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DISCOURSE, HEGEMONY, AND POPULISM IN THE VISEGRÁD FOUR

Seongcheol Kim

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Discourse, Hegemony, and Populism in the Visegrád Four

This is the first book-length account of populism in the Visegrád Four (V4) countries — Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia — for the first 30 years of multi-party competition since the transformative events of 1989–91 in Central and Eastern Europe.

Advancing a post-foundational approach to populism based on a semi-formal reading of Ernesto Laclau's theory, the book undertakes a detailed examination of how the 'people' has been constructed in populist discourses in the party systems of the four countries since 1989. Drawing on a wealth of source material, the book offers both a wide-ranging and in-depth overview and classification of populism in the V4 in terms of discursive (e.g. centrist, conservative, left-wing, liberal, nationalist, social) and hegemonic type (e.g. authoritarian hegemonic, generational counter-hegemonic) alike.

This book will be of interest to students and scholars of populism, party politics, and Central and Eastern Europe.

Seongcheol Kim is a Postdoctoral Researcher in the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Kassel, Germany, and a Visiting Researcher at the WZB Berlin Social Science Center, Germany.

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Seongcheol Kim

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Contents

List of Figures xi
List of Tables xii
Acknowledgements xiii
List of Abbreviations xv

Introduction: discourse, hegemony, populism, and the Visegrád Four 1
Populism and the Visegrád Four: an oft-trodden, yet under-excavated terrain 2
Discourse – hegemony – populism: from concept to analysis 5
Research questions and objectives 7
Structure of the book 9
References 10

1 Discourse – hegemony – populism: a conceptual horizon 14
Populism as expression and deviation: objectivist approaches to populism 15
Populism as thin construction: ideational approaches to populism 20
Populism as construction and royal road: post-foundational approaches to populism 26
References 31

2 Discourse – hegemony – populism: a framework for analysis 35
Analyzing populism and its conceptual Other(s) 35
Research questions and case selection 43
Source material and selection 46
References 48

3 Populism in the Czech Republic 52

Introduction 52

Historical background: the saga of "the people" from the "people's camps" to Masaryk to Gottwald 53

"Your government, people, has returned to you!" The "post-November" imaginary and the anti-communist nationalist populism of the Republicans 58

The anti-communist nationalist populism of the Rally for the Republic – Republican Party of Czechoslovakia (1990–92) 62

The "post-November" hegemonic formation (1992–2006) 69

"People" vs. "politicians" (2010–present): a break in the "post-November" imaginary 77

The centrist populism of Public Affairs (2010) 77

ANO: from centrist entrepreneur populism (2011–13) to a centrist populism of "hard work" in power (2014–present) 83

Dawn of Direct Democracy and Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD): from neo-liberal nativist populism (2013) to neo-conservative nativist populism (2017) 90

ANO and SPD as competing populisms (2017) 94

The liberal populism of the Czech Pirate Party (2013, 2017) 96

Conclusion and summary 99

References 104

4 Populism in Hungary 110

Introduction 110

Historical background: the saga of "the people" between 1848, 1956, and 1989 111

"Hungarianhood" (magyarság) vs. "Hungary" (Magyarország): the divided imaginary of the "system change" 117

"The prime minister of 15 million Hungarians": the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) between institutionalism and populist nationalism (1990–93) 117

The populist nationalisms of the Hungarian Justice and Life Party (1993–2002) and Fidesz (1997, 2002–04) 121

The national-conservative social populism of Fidesz (2006–09) 127
The "System of National Cooperation" (NER) as hegemonic formation (2010–present) 134
From "illiberal state" to "Stop Soros": the illiberal populist nationalism in power of Fidesz (2014–18) 138
Jobbik: between anti-liberal populist nationalism and nationalist populism 142
The nationalist populism of Jobbik (2010, 2014, 2017–18) 145
The left-wing populism of the Dialogue for Hungary – Hungarian Socialist Party alliance (2018) 153
Conclusion and summary 156
References 160

5 Populism in Poland 164
Introduction 164
Historical background: the saga of "the people" from Endecja and Sanacja to Gomułka 165
Post-"Solidarity" vs. anti-"liberalism": the divided imaginary of post-1989 transition 172
The anti-liberal left-wing populism of the Union of Labor (1993, 1997–2000) 174
The anti-liberal nationalist and social populism of the Self-Defense of the Republic of Poland (2001–05) 182
"Solidaristic Poland" vs. "Liberal Poland": a break in the post-1989 imaginary 188
The anti-liberal nationalist populism of Law and Justice (2001–07) 188
The anti-liberal nationalist and social populism of Law and Justice (2007–14, 2019) 198
The anti-clerical liberal populism of Palikot's Movement (2010–11) 205
The nationalist anti-party populism of Kukiz'15 (2015) 208
Conclusion and summary 213
References 217

6 Populism in Slovakia 222
Introduction 222
Historical background: the saga of "the people" between 1848, 1918, and 1989 223
Pro- vs. anti-Mečiar: the divided imaginary of post-1989 transition 229
Between nationalism and populism: the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) 229
The centrist populism of the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (2002) 236
"Just like they stole under Mečiar, so they steal under Dzurinda": a break in the post-1989 imaginary 239
The centrist populism of the early Smer (1999–2002) 239
The conservative anti-party populism of Ordinary People and Independent Personalities (2012–present) 245
The nativist entrepreneur populism of Sme Rodina (2016–present) 254
Between ethno-nationalist reductionism and populism: Kotleba – People's Party Our Slovakia (2016–present) 261
Conclusion and summary 263
References 267

7 Conclusions: discourse, hegemony, and populism after '89 271
Patterns of populism: hegemonic and counter-hegemonic, centrist, conservative, liberal, nationalist, nativist, social 272
Populism as hegemonic and counter-hegemonic logic: from the first to the fourth generation 272
Centrist, conservative, liberal, nationalist, nativist, social populisms 282
Final remarks and outlook 286
References 288

Bibliography 290
Index 312

Figures

2.1 Basic structure of an equivalential discourse 38
3.1 Anti-communist populism of SPR-RSČ (1990) 65
3.2 Anti-communist nationalist populism of SPR-RSČ (1990–92) 68
3.3 Centrist populism of VV (2010) 82
3.4 Centrist entrepreneur populism of ANO (2011–13) 86
3.5 Centrist populism of "hard work" in power of ANO (2014–present) 89
3.6 Neo-liberal nativist populism of Dawn (2013) 92
3.7 Neo-conservative nativist populism of SPD (2017) 94
3.8 Liberal populism of the Pirates (2017) 99
4.1 National-conservative social populism of Fidesz (2006–09) 131
4.2 Illiberal populist nationalism in power of Fidesz (2006) 139
4.3 Nationalist populism of Jobbik (2010) 147
4.4 Nationalist populism of Jobbik (2014) 150
4.5 Nationalist populism of Jobbik (2017–18) 152
4.6 Left-wing populism of PM-MSZP (2018) 155
5.1 Anti-liberal left-wing populism of UP (1993) 177
5.2 Anti-liberal nationalist and social populism of SRP (2001–05) 186
5.3 Anti-liberal nationalist populism of PiS (2001) 191
5.4 Anti-liberal nationalist populism in power of PiS (2005–07) 195
5.5 Anti-liberal nationalist and social populism of PiS (2007–14) 200
5.6 Anti-clerical liberal populism of RP (2010–11) 208
5.7 Nationalist anti-party populism of Kukiz'15 (2015) 211
6.1 Centrist populism of the HZDS (2002) 238
6.2 Centrist populism of Smer (1999–2002) 242
6.3 Conservative anti-party populism of OĽaNO (2012) 248
6.4 Nativist entrepreneur populism of Sme Rodina (2016) 258

Tables

3.1 Summary of populist discourses in the Czech Republic 101
3.2 Summary of source material used 103
4.1 Summary of populist discourses in Hungary 157
4.2 Summary of source material used 158
5.1 Summary of populist discourses in Poland 215
5.2 Summary of source material used 216
6.1 Summary of populist discourses in Slovakia 265
6.2 Summary of source material used 266
7.1 Summary of populist discourses in the Visegrád Four 273
7.2 Periodization of populist discourses in the Visegrád Four 281

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List of Abbreviations

ABL *Agentura Bílého Lva* [White Lion Agency (Czech Republic)]
ANO *Akce nespokojených občanů* [Action of Dissatisfied Citizens (Czech Republic)]
ANO *Aliancia nového občana* [Alliance of the New Citizen (Slovakia)]
AWS *Akcja Wyborcza Solidarność* [Solidarity Electoral Action (Poland)]
BBWR *Bezpartyjny Blok Współpracy z Rządem* [Nonpartisan Bloc for Cooperation with the Government (Poland)]
CBA *Centralne Biuro Antykorupcyjne* [Central Anti-Corruption Bureau (Poland)]
ČSDSD *Československá sociálně demokratická strana dělnická* [Czechoslovak Social Democratic Workers' Party]
ČSFR *Česká a Slovenská Federativní Republika / Česká a Slovenská Federatívna Republika* [Czech and Slovak Federative Republic]
ČSL *Československá strana lidová* [Czechoslovak People's Party]
ČSNS *Československá strana národně socialistická* [Czechoslovak National Socialist Party]
ČSSD *Česká strana sociálně demokratická* [Czech Social Democratic Party]
ČSSR *Československá socialistická republika* [Czechoslovak Socialist Republic]
DK *Demokratikus Koalíció* [Democratic Coalition (Hungary)]
DS *Demokratická strana* [Democratic Party (Slovakia)]
DÚ *Demokratická únia* [Democratic Union (Slovakia)]
EFSF European Financial Stability Facility
EU European Union
FJN *Front Jedności Narodu* [Front of National Unity (Poland)]
FKGP *Független Kisgazda-, Földmunkás- és Polgári Párt* [Independent Smallholders, Agrarian Workers and Civic Party (Hungary)]
HSĽS *Hlinkova slovenská ľudová strana* [Hlinka's Slovak People's Party]

HZD	*Hnutie za demokraciu* [Movement for Democracy (Slovakia)]
HZDS	*Hnutie za demokratické Slovensko* [Movement for a Democratic Slovakia]
HZDS-ĽS	*Hnutie za demokratické Slovensko – ľudová strana* [Movement for a Democratic Slovakia – People's Party]
KDH	*Kresťanskodemokratické hnutie* [Christian Democratic Movement (Slovakia)]
KDNP	*Kereszténydemokrata Néppart* [Christian Democratic People's Party (Hungary)]
KDS	*Konzervatívni demokrati Slovenska* [Conservative Democrats of Slovakia]
KDU-ČSL	*Křesťanská a demokratická unie – Československá strana lidová* [Christian Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party]
KGB	*Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti* [Committee for State Security (Soviet Union)]
KSČ	*Komunistická strana Československa* [Communist Party of Czechoslovakia]
KSČM	*Komunistická strana Čech a Moravy* [Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia]
KSS	*Komunistická strana Slovenska* [Communist Party of Slovakia]
LGBT	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender
LiD	*Lewica i Demokraci* [Left and Democrats (Poland)]
LMP	*Lehet Más a Politika* [Politics Can Be Different (Hungary)]
LPR	*Liga Polskich Rodzin* [League of Polish Families]
ĽSNS	*Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko* [People's Party Our Slovakia]
MDF	*Magyar Demokrata Fórum* [Hungarian Democratic Forum]
MDP	*Magyar Dolgozók Pártja* [Hungarian Working People's Party]
MIÉP	*Magyar Igazság és Élet Pártja* [Hungarian Justice and Life Party]
MKP	*Magyar Kommunista Párt* [Hungarian Communist Party]
MKS	*Międzyzakładowy Komitet Strajkowy* [Interfactory Strike Committee (Poland)]
MLP	*Magyar Liberális Párt* [Hungarian Liberal Party]
MP	Member of Parliament
MSZDP	*Magyarországi Szociáldemokrata Párt* [Hungarian Social Democratic Party]
MSZMP	*Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt* [Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party]
MSZP	*Magyar Szocialista Párt* [Hungarian Socialist Party]
NATO	North Atlantic Trety Organization
NER	*Nemzeti Együttműködés Rendszere* [System of National Cooperation (Hungary)]
OCÖ	*Országos Cigány Önkormányzat* [National Gypsy Council (Hungary)]

ODA	*Občanská demokratická aliance* [Civic Democratic Alliance (Czech Republic)]
ODS	*Občanská demokratická strana* [Civic Democratic Party (Czech Republic)]
OF	*Občanské fórum* [Civic Forum (Czech Republic)]
OH	*Občanské hnutí* [Civic Movement (Czech Republic)]
OKS	*Občianska konzervatívna strana* [Civic Conservative Party (Slovakia)]
OĽaNO	*Obyčajní ľudia a nezávislé osobnosti* [Ordinary People and Independent Personalities (Slovakia)]
PC	*Porozumienie Centrum* [Center Alliance (Poland)]
PiS	*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* [Law and Justice (Poland)]
PM	*Párbeszéd Magyarországért* [Dialogue for Hungary]
PM	Prime minister
PO	*Platforma Obywatelska* [Civic Platform (Poland)]
POC	*Porozumienie Obywatelskie Centrum* [Civic Center Alliance (Poland)]
PP	*Porozumienie Prawicy* [Right Alliance (Poland)]
PPS	*Polska Partia Socjalistyczna* [Polish Socialist Party]
PRL	*Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa* [Polish People's Republic]
PSL	*Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe* [Polish People's Party]
PVV	*Partij voor de Vrijheid* [Party for Freedom (Netherlands)]
PZPR	*Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza* [United Polish Workers' Party]
RN	*Ruch Narodowy* [National Movement (Poland)]
RP	*Ruch Palikota* [Palikot's Movement (Poland)]
RPP	*Ruch Poparcia Palikota* [Movement in Support of Palikot (Poland)]
SaS	*Sloboda a Solidarita* [Freedom and Solidarity (Slovakia)]
SDA	*Sociálnodemokratická alternatíva* [Social Democratic Alternative (Slovakia)]
SDK	*Slovenská demokratická koalícia* [Slovak Democratic Coalition]
SDKÚ	*Slovenská demokratická a kresťanská únia* [Slovak Democratic and Christian Union]
SDKÚ-DS	*Slovenská demokratická a kresťanská únia – Demokratická strana* [Slovak Democratic and Christian Union – Democratic Party]
SDĽ	*Strana demokratickej ľavice* [Party of the Democratic Left (Slovakia)]
SDPL	*Socjaldemokracja Polska* [Social Democracy of Poland]
SLD	*Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej* [Democratic Left Alliance (Poland)]
SĽS	*Slovenská ľudová strana* [Slovak People's Party]
SMD	Single-member district

SMK	*Strana maďarskej koalície* [Party of the Hungarian Coalition (Slovakia)]
SNS	*Slovenská národná strana* [Slovak National Party]
SOP	*Strana občianskeho porozumenia* [Party of Civic Understanding (Slovakia)]
SPD	*Svoboda a přímá demokracie* [Freedom and Direct Democracy (Czech Republic)]
SPR-RSČ	*Sdružení pro republiku – Republikánská strana Československa* [Rally for the Republic – Republican Party of Czechoslovakia]
SRP	*Samoobrona Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej* [Self-Defense of the Republic of Poland]
ŠtB	*Štátna bezpečnosť* [State Security (Czechoslovakia; Slovak version)]
SZ	*Strana zelených* [Green Party (Czech Republic)]
SZDSZ	*Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége* [Alliance of Free Democrats (Hungary)]
TK	*Trybunał Konstytucyjny* [Constitutional Tribunal (Poland)]
UD	*Unia Demokratyczna* [Democratic Union (Poland)]
UK	United Kingdom
UL	*Unia Lewicy* [Union of the Left (Poland)]
UP	*Unia Pracy* [Union of Labor (Poland)]
US	United States
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
UW	*Unia Wolności* [Freedom Union (Poland)]
V4	Visegrád Four
VPN	*Verejnosť proti násiliu* [Public Against Violence (Slovakia)]
VPN-ZDS	*Verejnosť proti násiliu – Za demokratické Slovensko* [Public Against Violence – For a Democratic Slovakia]
VV	*Věci veřejné* [Public Affairs (Czech Republic)]
ZL	*Zjednoczona Lewica* [United Left (Poland)]
ZRS	*Združenie robotníkov Slovenska* [Union of the Workers of Slovakia]

Introduction: discourse, hegemony, populism, and the Visegrád Four

This is the first book-length account of populism in the Visegrád Four (V4) countries – Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia – and a response to the recent explosion of academic and media interest in the phenomenon of "populism" as well as the V4 region with which it has come to be intimately associated. Names such as Viktor Orbán, Jarosław Kaczyński, and Andrej Babiš have become synonymous with the perceived rise of populism not only in the region, but also as a global phenomenon. At the time of writing, the heads of government of all four countries are from parties or self-styled "movements" commonly referred to as populist (ANO, Fidesz, OĽaNO, PiS), commanding either solid pluralities or outright majorities in parliament. Thirty years after the transformative events of 1989–91 in Central and Eastern Europe, populism has turned into something of an indicator of these countries' straying away, to various extents, from the great expectations of democratization and transformation: the concept of "democratic backsliding," of which Hungary and Poland have become the most oft-cited cases in Europe, has not only found extended application to the rest of the V4 and beyond (Bakke and Sitter 2020; Cianetti, Dawson, and Hanley 2018; Greskovits 2015; Stanley 2019), but also been explained as a direct outcome of populist party strategies with differing accents – authoritarian and nationalist in Hungary and Poland (Enyedi 2016; Sadurski 2019), business-firm and oligarchical in the Czech Republic (Hanley and Vachudova 2018). What is abundantly clear in this context is that we are dealing with a multifaceted phenomenon with far-reaching implications; any account of populism in the V4 countries today faces the hardly trivial task of having to trace not only the manifold expressions of the phenomenon, but also their complex genealogies, interrelationships, and impacts on these political systems as well as the differences and similarities across the four countries. This book makes one such attempt by drawing on a post-foundational discursive perspective that, as will be argued in the first two chapters, is particularly well suited for the task at hand.

The question at the center of this study is *how the "people" has been constructed in populist discourses in the first 30 years of multi-party competition since the fall of state socialism in the V4 countries*. This ostensibly

simple research question, in turn, entails multiple interrelated dimensions of inquiry: 1) the empirical identification and classification of different types of populist discourse, based on a conceptualization of populism as the discursive construction of an antagonistic divide between a popular subject and a power bloc (drawing on Laclau (2005a) in particular); 2) the interpretive unpacking of how the popular subject (and its Other) is constructed in these various manifestations of populism; and 3) the critical contextualization of these discourses against the wider background of hegemonic struggles over the construction of post-1989 order. In this manner, the book hopes to provide a holistic account, in discourse-analytic terms, of how different forms of populism have emerged from certain contexts of party competition and reshaped them in turn. In the following, this research interest is developed in more detail in conjunction with the conceptual underpinnings and analytical framework, which then leads into a discussion of the research questions, objectives, and structure of the book.

Populism and the Visegrád Four: an oft-trodden, yet under-excavated terrain

In a 2007 article, Ivan Krastev – an arguably rare breed of public affairs commentator and social scientist widely read across Europe, both east and west – spoke of a "populist moment" in "central Europe," pointing to the new ruling majorities in Poland and Slovakia as indicative of a "people" vs. "elites" divide coming to the fore in these countries. Krastev (2007) pointed here to the illustrative nature of the rise of populism in the region for contemporary politics more generally as well as the paradoxical value of populism as a concept for capturing these developments:

> Only a vague and ill-defined concept such as "populism" can enable one to grasp and [*sic*] the radical transformation of politics underway in many places around the world. More than any other concept currently circulating, "populism" captures the nature of the challenges that liberal democracy faces today.

Within a few years before Krastev's intervention, two scholars with very different intellectual backgrounds – the Dutch political scientist and specialist on the far right, Cas Mudde, and the UK-based Argentinian political theorist Ernesto Laclau – had developed theories of populism that appeared to make a virtue of the concept's vagueness. In their own ways, Mudde (2004) and Laclau (2005a) conceptualized populism as a "thin ideology" or "political logic" combinable with a wide range of contents – left or right, democratic or authoritarian, socially progressive or reactionary – signaling an *ideational turn* within populism research toward examining the phenomenon not in terms of an underlying socio-structural composition, but in relation to particular (and widely variable) constructions of a "people" in

antagonistic demarcation against a "power bloc" or "elite." While Mudde and Laclau are not the first to have conceptualized populism in such terms – and in spite of the important differences between them – their explicitly social-constructionist approaches to populism have inaugurated a conceptual terrain on which populism can be studied as a dynamic and relatively indeterminate phenomenon that can take on a wide range of variations depending on *how* the popular subject is constructed.

Indeed, within the by now immense and ever-growing body of scholarship on populism, the V4 countries take on the status of a kind of laboratory of populism in all its different shapes and forms: "hard" and "soft" populism, with the former undermining institutions of liberal democracy whereas the latter does not (Smilov and Krastev 2008); populism as a project of authoritarian constitutionalism (Blokker 2019; Halmai 2019; Müller 2017; Sadurski 2019) as well as a widespread form of protest politics with varying accents – from agrarian to centrist to nationalist – throughout the post-communist space (Mudde 2000; Pop-Eleches 2010); the prevalence of ideologically diffuse "centrist populism" (Kriesi 2014; Učeň 2007) on the one hand and a stridently nationalist, nativist, and/or civilizationist "populist radical right" or "national populism" (Brubaker 2017; Mudde 2007; Pirro 2015) on the other (see also Engler, Pytlas, and Deegan-Krause 2019; Stanley 2017). Besides these attempts at identifying broader patterns, however, rigorous analyses of specific populist constructions of "people" vs. "elite" based on a systematic application of a theoretical concept of populism have remained relatively rare or generally confined to isolated case studies (e.g. Deegan-Krause 2012; Enyedi 2015; Hanley 2012; Havlík and Hloušek 2014), which is perhaps indicative of the sheer scope of material to work with across the four countries. There is thus a persistent discrepancy between the heightened interest in populism in the V4 context and the lack of in-depth, but also wide-ranging, analysis that provides both a detailed and holistic view of the phenomenon across the four countries while remaining grounded in a systematic conceptual framework. This book aspires to fill this gap and chart a universe of populism in the V4 countries that turns out to be even more diverse than what has been registered in the existing literature, as chapters 3–6 will show: from left-wing to conservative, from liberal to anti-liberal as well as centrist, nationalist, and/or social populism. This brief foretaste of the empirical results, in turn, presupposes a certain way of conceptualizing and analyzing populism – namely, as a political logic appearing in discursive combinations with or against other -isms – that allows for the development of empirical typologies based on detailed interpretive unpacking of the specific constructions of "people" vs. "elite" in different populist discourses.

The V4 countries pose an interesting set of cases for analysis not only given the *prima facie* salience of populism in the region, but also the shared reference point of 1989/90 that opens up a common time frame for analyzing how populism emerges in the context of newly developing multi-party systems. Within

the comparative politics literature, early expectations for the development of post-communist party systems in general and those of the V4 countries in particular ranged from relatively stable combinations of socio-economic and socio-cultural programmatic structuration (Evans and Whitefield 1993; Kitschelt 1995) to long-term uncertainty and instability (Ágh 1993; Mair 1998). More recent debates have seen growing emphasis on "non-programmatic" appeals in party politics in Central and Eastern Europe, from corruption (Engler 2016) and newness (Sikk 2012) to a combination of these and economic issues (Hanley and Sikk 2016). In other words, there has been increasing attention to something like the symbolic dimension of politics – not least in conjunction with populism (Engler 2020; Stanley 2017) – as well as its potential intersections with programmatic-based party competition in a more traditional sense. In this context, a discursive approach geared toward analyzing the construction of political identities in a broad sense can produce valuable insights on the different shapes and forms that populism takes in these countries as well as the ways in which it emerges in the aftermath of 1989/90 – both as an imagined break that is subject to competing political constructions and as a temporal horizon within which these competing claims can be situated.

The basic proposition of this book, therefore, is that a post-foundational discursive conception of populism – based on Laclau's (2005a) theory as well as a semi-formal reading thereof, drawing on De Cleen's and Stavrakakis' (2017) "discursive architectonics" approach – is particularly well suited for the task of telling the story of populism in the first 30 years of multi-party competition in these countries. If the study of populism in the V4 context constitutes an oft-trodden terrain in which numerous patches and swathes have been charted, Laclau's theoretical framework of discourse, hegemony, and populism offers the conceptual and analytical tools for digging deeper into the meanings of populist discourses as well as their discursive contexts of emergence. To begin with, this perspective offers a conceptual vocabulary for unpacking the construction of political subjects such as "the people" and "the elite" in terms of the discursive infrastructure of signifying relations underpinning them, making analytically sharp distinctions between populism and other -isms in the process. Moreover, a post-foundational approach is grounded in a theory of discourse and hegemony that situates political phenomena in relation to hegemonic claims and struggles over the construction of social order. In the context of the V4 countries, this perspective can shed light on how populism emerges from and re-institutes an established constellation of post-1989 imaginaries as well as, in discourse-theoretical terms, dislocations in prior hegemonic stabilizations and partial fixations in the construction of post-1989 order. In addition to the work of empirical classification and interpretive examination, therefore, a post-foundational discursive approach can provide a critical contextualization of populism in the V4 countries in relation to competing imaginaries of 1989/90 as a founding moment of democratic order whose inaugural promises are questioned, incorporated, radicalized, and/or re-articulated in some form or another in populist discourses.

Discourse – hegemony – populism: from concept to analysis

As chapters 1 and 2 will discuss in more detail, Laclau's theory of populism is grounded in a theory of discourse and hegemony that posits the discursively constituted and politically instituted nature of the social. Put simply, politics is a struggle for hegemony between competing constructions of "society," which plays out following the two basic discursive operations of *difference* and *equivalence* following Laclau and Mouffe (2001): the logic of difference constitutes the identity of every discursive element as particular and separate (*A* is distinct from *B*, *C*, *D*, …), whereas the logic of equivalence enables the formation of a collective identity of multiple differential elements in common opposition to others (*A* is distinct from *B*, but united with it against *Z*). The equivalence *A* ≡ *B* in the example given can be extended further onto a *chain of equivalences* facing another on the opposing side of an *antagonistic frontier* (*A* ≡ *B* ≡ *C* ≡ *D* ≡ … vs. *X* ≡ *Y* ≡ *Z* ≡ …). This moment of antagonistic division constitutes not only a founding moment of every social order, but also a precondition for every order's political contestability: categories such as "society," "the people," "the nation," but also "liberty," "equality," or "justice" can only take on certain meanings today because they were instituted politically in earlier (or ongoing) moments of antagonistic demarcation against the likes of "the nobility," "the foreign invader," "inequality," "dictatorship," or indeed "communism," "the rule of corrupt parties," etc.; these meanings, however, are fundamentally contingent because they can be contested and re-instituted through the construction of new antagonisms. Following Marchart's (2007) "post-foundational" reading, the political as antagonism thus takes on the ontological status of a founding moment of the social and a condition of possibility for politics. Against this theoretical background, Laclau's (2005a, 67) proposition in his later work is that populism takes on a metaphorical character for the political – a "royal road to understanding something about the ontological constitution of the political as such." Populism, following Laclau, entails the equivalential construction of a "people" in antagonistic demarcation against a power bloc – in other words, a certain construction of "society" in terms of a people vs. power division that, following Lefort (1986, 1988), constitutes the founding logic of democracy itself. The "perennial possibility" of populism (Canovan 1999, 2) can thus be understood as a constitutive feature of politics in a democracy – a constant reminder of the contingent and politically instituted nature of every social order, which democracy as a form of society is about making visible – culminating in the thesis that "the end of populism coincides with the end of politics" (Laclau 2005b, 48).

As chapter 1 will argue, Laclau's theory is thus situated both within and at the forefront of ideational understandings of populism in a broad sense, all of which are predicated on some form of social-constructionist conceptual underpinnings: the "people" in populism is not reducible to an epiphenomenal expression of an underlying socio-structural composition, but rather constitutes a necessarily contingent construction that can take on a wide variety of

meanings. Because of its grounding in a theory of discourse and hegemony, a post-foundational approach offers a particularly dynamic research perspective for tracing and unpacking the signifying relations behind the construction of political subjects such as "the people." As chapter 2 will introduce in greater detail, the "methodological holism" (Marttila 2015) of post-foundational discourse analysis entails the deployment of discourse-theoretical categories such as difference, equivalence, contrariety, nodal points, empty signifiers, dislocations, and antagonistic frontiers for tracing the signifying relations between discursive elements in any ensemble of articulations. A populist discourse can be identified in these terms as an equivalential articulation of demands around the name of a popular subject as an empty signifier in antagonistic demarcation against a power bloc; in the same vein, it becomes possible to distinguish populism from and identify joint articulations with or against other -isms. This book advances a semi-formal reading of Laclau's theory, drawing on the "discursive architectonics" approach of De Cleen and Stavrakakis (2017; discussed in chapters 1 and 2) for distinguishing populism from the likes of nationalism or nativism in terms of a vertical (underdog vs. power) as opposed to a horizontal (national vs. foreign) logic of antagonistic division. These logics are, to be sure, combinable but conceptually distinct, making it possible to analytically distinguish between discursive combinations with primarily populist (nationalist populism) or primarily nationalist (populist nationalism) structurations – a recurring theme in the empirical chapters that follow.

Another key aspect of a post-foundational discursive approach is the critical orientation toward uncovering populist discourses' embeddedness in hegemonic constellations, following what Marttila and Gengnagel (2015) refer to as "unmasking critique." Glynos and Howarth (2007) propose one way of bringing together the empirical, interpretive, and critical aspects of inquiry into an integrated research perspective with their distinction between social, political, and fantasmatic logics. Populism, following Laclau (2005a, 117–18), is a political logic *par excellence* that institutes the social space in terms of an antagonistic division of people vs. power. Political logics, however, are also embedded in sedimented practices of social reproduction, which Laclau and Mouffe (2001) conceptualize as "hegemonic formations" (drawing on Foucault's concept of discursive formation), as well as the fantasmatic dimension of imaginaries that tend to conceal the contingent and politically instituted nature of these social formations (Laclau 1990). Chapter 2 illustrates these distinctions with the example of the "Keynesian welfare state," following Wullweber (2017), as a discursive formation (social logic) that was instituted politically via antagonistic divisions of the social space by New Deal-era discourses of "soaking the rich" (political logic) and reproduced via the Fordist imaginary of an ever-expanding middle class (fantasmatic logic), before being dislocated by the counter-hegemonic discourses of Reagonomics and Thatcherism that re-introduced an antagonistic division of the social (political logic), this time against "big government" or "the nanny state." In short, the task for a post-foundational discourse

analysis of populism is not only to unpack populist discourses as political logics in terms of their relational structures of meaning, but also to trace their constitutive interplay with the social logics of hegemonic formations and the fantasmatic logics of imaginaries.

Research questions and objectives

This integrated research approach entails thinking together three interrelated dimensions of inquiry that constitute the starting point for Glynos' and Howarth's discussion of critical explanation: namely, the "*empirical*, *interpretative*, and *critical*" (Bernstein 1976, 235; emphasis in original). In this vein, the research question posed at the beginning of this introduction – how is the popular subject constructed in populist discourses in the V4 countries since 1989/90? – can be further differentiated according to the three dimensions as well as generalized for any systematic application of Laclau's theory of populism:

- *Empirical*: Which discourses in these countries can be classified as populist, and in which time frames? How does populism, understood dynamically as a political logic, come and go at different junctures?
- *Interpretive*: How is the popular subject constructed in these populist discourses? How is populism articulated in discursive combinations with other political logics?
- *Critical*: In what ways are these constructions of popular subjects embedded in hegemonic formations and imaginaries as well as competing political claims to institute social order?

In short, the three lines of inquiry can be summarized as follows: *Which* discourses are primarily populist (and *when*)? *How* are they populist? *In what contexts* of hegemonic structuration and struggle are they populist? To be sure, the three dimensions are intimately linked: empirically identifying a discourse as populist requires the interpretive work of examining how political subjects are constructed, while the critical operation of uncovering the embeddedness of populist discourses in hegemonic processes constitutes both a starting point and a result of the interpretive analysis. As a first step of the research, therefore, the discourses of all electorally relevant parties contesting national parliamentary elections in the V4 countries since 1989/90 were initially examined (the interpretive dimension) in order to both define a narrower set of populist discourses (the empirical dimension) and establish an overall background picture of the discursive terrain of party competition (the critical dimension) – followed by in-depth analyses of the discourses identified as primarily populist.

In the context of the V4 countries, such an integrated approach to examining populism is particularly meaningful not only given the *prima facie* salience of populism in its different shapes and forms, but also in relation to the imagined

break of 1989/90 as a founding moment of the political that inaugurates a post-1989 imaginary in all four countries. The manner in which this post-1989 imaginary crystallizes in the discursive terrain of party competition, however, varies across the four countries: in the Czech Republic, a "post-November" hegemonic formation emerges whereby competing party discourses articulate largely differential and non-antagonistic variations on the founding promises of "post-November" order; party politics in Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia, by contrast, is arguably characterized by the lack of such hegemonic stabilization and the emergence of deeply divided imaginaries whereby party discourses tend to cluster around opposing constructions of post-1989 reality as the realization of ethno-national redemption for the community of "Hungarianhood" vs. the state of "Hungary"; the continuation of the legacy of "Solidarity" vs. opposition to the forces of "liberalism"; or support for vs. opposition to Vladimír Mečiar's nation-building project. These background contexts, which are discussed in the beginning of each empirical chapter, suggest considerable variation across the V4 countries along the key background dimension of how the post-1989 imaginary crystallizes into a discursive terrain of party politics within the common time frame of 1989/90 as an imagined break with the old order. Against this background, as chapter 2 will argue, the choice of the four Visegrád countries for the discourse analysis corresponds to the logic of the "diverse-case method," which is particularly conducive to "typological theorizing" by producing "maximum variance along relevant dimensions" (Gerring 2007, 97–98) for identifying different types that occur under these different background conditions. The research goal, therefore, is not to generate causal explanations for *why* certain populist discourses are pursued or are more successful than others (see also Nonhoff 2006, 17–18), but to develop, on the basis of both in-depth and wide-ranging discourse analysis, a typology of populist discourses in the V4 countries according to the interrelated dimensions of empirical (*which/when?*), interpretive (*how?*), and critical (*in what contexts?*) inquiry. To this end, the concluding chapter brings together the results of the four empirical chapters and considers the ways in which populism as a political logic emerges in different discursive combinations (e.g. nationalist populism, liberal populism) as well as hegemonic or counter-hegemonic guises (e.g. authoritarian hegemonic, generational counter-hegemonic). This, in turn, allows for a periodized classification of populist discourses both in terms of discursive and hegemonic type.

These considerations on the background conditions in the V4 party systems already suggest intersections with comparative scholarship across multiple decades that has identified a predominantly socio-economic conflict structuration in the Czech Republic, predominantly socio-cultural ones in Hungary and Poland, and a combination of the two in Slovakia (e.g. Casal Bértoa 2014; Evans 2006; Kitschelt et al. 1999). Indeed, in tracing the different post-1989 imaginaries and their crystallization in each party system, the analysis in the following chapters also points to key lines of differentiation and contestation in each party system, such as the state-citizen relation in the

Czech Republic, the national question in Hungary, the role of liberalism in Poland, or questions of nation-building (in the 1990s) as well as corruption and oligarchization (in the 2010s) in Slovakia. From here, the discourse analysis sheds light on how different populist discourses selectively take up, radicalize, and/or contest elements of the established discursive terrain of party politics, thus providing an integrated diachronic account of populism in relation to the context of party competition as a whole and with a sensitivity to symbolic appeals to subject categories such as "people" and "nation" in addition to their equivalential articulation with specific policy demands. The concluding chapter also addresses numerous debates in the area-specific literature on populism and party politics in light of the empirical analysis, including the generational temporality of populism (Gyárfášová 2018; Pop-Eleches 2010), the prevalence of "centrist" or "radical" populism (Stanley 2017; Učeň 2007), the role of "newness" appeals and new party strategies (Lucardie 2000; Sikk 2012), and the relationship between populism and democracy (Rovira Kaltwasser 2012; Smilov and Krastev 2008). In all these ways, the book contributes to the study of comparative politics as well as populism from a distinct angle through a productive interplay of discourse theory and empirical research with a regional focus.

Structure of the book

In addition to the introduction and conclusion, this book consists of six chapters, of which the first two lay the conceptual and methodological groundwork for the four empirical chapters that follow. Chapter 1 develops the theoretical framework of the book by presenting a reading of three strands of theorizing on populism – objectivist, ideational, and post-foundational – and situating the post-foundational approach within a wider "ideational turn" in populism research since the early 2000s. In this vein, chapter 1 also introduces the theoretical framework of discourse, hegemony, and populism, which chapter 2 then bridges onto a post-foundational discourse-analytic research perspective, followed by a discussion of the research questions, case selection, and source material. Chapters 3–6 examine populism in each V4 country in turn, proceeding in alphabetical order (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia). Each empirical chapter follows the same basic structure, opening with a historical background section featuring targeted snapshots of constructions of popular signifiers in different periods of mass politics before 1989 and working its way from there to an analysis of how the imagined break of 1989/90 crystallizes into a discursive terrain of post-1989 party politics. This, in turn, is followed by in-depth analyses of populist discourses in the party system since 1989 – generally one for each section of a chapter – tracing how the popular subject is constructed in each populist discourse and how the latter interacts with a discursive context of prior instituting moments, imaginaries, hegemonic stabilizations and partial fixations as well as dislocations. Each empirical

chapter, in short, tells a story of populism and its role in a context of discourse and hegemony for each V4 country. The concluding section of each chapter presents a tabular overview of the populist discourses analyzed and provides an explicit justification for the selection of source material for the discourse analysis, which varies according to differences in the performativity of each discourse. Finally, the concluding chapter brings together the results for the four countries and presents a typology of populist discourses both in terms of discursive and hegemonic type. The discussion identifies numerous patterns based on the preceding chapters and builds links to the wider scholarship on populism in the region, identifying *inter alia* a prevalence of *generational counter-hegemonic* populism from "third-generation" post-1989 elections onwards, with Fidesz in Hungary and PiS in Poland constituting two notable exceptions to this trend that correspond to an *authoritarian hegemonic* type. What thus emerges in the end is a periodized classification of populist discourses in the V4 countries in terms of the empirical, interpretive, and critical findings alike.

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1 Discourse – hegemony – populism: a conceptual horizon

It is a common refrain at the beginning of academic studies of populism that the concept of populism is difficult to pin down, perhaps even “notoriously” or “exceedingly” so. This self-exculpating gesture – signaling that the author is entering the terrain of populism research without any illusions of easy and straightforward definability – is indicative of a special kind of challenge that the concept of populism has posed to the sedimented assumptions of the normality of social science research since the 1960s. The ways in which populism was initially theorized – such as in the Ionescu and Gellner volume of 1969 – point to the limitations of objectivist approaches to political identities, according to which populism becomes conceptually reducible to an epiphenomenal expression of (and reaction to) modernization processes. With the *ideational turn* in populism research in the early to mid-2000s, a key shift occurs insofar as populism is now understood as a political ideology or logic that constructs, rather than merely expresses, a “people” that can take on a wide range of meanings depending on the construction. This, in turn, points to an opening for ultimately conceptualizing *all* collective identities – for which “the people” in populism represents something like a royal road – as discursively constituted in a contingent struggle for hegemony. This is the entry point for the theoretical framework of this book: namely, the post-foundational discourse theory of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe as well as its subsequent development into an analytical perspective for the study of populism, which will be introduced toward the end of this chapter and then further elaborated in the next.

The basic structure of this theoretical chapter is that of a condensed literature review that traces, in a targeted manner and with no claim to exhaustiveness, a development spanning three strands of theorizing on populism: objectivist, ideational, and post-foundational. Whereas objectivist approaches reduce collective identities to the epiphenomenal expression of underlying socio-structural cleavages and conceptualize populism in this vein as a diffuse reaction to modernization that is tied to some objectively given socio-structural category such as “the peasantry,” ideational approaches in a broad sense understand “the people” in populism as a necessarily contingent construction that can take on different meanings

depending on the discursive or ideological permutation. Post-foundational approaches within the ideational literature extend this insight into a general theory of the contingent and constructed nature of political identities and conceptualize populism in this vein as a quintessentially political logic – rather than a deviation from or residual category of the normal mode of politics, as objectivist perspectives would have it – that ultimately points to the contingent foundations of democratic politics itself. In this context, the discussion also specifically advances a semi-formal reading of Laclau's theory of populism following the "discursive architectonics" approach.

Populism as expression and deviation: objectivist approaches to populism

The 1969 volume *Populism: Its Meaning and National Characteristics*, edited by Ghiţa Ionescu and Ernest Gellner and based on an international conference that took place at the London School of Economics, is frequently cited as one of the first attempts to combine empirical analysis and conceptual theorizing on populism. A clear pattern emerges throughout the book: namely, the attempts at conceptual theorization converge in "ascribing to populism some particular social content" (as noted by Laclau 2005a, 8 in his own literature review) and reducing populism to the expression of objectively given socio-structural processes such as "modernization." Stewart (1969, 180) stakes out this position most explicitly when he argues that, faced with the choice of conceptualizing populism as "(1) a system of ideas; or (2) as a number of discrete social phenomena; or (3) as the product of a certain type or types of social situation […] it is the third which is the most illuminating." He goes on to maintain that "[p]opulism emerges as a response to the problems posed by modernization and its consequences," most notably "the tension between backward countries and more advanced ones, and […] between developed and backward parts of the same country" (Stewart 1969, 180–81). Even McRae's (1969, 163–64) contribution, which explicitly sets out to conceptualize "Populism as an Ideology," ends up reducing populism to the "a-political" reaction of "a predominantly agricultural segment of society" that, "under the threat of some kind of modernization, industrialism, call it what you will," asserts itself in terms of some primitive "virtue" untouched by the ills of modernity. Wiles (1969, 166–67), who similarly defines populism as the belief that "virtue resides in the simple people, who are the overwhelming majority, and in their collective traditions," maintains that populism results from some form of "alienation" that can be "racial," "geographical," or "urban," but is "always social."

For all their differences, there is a clear tendency in these approaches to reduce "the people" as the central category of populism onto a socio-structurally determined content – reminiscent of what Sartori (1990) criticized in a 1968 article as an "objectivist bias" that reduces politics to an epiphenomenon of underlying socio-structural processes. At the same time, a tension

is already visible between those approaches that fix this content onto a specific social group (such as "a predominantly agricultural segment of society") and others that vaguely attribute an "alienation" that can emerge from different points in the social structure, suggesting a potential compatibility with a more formal understanding of populism that leaves open *how* "the people" and its Other are constituted. Where the contributors to the 1969 volume ultimately converge, however, is in answering this "how" question with the assumption (not without a certain plausibility at the time) that "the people" of populism can be taken to express socio-structurally derived group categories, whether this is specifically "the peasants" or encompasses other possible dimensions of the social structure ("racial" or "urban"). This line of argument is summed up by Ionescu and Gellner (1969, 4), who write in the introduction that

> populism worshipped the people. But the people the populists worshipped were the meek and the miserable, and the populists worshipped them because they were miserable and because they were persecuted by the conspirators. The fact is that the people were more often than not identified in the peasants who were and are, in underdeveloped societies especially, the most miserable of the lot – and the more miserable they were the more worshipped they should be.

Parallel to this move of referring the "people" of populism back to the peasantry, there is also a tendency to situate populism outside the assumed normality of politics (or party politics) – from McRae's characterization of populism as "a-political" to multiple authors' insistence that populism can only take the form of a "movement" as opposed to a "party" (McRae 1969, 156; Wiles 1969, 167), albeit still a "political movement" of "those aware of belonging to the poor periphery of an industrial system" (Minogue 1969, 209). The idea here is that populism is "moralistic rather than programmatic" and "loosely organized and ill-disciplined" (Wiles 1969, 167) as opposed to "highly-structured parties" (McRae 1969, 156–57) – with "one reason" that McRae rather vaguely gives for this being that "populism is so social, so convinced that the political does not really, fundamentally matter as compared with the community."

Populism is thus ascribed a paradoxical in-betweenness as a concept somehow located both within and outside the assumed normality of politics – raising, in turn, the question what this baseline understanding of "the political" is. One way of answering this question would be to situate these early conceptualizations of populism within the wider context of an objectivist political sociology in which political identities were understood as expressions of socio-structurally derived group categories arising from modernization processes – most notably with Lipset's and Rokkan's cleavage theory. Lipset and Rokkan (1967, 13–14) are perhaps best known for their thesis that some combination of four socio-structural cleavages – labor vs. capital, urban vs. rural, center vs. periphery, church vs. state – emerged as a

result of "the Two Revolutions" (the "Industrial" and the "National") and subsequently established themselves path-dependently (this being the "freezing hypothesis") as the long-term determining logic of party competition in Western multi-party democracies ("*the party systems of the 1960s reflect, with few but significant exceptions, the cleavage structures of the 1920s*") (Lipset and Rokkan 1967, 50; emphasis in original). In addition to this diachronic account of party competition, however, Lipset and Rokkan (1967, 5; emphasis in original) also presented a theory of the political party as an "agent of conflict and instrument of integration" that performs "an *expressive* function" of "crystalliz[ing] and mak[ing] explicit the conflicting interests, the latent strains and contrasts in the existing social structure." In other words, conflicts and identities are constituted first at the level of the social structure and then made visible by party actors in the political system. Seen in this light, the various contributions to the Ionescu and Gellner volume are characterized by a curious indeterminacy: on the one hand, they conceptualize populism in the same objectivist manner as the epiphenomenal manifestation of an underlying socio-structural cleavage; yet the cleavage that populism is supposed to express – "some kind of modernization, industrialism, call it what you will" – is somehow too diffuse, too unorganized to fit the mold of Lipset's and Rokkan's description of party-based institutionalization and freezing into place of cleavages. Populism thus emerges as a remainder that is conceptualized internally to, yet cannot quite be subsumed by, a cleavage-based conception of politics: populism is, on the one hand, supposed to be a quintessential reaction to modernization and thus the expression of underlying social processes, yet it is also somehow a poor relation that does not seem to fit into the conceptual schema of the Two Revolutions and the four cleavages.

From here, it becomes possible to identify attempts within the objectivist paradigm to resolve this conceptual ambivalence by turning populism into an explicit Other of the "normal" mode of politics and thereby situating it formally outside the latter. In one such attempt, Germani (1978, 88) describes populism as "a multiclass movement" that emerges as "a mass movement only in societies where typical Western European leftist ideologies of the working class fail to develop into mass parties" (Germani 1978, 88) – the reason for this, in turn, being that delayed industrialization and nation-building "prevents or delays the formation of a well-structured social and political consciousness" of the working class and gives rise to different types of populist cross-class mobilizations against the ruling class (such as "liberal populism" and "national populism," depending on the relative weight of the middle and lower classes, respectively) (Germani 1978, 96). Germani (1978, 102) additionally describes "national populist regime[s]" – such as that of Juan Perón in Argentina – as a particular form of "lower-class authoritarianism" and a separate stage of development that arises as "an effect of delayed social modernization" and may replace that of democratization. Populism, in Germani's account, thus becomes a full-fledged

Other of the normal path to modernization that can be accounted for as a structural deviation from the standard timing of the Two Revolutions as well as from the subsequent formation of clear-cut class cleavages and their party-based institutionalization as seen in Western Europe.

If Germani, in situating populism outside the normal path to modernization, relies on a conceptual opposition between populism and class politics, Laclau's (1977) early theory of populism from the same period is notable as a first attempt to deconstruct this opposition. Laclau draws on Althusser's notion of interpellation to conceptualize class identity as a form of discursive articulation as opposed to a direct reflection of economic relations – prefiguring his subsequent post-Marxist critique of "class reductionism" and already signaling a break with objectivist approaches to collective identities as reducible to an underlying socio-structural content of some kind. Perhaps ironically, it is the early Laclau (1977, 163) – a thinker still operating within a Marxist theoretical horizon – who is arguably a step ahead of his non-Marxist objectivist contemporaries in this respect, drawing conclusions such as "classes and empirically observable groups do not necessarily coincide" insofar as the class as constituted at the level of discursive articulation is analytically distinct from that observable at the level of production relations. In other words, class contradictions at the level of production relations can turn into different kinds of (class or non-class) antagonisms, depending on their discursive articulation by a hegemonic ideology. Laclau (1977, 172–73), in this context, goes on to conceptualize populism as the discursive articulation of a people/power contradiction into an antagonistic discourse against the dominant ideology. In this way, Laclau (1977, 174) argues, it becomes possible to identify a conceptual basis for calling Hitler, Mao, and Perón all populist in some sense – precisely "[n]ot because the social bases of their movements were similar […] but because popular interpellations appear in the discourses of all of them" (to varying degrees) in antagonistic fashion against a dominant ideological bloc. Understood thus, populism is not conceptually opposed to class politics, but rather constitutes a distinct type of discursive interpellation combinable with other ideologies, including socialist class politics; Laclau (1977, 174) even refers to "socialist populism" in this vein as the most advanced form of "working class ideology" insofar as the working class thus hegemonically incorporates the people/power contradiction into its own ideologically mediated struggle against a ruling bloc.

Laclau's early distinction between "class" or "people" as a discursive construction on the one hand and as a category of economic contradiction on the other marks a departure from the objectivist paradigm, which is founded on the opposite move of reducing categories such as "class" to the expression of socio-structurally derived units. Because the underlying group that populism is supposed to express is no less than "the people," the concept of populism brings to the fore a split within group designations such as "class" and "people" as discursive effects on the one hand – contingent

constructions produced by those (such as parties) who claim to represent such groups – and as analytical categories attached to objective locations within the social structure on the other. Faced with this problem, social scientists can either conceptually reduce the "people" of populism onto other group designations corresponding to determinate locations within the social structure such as "the peasantry" (what populists *actually* always mean when they speak of "the people") – or they can turn the apparent indeterminacy of "the people" into part of the definitional basis of populism itself: namely, as a contingent construction that can take on wide variations of meaning. While the contributors to the Ionescu and Gellner volume of 1969 tend to opt for the first path, conspicuously vague definitions such as Wiles' (1969) – that populism is always the expression of an "alienation" that can take on different "social" forms – already suggest a certain potential for the second. Lipset (1960, 170) himself, in his earlier work *Political Man*, had argued that "populist" movements, from McCarthyism in the US to Poujadism in France, "were in large part products of the insoluble frustrations of those who feel cut off from the main trends of modern society." Here, too, the vague designation of some form of "cut off"-ness as the defining feature of populism points to the possibility of a more formal understanding of populism according to which "the people" can take on a wide variety of constructions rather than corresponding to a determinate location in the social structure.

This tension between an objectivist and a constructionist view of collective identities is likewise already present in Lipset's and Rokkan's (1967, 3; emphasis in original) discussion of cleavages when they briefly consider "alignments by strictly political criteria of membership in 'we' versus 'they' groups," raising in turn "the possibility that the *parties themselves* might establish themselves as significant poles of attraction and produce their own alignments independently of the geographical, the social, and the cultural underpinnings of the movements." While this notion of "strictly political" alignments is left largely unelaborated, the authors return to it in the concluding section in referring to recent examples from Scandinavia of disruptions to "the equilibrium of the old parties," from party splits on the left to "a four-party coalition of the non-Socialist front" in Norway (Lipset and Rokkan 1967, 54–56). Tellingly, the category of the "strictly political" designates here the non-incorporable remainder that cannot be accounted for by the objectivist logic of socio-structural cleavages, yet it also carries the conceptually subversive potential of pointing more generally to the contingency of party-voter alignments and the politically constructed nature of group identities as such. The latter point is taken up by Sartori (1990, 171) in his aforementioned critique of the "objectivist bias" in the "sociology of politics" paradigm. Sartori (1990, 154) criticizes the class voting and class representation literature – including Lipset's (1960) earlier work – for "the fantastic irreality of the argument that an entire 'class' is being 'represented' […] by such a complex organization as a mass party"; instead, he argues in

an uncannily proto-constructionist vein that whenever a party does align with a social class, "the party is not the 'consequence' of the class. Rather, and before, it is the class that receives its identity from the party" (Sartori 1990, 169). In this context, Sartori (1990, 173, 175–76; emphasis in original) praises Lipset's and Rokkan's (1967) contribution as a founding moment of "political sociology" proper insofar as the authors not only move beyond the centrality of class and "give equal attention to *any kind* of conflict and cleavage," but also – more fundamentally – understand cleavages as contingently "*produced by*," rather than "*reflected in*," the party system and as instituted politically insofar as "a source of political alignments is traced back to the 'we' versus 'they' interaction." Sartori thus points to the radical implications of what Lipset and Rokkan only refer to in passing as the "strictly political" for re-formulating the entire conceptual basis of political sociology in terms of the contingent construction of collective identities. These implications would only be realized, however, in the context of wider conceptual shifts leading up to the ideational turn in populism studies several decades later.

Populism as thin construction: ideational approaches to populism

With the dealignment/realignment literature beginning in the 1980s, a pronounced shift can be seen in the conceptual terrain of comparative politics and, with it, eventually that of populism research. Dalton, Flanagan, and Beck (1984, 8, 21; emphasis in original), in their introduction to the 1984 volume *Dealignment or Realignment?*, observed a "*decomposition* of electoral alignments in many Western nations," whereby "the Old Politics, structured largely on class cleavages, is being replaced by a New Politics based on a new set of societal cleavages" that appear to crosscut established ones; yet the new cleavages, they argued, cannot be accounted for internally to the logic of the old ones (e.g. the thesis of the "embourgeoisement" of the working class leading to shifts within the established labor vs. capital axis). In other words, cleavage formation as such begins to follow a different kind of logic; Inglehart (1984, 25), in his contribution to the same volume, proposed one version of this argument in identifying a shift "from class-based to value-based political polarization." According to Inglehart (1984, 25–26), unlike in "industrial society," where "political polarization was a direct reflection of social class conflict," polarization in "advanced industrial society" plays out increasingly in terms of conflicting value orientations with the emergence of "postmaterialist issues." Importantly, Inglehart (1984, 25–26) distinguished between a "postmaterialist base," which is "largely middle class in origin," and materialism/post-materialism as "an issue dimension" whose mobilizing logic is not that of one class against another, but that of positioning on a set of issues ranging from nuclear energy to military installations. Here, the conceptual distinction between socio-structural group categories and

politically mobilized identities – in light of the growing empirical gap between the two – is explicitly incorporated into a theory of alignments, signaling the beginnings of a broader shift away from a primarily class-based understanding of cleavages and toward conceptualizing the conflict structures of party systems in terms of issue dimensions such as "socio-economic" and "socio-cultural."

Against this wider background, a strand of theorizing emerged in the early 2000s that conceptualized the phenomenon of populism as a product of the erosion of class-based cleavages. If the concept of populism had previously emerged as a non-incorporable remainder of cleavage-based politics – or as a synchronic Other of the latter (in Germani's work) as a deviation from the normal path to modernization – it now took on the status of a diachronic Other that characterizes a world "after cleavages." Mair (2002) presented one version of this argument in his contribution "Populist Democracy vs Party Democracy"; he began by diagnosing an "erosion of party democracy" in Western Europe, whereby the Lipset-Rokkanian understanding of "politics as a 'democratic class struggle' in which the competing parties were seen to represent the political interests of opposing social forces [is] now less and less appropriate" (Mair 2002, 84–85). It is in this context of established parties' loss of their representative function, Mair (2002, 89) argued, that "populist democracy" emerges as a competing logic of representation that rejects the mediating role of cleavage-based parties and claims to "serve […] the national interest, the popular interest, rather than any sectional interest." The key argumentative step here is that if populism emerges from the erosion of class-based cleavages, it is no longer reducible to a determinate socio-structural content and, on the contrary, is about constructing some notion of the "popular interest" that can conceivably take on a wide range of contents in its claim to transcend established "sectional" identities. In this reading, populism is now defined in terms of a different kind of conceptual opposition: not as a deviation from the development of cleavage-based politics, but as a product of the latter's secular erosion – making visible, in turn, the historically contingent nature of cleavage-based politics as a mode of organizing political conflict that sustained "party democracy" and whose limits now give rise to an alternative political logic.

In the context of post-communist East-Central Europe, which is the region of interest for this book and where the golden age of "party democracy" evidently never took place, a diagnosis emerges that understands populism not so much as the byproduct of the erosion of the cleavage-based normality of politics, but rather as the expression of the historical absence of this normality in the first place. Kriesi (2014), for instance, takes up Mair's (2002) thesis and argues that unlike in Western Europe, where populism emerges from the erosion of cleavage structures sustaining party democracy, populism in East-Central Europe is a widespread expression of the lack of institutionalization of party systems – in other words, the absence of something like a party-based institutionalization of cleavages to begin with –

leading, in turn, to the prevalence of ideologically diffuse forms of populism such as "centrist populism" (following Učeň 2007) that defy conventional Western European notions of left/right politics. Krastev (2007, 2011; see also Smilov and Krastev 2008) likewise points to the central, rather than peripheral, role of populism in East-Central Europe with his notion of a "populist moment," whereby political conflict tends to concentrate around an opposition between illiberal populists willing to undermine institutional checks in the name of popular sovereignty and technocratic elites who have long moved to restrict the scope of democratic sovereignty in the name of EU and market imperatives. Following this line of interpretation, the East-Central European region brings to the fore a twofold ambivalence of populism: firstly, its dual positioning in the literature as an Other of the cleavage-based normality of politics where cleavage structures can be assumed, but very much a normal and established part of politics where they cannot; secondly, the ambivalence that emerges in relation to democracy if populism entails a claim to popular sovereignty that can, depending on how this claim is formulated, also be deployed to undermine institutional checks ("hard" as opposed to "soft" populism, following Smilov and Krastev (2008)), thus highlighting the illiberal potential and contingent foundations of democracy itself.

These two dimensions of ambivalence are, in turn, not entirely unrelated – a point that is taken up in Arditi's (2005) theorization of populism as a "symptom" of democracy. In a similar vein to Mair, Arditi draws on Manin's (1997) three stages of representative government to explain the rise of populism in terms of the transition from "party democracy" to "audience democracy." In Manin's (1997, 209–10, 219, 222; emphasis in original) analysis, party democracy resulted from the growth of mass parties that translated "class divisions" between social forces into "electoral cleavages" – so that "elections reflect a social reality that is prior to politics" – whereas audience democracy entails "the personalization of electoral choice" and the flexibilization of voting behavior so that "[v]oters seem to *respond* (to particular terms offered at each election) rather than just *express* (their social or cultural identities)." For Arditi (2005, 86), audience democracy creates a conducive terrain for populism as a representative logic that claims to transcend historically constituted social group identities and generate instead an immediate link between a wider "people" and its representatives. Arditi thus offers a diachronic account of how populism has entered the mainstream of democratic politics as a result of the shifting practices of representative democracy itself, while drawing from here the conclusion that the phenomenon of populism can be understood as a "symptom of democracy" that emerges from the limitations of a purely institutionally mediated form of politics and points, with the central claim to popular sovereignty, to both the constitutive promise and the potentially dark authoritarian underside of democracy. Arditi draws here on the concept of symptom from Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis as an element

articulated internally to a signifying system but also pointing to the latter's limits; populism is a "symptom" in this sense of "an internal element of the democratic system which also reveals the limits of the system and prevents its closure in the pure and simple normality of institutional procedures" (Arditi 2005, 88). The historical decline of cleavage-based democracy, in other words, has brought to the fore and rendered visible the contingent nature of democratic politics itself – namely, in the form of populism.

While Arditi's contribution has further theoretical implications that will be explored in the next section, the founding moment of the ideational literature arguably comes with Mudde's (2004) "thin-centred ideology" conception of populism, which is likewise situated in a diachronic perspective that diagnoses a "populist *Zeitgeist*" since the early 1990s. For this, he proposes numerous explanations, including not least "the development toward a post-industrial society [that] has dealigned many voters" (Mudde 2004, 555). In conceptualizing populism, Mudde (2004, 541–42) begins by eliminating a series of other definitional options – such as populism as a "normal pathology" of Western democracies consisting of a "corruption of democratic ideals"; populism as a set of "opportunistic policies with the aim of (quickly) pleasing the people/voters"; or populism as "a highly emotional and simplistic discourse" as opposed to a "rational" one. Mudde (2004, 543–44) then proposes his own seminal definition of populism as a "thin-centred ideology" that "*considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite'* […]." "Thin-centred," following Freeden's (1996) theory of ideology, means that populism has "a restricted core attached to a narrower range of political concepts" – namely, some form of antagonistic divide pitting "the people" against "the elite" – which is then combinable with a whole range of other (thicker) ideologies such as "communism, ecologism, nationalism, or socialism" that thus lend the people vs. elite divide a more specific content (Mudde 2004, 544).

Within the wider post-cleavages strand of conceptualizing populism, a bridge thus emerges to the *ideational turn* in populism research. What the various "post-cleavages" perspectives here have in common is that they register a shifting terrain whereby the old assumptions sustaining an objectivist, cleavage-based view of politics no longer hold and a new conceptual basis is needed for understanding populism. For approaches grounded in the objectivist underpinnings of an earlier era of social-science research, the phenomenon of populism could readily be reduced to the expression of modernization processes yet, at the same time, constituted a remainder that somehow did not fit into the "normality" of cleavage-based politics – an ambivalence that Germani, for example, tried to resolve by Othering populism into a particular type of deviation from the normal path to modernization and the institutionalization of class-based cleavages. With the dealignment/realignment literature, the conceptual basis for this assumed normality of politics becomes increasingly questionable, while the

apparently increasing empirical relevance of the phenomenon means that populism can no longer be safely kept away as a deviation or residual category of this would-be normal. These dislocations in the objectivist paradigm point to the problem of missing ground that looms large over the concept of populism by the beginning of the 2000s: the concept now requires a new foundation capable of capturing the various interrelated aspects – populism as a product of the erosion of socio-structural cleavages, the conceptual indeterminacy of "the people" in populism, the ambivalence of populism in relation to democracy – that recur in these more recent theorizations of populism.

Mudde's contribution is a founding moment of this ideational body of literature to the extent that it explicitly and systematically invests populism with a new conceptual foundation: namely, with an interpretation of Freeden's (1996) morphological understanding of ideologies[1] as (relatively "decontested") systems of signifying relations between core and peripheral "concepts." Populism as a thin-centered ideology, following Mudde, entails a limited conceptual core consisting of the people vs. elite divide, which can be constructed in different ways depending on the specific cross-fertilization with one or more host ideologies.[2] We thus arrive at a radical departure from the Ionescu and Gellner volume of 1969: the "people" of populism, far from being reducible to determinate socio-structural categories such as "the peasantry," constitutes a necessarily contingent construction whose very contingency characterizes the specific conceptual status of populism. What makes populism populism is not least its indeterminacy: it can be of the left or of the right, agrarian or urban, progressive or reactionary, democratic or authoritarian. In this vein, Rovira Kaltwasser (2012) as well as Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2013) argue that populism is "ambivalent" in relation to democracy – depending on whether, for instance, "the people" is constructed to exclude or include minority groups and "popular sovereignty" is interpreted to be compatible or at odds with the rule of law and constitutional checks.

It is worth emphasizing that while Mudde's is far from being the very first ideational approach to populism, it defines a conceptual terrain on which populism can be understood as a dynamic and relatively indeterminate phenomenon whose defining feature is the construction of an antagonistic relation between "the people" and "the elite" (see, for instance, Albertazzi and McDonnell 2008; Canovan 1999; Hawkins 2009; Rovira Kaltwasser 2012; Stanley 2008). Within this variety of ideational definitions of populism, however, there are also those that ascribe to populism a much lesser degree of ambivalence or indeterminacy: a prominent recent example being Müller's (2014, 2016, 2017) theory, according to which populism is necessarily authoritarian and anti-democratic (but can still be left or right, agrarian or urban, socially progressive or reactionary, etc.). Müller (2014, 485) defines populism as a "moralistic imagination of politics" that articulates an exclusive and totalizing, and hence anti-pluralist and anti-democratic,[3] claim to

represent "the people" against "small minorities who are put outside the people" and thus ultimately denies the legitimacy of alternative representational claims. This definition points in exemplary fashion to a trade-off: with his "thicker" ideational conception of populism, Müller attains a greater level of conceptual determinacy at the expense of both the range of applicability and the distinctive value of populism as a concept. Indeed, a point of criticism levied at Müller is that the concept of populism, following his definition, cannot even be applied to the first modern example of a self-avowedly "populist" movement (the US People's Party) or the distinctive case of a "reflexive populism" (Kioupkiolis 2016) inspired by a theory of populism (Podemos in Spain) (Stavrakakis and Jäger 2018, 548–50). More fundamentally, however, populism following Müller's definition comes dangerously close to being reduced to a mere synonym for authoritarianism – corresponding to what Lefort (1986, 1988) theorized as "totalitarianism," to which Müller (2014, 488) notes a conceptual "affinity" – or at least a subtype of authoritarianism (arguably the most common one today) that actively invokes the notion of popular sovereignty rather than ignoring or decrying it in justifying an exclusive claim to rule. An exclusive claim to rule is a defining feature of every authoritarianism; the only difference between populism (following Müller's definition) and authoritarianism *tout court* would consist in the increasingly rare forms of authoritarianism that do not even pay lip service to a sovereign and virtuous "people." All this suggests that an ideational approach that, in this case, offers a more determinate and normatively straightforward answer to what populism is does so by sacrificing populism's conceptual "distinguishability" (Mudde 2017) from other -isms.

More broadly, Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser themselves refer to "ideational" approaches as those that conceptualize populism as a "set of ideas" (2013, 150) or "as a discourse, an ideology, or a worldview" (2017, 12). As Mudde (2017, 32) notes, a common criticism from those who question the value of populism as a concept is that "the people do not really exist and are a mere construction of the populists" – but the same, of course, holds for "the nation" in nationalism or "the class" in socialism. Ideational approaches to populism thus recognize this irreducibly constructed nature of collective identities and require, in turn, some kind of constructionist conceptual underpinning – such as Freeden's morphological approach to ideology in Mudde's case – that makes it possible to analytically trace different ways of constructing "the people" (what Mudde (2017) refers to as "categorizability" in his discussion of the advantages of an ideational approach to populism). What is foreclosed in earlier objectivist approaches – namely, the question *what populists actually mean* when they say "the people" – thus becomes the main object of inquiry for ideational ones. In the following section, it will be argued that a specifically post-foundational current within the ideational literature on populism offers a particularly systematic and analytically productive framework for thinking through the constructionist implications of ideational approaches. Following the

diachronic movement from objectivist to ideational approaches to populism, this branching out onto post-foundational approaches represents the second step in staking out the theoretical positioning of this book within the wider field of populism research.

Populism as construction and royal road: post-foundational approaches to populism

Laclau's (2005a) later theory of populism, while featuring superficial similarities with his 1977 version, is grounded in a "post-foundational" (Marchart 2007) discourse-theoretical ontology that brings to the fore the contingent and politically instituted nature of the social. After his 1977 book on politics and ideology, in which he maintained the Althusserian distinction between contradictions and antagonisms in conceptualizing class politics, Laclau broke with the *a priori* primacy of class in Marxist theory altogether and proposed a post-Marxist theory of discourse in his joint book with Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*. Here, Laclau and Mouffe (2001) posited the discursively constituted nature of the social according to the logics of *difference* and *equivalence*. Their basic proposition is that discourse can be understood in an expansive sense to encompass all signifying practices (linguistic and non-linguistic alike) that produce structured meaning through *articulations* that place elements in relations of difference (*A* is *A* because it is distinct from *B*, *C*, *D*, …) or equivalence (*A* is distinct from *B*, *C*, and *D*, but united with them in a *chain of equivalences* against *E*) to each other. A key ontological implication here is that discursively mediated social identities are necessarily contingent: for example, the differential play of discursive elements such as "freedom," "equality," and "justice" takes on a new set of meanings once they are equivalentially articulated in terms of an *antagonistic frontier* against "the nanny state," "the trade unions," and "scroungers." The political as antagonism thus represents an instituting moment of the social and "the limit of all objectivity" (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, 122) insofar as it points to the possibility of breaking up and redefining existing constellations of meaning around new oppositions. *Hegemony* is this operation of partially fixing an ensemble of meanings around *nodal points*, which in turn presupposes an antagonistic moment of instituting that meaning against a *constitutive outside* (e.g. "democracy" as a nodal point linking "freedom," "equality," and "justice" in an original moment of institution against "absolute monarchy"). No hegemonic fixation, however, can be total because the contingency of these discursively articulated identities entails that established partial fixations of meaning can be re-articulated around new oppositions, i.e. via antagonism. Politics as a permanent struggle for hegemony thus presupposes this possibility of antagonistic break in the form of recurring interventions of the political that re-institute and reshuffle discursively constituted social orders (see also Marchart 2007 on the "political difference").

In his later book *On Populist Reason*, Laclau (2005a) draws far-reaching conclusions within this theoretical framework for the study of populism. From a theoretical perspective that emphasizes the contingent and politically instituted nature of all identities, populism takes on a metaphorical character for the political – "the royal road to understanding something about the ontological constitution of the political as such" (Laclau 2005a, 67). Laclau (2005a, 74) defines populism in terms of three "preconditions": an equivalential articulation of demands in common opposition to a locus of power; the formation of an antagonistic frontier pitting a popular subject of these demands against a power bloc; and the symbolic unification of the chain of equivalences around the name of this popular subject as an empty signifier (a concept that requires further elaboration; see chapter 2). At this stage in his work, Laclau understands the category of "demand" as the basic unit of discourse or "the elementary unit of politics" (Marchart 2018, 111). The idea here is that the most basic discursive relation is established by a demand calling upon a locus of power for its fulfillment; a differential articulation of demands addresses each demand in isolation to the locus of power in question without generating an antagonistic break *vis-à-vis* the existing discursive terrain (e.g. when hungry peasants petition the king for more bread). An antagonistic break only emerges through an equivalential articulation of unfulfilled demands, united in their non-fulfillment, around a negative frontier against the locus of power from which they articulate a collective exclusion (e.g. when hungry peasants decide that the demand for more bread, in addition to demands for peace, land, or electrification, requires opposition to the king's rule as a whole) (Laclau 2005a, 74).

The interrelated dimensions of Laclau's definition thus take shape: populism is 1) an *equivalential articulation* of demands that 2) generates an *antagonistic frontier* pitting a popular subject against a power bloc and 3) turns the name of this popular subject into the central representative ("empty") signifier. In a similar vein to other ideational definitions, the short version of Laclau's theory is that populism entails the construction of an antagonistic divide between "people" and "power." If this is the case, however, populism – to return to Laclau's "royal road" argument – reveals something about the political condition as such; if the political as antagonism is understood as a founding moment of every social order, populism as the construction of an antagonistic relation between "people" and "power" constitutes something like a founding moment of democratic politics, the moment of redefining social order in terms of an unredeemed subject of popular sovereignty against instituted forms of power blocking that sovereignty. In this vein, Laclau (2005a, 154) argues that the populist "construction of the 'people' is the political act *par excellence*" and an instituting moment that "does not simply *express* some kind of original popular identity; it actually *constitutes* the latter" (Laclau 2005b, 48). We thus arrive at a radical counter-position to objectivist conceptualizations of populism as a deviation from or residue of the normal mode of (cleavage-based) politics – culminating in Laclau's (2005a, 154) controversial assertion that

populism even becomes "synonymous" with the political in the sense of a "moment of institution of the social." While this statement is frequently criticized from other ideational perspectives (Müller 2014; Rovira Kaltwasser 2012; Stanley 2008) for depriving the concept of populism of analytical value, there are at least two senses worth unpacking here in which Laclau's thesis can yield insights for conceptualizing populism: a democratic-theoretical one and a formal-analytical one.

Laclau (2005b, 164–66) draws on Lefort's (1986, 1988) understanding of democracy as the form of society that recognizes its internally divided character – in particular, the irreducible gap between "the people" and "power."[4] The paradox of democracy, following Lefort (1986, 279), is that power supposedly "emanates from the people," but it is ultimately "the power of nobody" insofar as no claimant to power can claim to be identical with "the people" and thus foreclose alternative claims to power. Populism, then, is what makes visible and politically articulates the people/power gap on which democracy is founded. If politics is not possible without the possibility of antagonism (as previously noted), politics in a democracy is not possible without the possibility of a people vs. power antagonism, i.e. populism – the possibility of claiming that "the people" is not, in fact, represented by power in its instituted forms. It is in this (limited) sense that Laclau's (2005b, 48) argument that "the end of populism coincides with the end of politics" might be understood: even if Laclau's other assertion that populism is "synonymous" with the political ought to be rejected at face value (for reasons that will be discussed), it is another thing to say that the possibility of populism is a precondition for the possibility of politics (in a democracy). Understood thus, Laclau's thesis boils down to a reformulation of what Marchart (2007) has theorized as the "political difference": if politics requires the possibility of antagonism, i.e. the political, politics in a democracy requires the possibility of a specific type of antagonistic division – namely, the populist one of people vs. power. This, of course, would entail accepting that populism is, indeed, no more than a specific type of antagonism – a particular form in which the political can manifest itself – rather than the political as such.

We thus arrive at the other sense in which Laclau's thesis of populism as the political can be understood. In a formal vein, Laclau's three definitional ingredients for populism – chain of equivalences, antagonistic frontier, hegemonic stabilization around a representative signifier – are all constitutive of the political as such. The political as antagonism shows itself, so to speak, whenever an antagonistic divide emerges from a chain of equivalences that subverts an existing system of differences and redefines the terrain of the social around new oppositions. Populism is one possible form of this manifesting itself but certainly not the only one; it is that form that takes on the name of a "people" as the most universal category of politics, making it one of multiple possible types but also a special type – a "royal road," following Laclau – within the political genus. It cannot, however, be the only

type insofar as – returning to Laclau's basic unit "demand" – not every equivalential articulation of demands has to take on the name of a "people" or be addressed to "power" (Stavrakakis 2004). Here, Laclau's theoretical premise that every demand calls upon a locus of power requires qualification: following Laclau's Lacanian-inspired reasoning, the demand as the basic unit of discourse points to the dependence of the subject on the symbolic order (Lacan's "big Other") for expressing its needs by symbolizing its lack. This does not mean, however, that it is always meaningful to refer to the addressees of demands as loci of power: consider, for instance, demands directed at (would-be) immigrants such as "Act normal or leave" (Mark Rutte to immigrants in 2017) or "If you come to Hungary, you must respect our culture" (from the Fidesz government's 2015 poster campaign) – in which the underdog vs. power relation is reversed, with the addresser of the demand positioning itself as a locus of power prescribing national norms for foreign outsiders. If this is the case, however, it would hardly be meaningful to speak of populism in these contexts. Within Laclau's work, there is a slippage between this less formalistic approach to conceptualizing populism not in terms of *any* antagonistic frontier, but specifically in terms of "an internal antagonistic frontier separating the 'people' from power" (Laclau 2005a, 74), on the one hand, and the insistence on a purely "formal" view of populism on the other, according to which "the prevalence of the equivalential over the differential logic" (Laclau 2005b, 44) suffices as a definitional basis because every equivalential articulation of demands, by implication, is directed against a locus of power. Once the latter assumption is discarded, however, the conceptual status of populism changes to that of a particular type of equivalential logic – and, "quite simply, a way of constituting the political" (Laclau 2005a, xi) – that constructs a people-as-underdog against a power bloc as opposed to, say, a people-as-nation against foreign Others (nationalism) or external immigrants (nativism), as recent applications of Laclau's theory for the study of populism have emphasized (De Cleen et al. 2019; De Cleen and Stavrakakis 2017; Stavrakakis et al. 2017). It thus becomes possible to sustain a semi-formal reading of Laclau's theory in terms of what De Cleen and Stavrakakis (2017) refer to as "discursive architectonics": populism corresponds to a "vertical" logic of antagonistic division in terms of an underdog vs. power relation, in contrast to a "horizontal" logic found in nationalism or nativism of constructing a "people" against other "peoples" excluded by virtue of their cultural or ethnic Otherness (a distinction that is certainly one of degree; see also chapter 2).

Žižek (2006, 553) is thus correct to point out that Laclau's equating of populism with the political – "in a nice case of self-reference" – itself follows a hegemonic logic whereby a partial object (populism) comes to stand for the whole thing (the political). If we now accept the semi-formal reading of Laclau – according to which populism is one "species of the genus hegemony" (Arditi 2010, 492), albeit one still conceptualizable in the relatively

formal terms of vertical (as opposed to horizontal) antagonistic division – this has productive implications in both a democratic-theoretical and a formal-analytical vein. On an analytical level, we now have a concept of populism that allows for analytically sharp distinctions between populism and what it is not – which Mudde (2017) refers to as the criterion of "distinguishability" – in terms of the degree and type of antagonistic division. Populism becomes conceptually distinguishable from what Laclau (2005a) refers to as institutionalism (see also chapter 2), on the one hand, along the continuum equivalence/difference (or antagonism/non-antagonism), and from the likes of nationalism or nativism, on the other hand, in terms of the type of antagonistic frontier (underdog vs. power as opposed to national vs. foreign) that emerges from an equivalential articulation of demands. In terms of democratic theory, the weaker version of Laclau's (2005b, 48) thesis – "the end of populism coincides with the end of politics" – carries the paradoxical implication that populism is a constitutive moment of democratic politics and, at the same time, indeterminate in its democratic or authoritarian character. As pointed out by Canovan (1999, 2), populism professes to "cash in democracy's promise of power to the people" – and constitutes, in this sense, the "ideology of democracy" – but it can lurch into totalitarianism in a Lefortian sense as soon as the claim to "the people" becomes exclusive and totalizing (Canovan 2002, 41–42). This fundamental "ambivalence" (Rovira Kaltwasser 2012) or "undecidability" (Arditi 2005) of populism in relation to democracy leads us back to Arditi's (2005) conceptualization of populism as a "symptom of democracy": populism is both a constitutive and a limiting moment, both a necessary possibility within democracy and a possibility of the latter's subversion.

With this post-foundational conception of populism, we arrive at a diametrical opposite to the objectivist approaches examined at the beginning of this chapter: populism is no longer a deviation from or a residual category of politics, but rather a constitutive moment of the latter that thereby reveals the contingent foundations of democracy itself. Within the wider ideational literature on populism, which recognizes the contingently constructed nature of the "people" in populism, Laclau's post-foundational theory of populism extends this key insight into an understanding of all identities as irreducibly constructed and all politics as ultimately contingent – for which populism, in turn, is the tip of the iceberg, the "royal road" that points to constitutive features of the political condition (but without being identical with the latter). It thus becomes possible to stake out a position for a discursive approach to populism within – and, indeed, at the very forefront of – the ideational study of populism. What now remains to be presented is a systematic overview of the analytical perspective and its link to both the underpinnings of post-foundational discourse theory and the empirical object of inquiry, which is the subject of the next chapter.

Notes

1 Freeden (2017) himself has questioned the ways in which his theory has been taken up by Mudde and other ideational scholars of populism, especially on the question whether populist ideology indeed qualifies as "thin-centred."
2 It is worth noting that Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2013, 2017) have expanded the conceptual core of populism to explicitly encompass not only the people vs. elite opposition, but also the "moralized" nature of this opposition as well as the notion that politics should be based on the Rousseauian "general will" of the people. Mudde (2004, 544) refers to both moralism and the general will in his 2004 article but does not definitively incorporate them into the conceptual core. The subsequent definitional emphasis on moralism constitutes a point of disagreement with post-foundational scholars who point out that moralism is neither specific to populism nor even a consistent feature of discourses that otherwise fit the people vs. elite criterion for populism (Katsambekis 2019, 2020; Stavrakakis and Jäger 2018).
3 It is worth emphasizing that Müller understands "anti-pluralism" differently from Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser: while the latter also refer to pluralism (in addition to elitism) as a conceptual opposite of populism, they understand pluralism as the notion that there are different groups to be represented in society (other than "the people"), whereas pluralism for Müller is the acceptance of the legitimacy of political opponents (similarly to Mouffe's (2000) conception of agonistic pluralism).
4 Laclau differs from Lefort, however, on the question how this division is enacted within the framework of democratic politics. While Lefort refers to power as an "empty place," Laclau (2005a, 166) argues that "emptiness is a type of identity, not a structural location": the division of the social space can be represented through the struggle and interplay of different empty signifiers, such as the "people" as an empty signifier in populism that is opposed to power and thus renders visible the people/power gap that ultimately sustains democracy.

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2 Discourse – hegemony – populism: a framework for analysis

This chapter presents a systematic overview of a framework for analyzing populism based on Laclau's theorization introduced in the previous chapter, including considerations on how the various discourse-theoretical categories can be deployed as analytical tools for the study of discourses and how populism, based on this conceptualization, can be analytically distinguished from other forms of discourse. A common theme running through this discussion is what Marttila (2015) has referred to as the "methodological holism" linking post-foundational discourse theory and discourse analysis. Drawing on categories such as difference, equivalence, and antagonistic frontier, populism can be distinguished from the likes of institutionalism and nationalism in terms of the degree and type of antagonistic division, respectively. Following this discussion, the chapter draws on Glynos' and Howarth's (2007) distinction between social, political, and fantasmatic logics in understanding populism as a political logic as well as its interplay with the social logics of hegemonic formations and the fantasmatic logics of imaginaries. This, in turn, gives rise to an integrated approach featuring empirical, interpretive, and critical dimensions of inquiry, which structure the research questions that are presented in the section that follows and then addressed in subsequent empirical chapters. A final section is devoted to a discussion of the source material, including an acknowledgment of the theoretically grounded limits of systematicity in the selection of sources for the empirical analysis.

Analyzing populism and its conceptual Other(s)

As briefly introduced in the previous chapter, Laclau (2005a, 74) defines populism in terms of three interrelated aspects:

> (1) the formation of an internal antagonistic frontier separating the "people" from power; […] (2) an equivalential articulation of demands making the emergence of the "people" possible […] [3] the unification of these various demands […] into a stable system of signification.

Drawing on this theory of populism for empirical analysis requires unpacking the three definitional components – populism as 1) an *equivalential articulation* of demands that 2) generates an *antagonistic frontier* pitting a popular subject against a power bloc and 3) turns the name of this popular subject into an *empty signifier* – and establishing a bridge between the conceptual underpinnings of post-foundational discourse theory and the analysis of populism. As outlined in the previous chapter, the discourse-theoretical perspective outlined in the joint work of Laclau and Mouffe (2001) posits the discursively constituted and politically instituted nature of the social as well as the relational nature of discourse, whereby structures of meaning are produced through articulations that establish relations of difference and equivalence between discursive elements. Difference and equivalence thus constitute the two basic operations of discursivity: the *logic of difference* occurs whenever a discursive element – or a "demand," as Laclau later tends to characterize the basic unit of discourse – is assigned a particular identity (A is distinct from B, C, D, …), while the *logic of equivalence* links together multiple differential elements in common opposition to a *constitutive outside* (A is distinct from B, but united with it against Z). In the parenthetical example, the equivalence $A \equiv B$ presupposes the overlapping oppositions $A \leftrightarrow Z$ and $B \leftrightarrow Z$, whereby A and Z as well as B and Z are constructed as mutually incommensurable with each other. Nonhoff (2006) proposes the concept of *contrariety* to describe this relation of constitutive exclusion between individual discursive elements. If the equivalence $A \equiv B$ expands into a *chain of equivalences* facing an opposing one ($A \equiv B \equiv C \equiv D \equiv \ldots$ vs. $X \equiv Y \equiv Z \equiv \ldots$), this, in turn, presupposes relations of contrariety between individual elements across the opposing chains (e.g. $A \leftrightarrow Z$, $B \leftrightarrow Z$, $B \leftrightarrow Y$, and $C \leftrightarrow Y$ enabling the equivalence $A \equiv B \equiv C$). An *antagonistic frontier* is the negative gap that emerges from this combination of opposing chains of equivalences and the contrarieties between individual elements on either side (Nonhoff 2017). The ontological function of the political *qua* antagonism as an instituting moment of social order thus makes itself visible through antagonism*s* in this empirical-analytical sense of frontier effects generated by the interplay of equivalence and contrariety (see also Marchart 2007, 2018; Nonhoff 2006, 2017).

If discursivity is understood to encompass all forms of relational signifying practice, a *discourse* as a discrete category refers to a particular structured ensemble of signifying practices that operates on what Laclau (2005b, 45) describes as a "continuum" of difference and equivalence: a predominantly equivalential discourse pits an equivalentially articulated collective identity (e.g. "the people," linked to the chain of equivalences $A \equiv B \equiv C \equiv \ldots$) in antagonistic demarcation against another (e.g. "the elite" that fails to represent them, comprising the equivalential chain $X \equiv Y \equiv Z \equiv \ldots$), while a predominantly differential discourse constructs a non-antagonistic field of differences (e.g. "the people" as a collection of "individuals and families" simply going about their business in a free market, following

Thatcher). Every discourse, in turn, relies on the structuring function of *nodal points* that hold together its constituent elements, whether in predominantly differential or equivalential fashion. In the examples given, the name of "the people" might serve as a nodal point either equivalentially linking a series of demands against "the elite" or organizing a differential expansion of syntagmas such as "working people," "businesspeople," "black and Asian people," etc. all coexisting in a non-antagonistic (i.e. differential) relation of harmony with each other. In the latter example, too, however, the field of differences presupposes an instituting moment of antagonistic break in which all these differential identities can take on – at least momentarily – a collective identity against a common outside (e.g. the common threat of "trade unions" allegedly trying to destroy the harmony between "working people" and "business people," or "the loony left" allegedly trying to convince "black people" that they are being racially oppressed, etc.). A nodal point, in other words, holds together a chain of equivalences or a field of differences by organizing the moment of antagonistic break that makes the emergence of a collective identity possible.

Beginning in the mid-1990s, Laclau (2007, 36–46) uses the concept of *empty signifier* to designate a special type of nodal point that takes on this holding-together function for the entirety of an equivalential unity. For instance, "democracy" might function as the empty signifier for an anti-authoritarian protest movement that dichotomizes the entire social space in terms of a struggle between "democracy" and "dictatorship," whereas "democracy" might constitute only one of multiple nodal points structuring the discourse of, say, a liberal party in a liberal democracy. Another way of formulating this distinction is that a nodal point is any element in an equivalential chain that articulates multiple common contrarieties with other elements of the chain, whereas the empty signifier is the nodal point that articulates common contrarieties with all other elements of the chain, thus taking on a representative function for the equivalential unity and carrying the promise of overcoming the opposing bloc in its entirety (Nonhoff 2006, 2017). In the visualization presented in Figure 2.1, B serves as the empty signifier for the chain of equivalences $A \equiv B \equiv C \equiv D \equiv E$ by articulating common contrarieties with A, C, D, and E, thus holding together the equivalential unity of all five elements, while C is an additional nodal point that has common contrarieties with B and D and thus holds together the $B \equiv C \equiv D$ segment of the equivalential chain. On the opposing side of the antagonistic frontier (i.e. the *constitutive outside*), Y functions as a nodal point that features the greatest number of contrarieties to the other side (i.e. $Y \leftrightarrow B$, $Y \leftrightarrow C$, and $Y \leftrightarrow D$, accounting for the equivalence $W \equiv X \equiv Y$).

The empty signifier thus entails a hegemonic claim to organize an entire ensemble of meanings around itself; the production of empty signifiers, as Laclau (2007) emphasizes, is a constitutive dimension of politics as a struggle for hegemony. To take up an earlier example, different discourses might construct the struggle against "dictatorship" in terms of competing

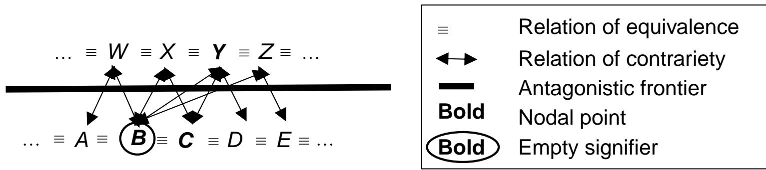

Figure 2.1 Basic structure of an equivalential discourse.
Source: Own illustration based on Laclau (2005a, 130); Nonhoff (2017, 94).

empty signifiers: a liberal-democratic discourse might construct "democracy" as an empty signifier opposed to a "dictatorship" that suppresses "freedom" and "equality," whereas a nationalist construction might interpellate "the nation" against a "dictatorship" deemed to be "foreign" and anti-"national" (perhaps in addition to suppressing "freedom" and "equality"). The contingent nature of discursively mediated social identities means that there is always the possibility of other empty signifiers or nodal points vying to subvert established ones by re-instituting the field around new oppositions (i.e. via antagonism). The hegemony of a particular discursive construction, therefore, is the inherently precarious result of a political moment of institution and constantly subject to *dislocations*, or interruptions in the structured production of meaning (e.g. the claim that actually existing "democracy" is not, in fact, fulfilling the promises of "freedom" and "equality" that were equivalentially articulated with it).

Post-foundational discourse analysis thrives on "methodological holism" (Marttila 2015, 110–13), which entails the deployment of these discourse-theoretical categories for the empirical analysis of discourses. To begin with, the concepts of difference, equivalence, and contrariety provide the building blocks for identifying relations between discursive elements in any ensemble of articulations (see also Nonhoff 2019), whether linguistic (text, talk) or non-linguistic (image, performance). While the identity of every discursive element is grounded in difference, the *logic of difference* turns into *contrariety* whenever an element is set against another and into *equivalence* whenever multiple elements share relations of contrariety against another. A *nodal point* is a discursive element that shares relations of contrariety with multiple other elements in a *chain of equivalences*; an *empty signifier* is the nodal point that articulates contrarieties with all other elements in the chain. An *antagonistic frontier*, in turn, emerges when the accumulation of contrarieties generates two opposing chains of equivalences.[1] Populism, then, is characterized by a concentration of contrarieties around the name of a popular subject as an empty signifier (e.g. "the people," "the citizens," or "the 99 percent") against that of a power bloc (e.g. "the elite," "the oligarchy," or "the caste"), generating a people vs. power frontier pitting two

equivalentially constructed blocs against each other. A discourse can only be established as "populist," therefore, as a result of this interpretive work of identifying the signifying relations behind the construction of a popular subject and its constitutive outside.

In this vein, it becomes possible to draw on Laclau's three definitional components – chain of equivalences, people vs. power frontier, "people" as empty signifier – as the conceptual basis for analytically distinguishing between populism and other -isms. Populism is distinguishable from 1) *institutionalism* in terms of the preponderance of difference or equivalence and thus the degree of antagonism; from 2) the likes of *nationalism* and *nativism* in terms of the type of antagonistic division; and from 3) *reductionism* in terms of the degree of emptiness of the representative signifier. Each of these distinctions is taken up here in turn.

Institutionalism, as theorized by Laclau (2005a) and further developed by Griggs and Howarth (2008), entails a differential articulation of demands that constructs a predominantly non-antagonistic relation between the addressers and addressees of demands – thus broadly corresponding to a default state of institutionally mediated politics whereby demands are addressed to a locus of power without generating an antagonistic break *vis-à-vis* that power. Examples of this logic at work range from Václav Havel's famous inaugural line as president, "Your government, people, has returned to you!" to Angela Merkel's technocratic crisis-management discourse of "*Alternativlosigkeit*" or Viktor Orbán's (2009) notion that the coming Fidesz landslide would mark the passage from a polarized "field of dual power" to a "central field of power" occupied by a single party "formulating the national concerns [...] in their naturalness." Taken to an extreme, institutionalism can amount to a denial of the need for political conflict altogether, which Mouffe (2005) refers to as "post-politics"; yet the political as antagonism returns whenever a collective identity is equivalentially articulated against a common outside – such as when Merkel referred to the first Troika memorandum on Greece as the only way to prevent the Eurozone from becoming a "transfer union," or when Orbán redefines the terrain of "the nation" against new enemies such as the figure of Soros. The latter example also illustrates how institutionalism and populism (in combination here with nationalism) can dynamically coexist and indeed alternate within the same party's discourse.

Nationalism and nativism, like populism, are generally characterized by an equivalential articulation of demands generating an antagonistic frontier, but – following De Cleen's and Stavrakakis's (2017) "discursive architectonics" approach – entail a horizontal logic of antagonistic division in interpellating a national community in demarcation against other nations or non-national outsiders, whereas populism entails a vertical logic of constructing some form of underdog subject against a power bloc. These logics are, of course, combinable while being conceptually distinct; indeed, a defining feature of *right-wing* populism or the "populist radical right" is the construction of a popular subject against some kind of power bloc on the one hand (populism) and

against other nations, cultures, immigrants, or minority groups on the other (nationalism or nativism) (Brubaker 2017; Lewandowsky, Giebler, and Wagner 2016; Mudde 2007; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2013; Stavrakakis et al. 2017).[2] The name of the popular subject, in this case, becomes a nodal point equivalentially linking populist constructions with nationalist or nativist ones. The key question for the analysis is to what extent the vertical logic of underdog vs. power is articulated internally to, or autonomously from, the horizontal logic of national vs. foreign: if "the elite" is constructed primarily in terms of its allegedly "foreign" character or promotion of "foreign interests," the underdog vs. power relation is arguably inscribed within the national vs. foreign logic as part of a primarily nationalist discourse. A primarily populist construction only emerges once "the elite" is accused of abusing its power or enriching itself with state funds, for instance – pointing to a vertical logic of underdog vs. power in its own right – beyond being merely "foreign"-like or anti-"national." As numerous examples throughout the empirical chapters will show, it is thus possible to draw analytical distinctions between the likes of nationalist populism and populist nationalism based on the relative preponderance of either logic.

In a similar vein, right-wing populist discourses tend to be marked by an internal tension between a populist logic, whereby the name of the popular subject becomes a catch-all (empty) signifier sustained by the negative frontier between an opposing power bloc and an otherwise open-ended chain of equivalences (see also Laclau 2007, 56–57), and a reductionist logic that reduces the identity of "the people" onto an essentialized differential positivity (e.g. Björn Höcke's "64 million native-born Germans") and thus brings about an *a priori* closure of the equivalential chain (Kim 2017). Whereas populism relies, by definition, on the preponderance of a logic of equivalence, reductionism undercuts the equivalential construction of the popular identity by inscribing the latter in an essentialized, *a priori* privileged difference, often expressed in ethnic, nativist, regional, religious, or even class terms (see also Laclau's and Mouffe's (2001) critique of "class reductionism"). Reductionism, understood in this formal sense, is not limited to the far right, but can also be seen in exemplary fashion in the class reductionism of unreconstructed communist parties such as the Communist Party of Greece (Stavrakakis et al. 2017). It is also worth noting that nationalism is not always reductionist and vice versa: the question is the degree of openness or closure in the equivalential chain tied to the collective subject. This difference in degree can be seen, for instance, in PiS's relatively open understanding of "Nation" as "all those who, either by birth or by choice, have taken on 'that great and difficult inheritance whose name is Poland'" (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość 2001, 3), in contrast to Höcke's reductionist closure of "the people" onto the "64 million native-born Germans" based on the essentialized differential criterion of "native-born"-ness.

Apart from these distinctions, it is also possible to deploy the tools of post-foundational discourse theory to identify numerous other discursive

types in terms of the nodal points that organize them and the signifying chains attached to them, such as: liberalism ("freedom" linking signifiers such as "market economy," "civil liberties," "individual freedoms," …); socialism ("solidarity" or "social justice"); Green politics ("environment" or "sustainability"); conservatism ("traditional values" or some variation on the classic triad "work, family, homeland"). Many of these -isms, while remaining conceptually distinct, are easily combinable with each other as well as with populism: apart from the aforementioned coupling of populism and nationalism or nativism in the form of right-wing populism, left-wing populism often entails a joint articulation of populism and socialism (Katsambekis 2016, 2019; Kim 2021; March 2011; Stavrakakis et al. 2016), while the empirical chapters that follow will also feature cases of conservative populism and liberal populism, in which the people vs. power frontier is supplemented by nodal points such as "civil society" or "freedom." It is worth noting that most of these -isms can alternate between predominantly differential and equivalential modes of articulation: liberal discourses tend to be differential when they emphasize rational consensus or deliberation (Mouffe 2000), but equivalential when they articulate opposition to threats to liberal order (e.g. "militant democracy"); nationalist discourses are equivalential insofar as they construct "the nation" against foreign Others, but they can also be predominantly differential whenever "the nation" is called upon as existing in harmony with its government (e.g. Fidesz's "System of National Cooperation"). Most discursive types, in other words, have both antagonistic (i.e. equivalential) and non-antagonistic (i.e. differential) sides to them, or what Canovan (1999) refers to in a similar vein as "redemptive" and "pragmatic" faces. Populism, in contrast, entails by definition a predominantly equivalential (and hence antagonistic) mode of articulation: while practically any political force can make some kind of legitimizing reference to "the people," this articulation is a populist one only to the extent that it is directed against some kind of power bloc, enacting a people vs. power division that, with Lefort, is also the founding logic of democracy. Populism thus occupies a special conceptual status as a political logic in which the antagonistic moment of the political is constitutively present (pointing once again to Laclau's "royal road" metaphor).

Another set of discursive types that take on heightened relevance in relation to populism are "anti"-isms such as anti-liberalism, anti-communism, or indeed anti-populism. The defining feature of anti-communism, as can be seen in examples ranging from McCarthyism to Berlusconi, is the use of "communism" as a pejorative and flexible label – following a logic of equivalence – independently of self-identification and terminological accuracy from the standpoint of an analytical concept of "communism." In a similar vein, anti-liberalism entails the use of "liberalism" as a pejorative term, independently of whether the label is conceptually warranted or accepted by those accused of being "liberal" – whereas *illiberalism* can be understood as opposition to liberalism in terms of the latter's conceptually identifiable contents (e.g. the

dismantling of institutional checks on executive power, opposition to minority rights).[3] The two can, of course, overlap – a prime example being Viktor Orbán, who not only professes opposition to "liberalism," but also engages in (discursive) practices that can be conceptualized as illiberal. Finally, anti-populism, analogously to anti-liberalism or anti-communism, is characterized by the equivalential construction of "populism" as a dangerous Other. While the importance of anti-populism has been stressed in recent literature (Marchart 2017; Stavrakakis 2014; Stavrakakis et al. 2018), the analysis here does not examine anti-populism in detail and focuses on the different discursive permutations involving populism as a political logic.

A final related dimension of "methodological holism" requires further elaboration. Given that the overarching theoretical framework is that of discourse *and hegemony* theory, a post-foundational discourse analysis of populism must likewise account for the ways in which populist discourses are embedded not only in struggles for hegemony over the construction of categories such as "the people," but also in longer-term hegemonic structurations of social order. One of the basic premises of post-foundational discourse theory is that discourse does not play out in a vacuum, but rather in the context of structured constellations of meaning that were instituted politically through the drawing of antagonistic frontiers, then partly "sedimented" (i.e. naturalized and de-politicized) over time (see also Laclau 1990). Mouffe's (2005, 2018) notion of "post-politics," for example, provides one account of how the general phenomenon of contemporary populism emerges from a context of "neo-liberal hegemony" in Western Europe – a hegemonic formation that was instituted politically by discourses that articulated notions of "freedom" and "entrepreneurship" in antagonistic demarcation against the likes of "high taxes," "inefficiency," and "trade unions," then reproduced itself over decades via sedimented practices of interpellating individuals as consumers and elevating "the confidence of the markets" to the status of *raison d'état* (see also Marchart 2017; Stavrakakis 2007, 2014). Similarly, a post-foundational discourse analysis of specific populist discourses, by first establishing the latter's hegemonically structured contexts of emergence, can identify specific ways in which populist discourses selectively contest certain aspects of these constellations while reproducing others. For example, the neo-liberal populism of Emmanuel Macron in the 2017 French presidential campaign declared opposition to the "system" of established parties in the name of "the people" (populism) while linking this to the central demand for labor-market flexibilization (neo-liberalism) that the "system" had pledged but supposedly failed to deliver, thus extending a long-standing promise of established technocratic crisis-management discourses in France and the Eurozone (Kim 2021). This critical orientation toward "unmasking" (Marttila and Gengnagel 2015) hegemonic constellations thus goes hand in hand with the interpretive work of unpacking the contents of populist discourses, such as their joint articulation with the likes of neo-liberalism.

In a related vein, Glynos and Howarth (2007, 137–52) propose distinguishing between social, political, and fantasmatic logics in the application of post-foundational discourse theory. Social logics refer to ensembles of sedimented practices within already instituted hegemonic constellations, whereas political logics encompass the struggles over the institution of such constellations and fantasmatic logics constitute the dimension (corresponding to the Lacanian register of the Imaginary) that tends to conceal the contingent and politically instituted character of these constellations. As noted by Glynos and Howarth (2007, 185), a social logic corresponds to the logic of a Foucauldian "discursive formation" and, by extension, Laclau's and Mouffe's (2001, 142–43) Foucault-inspired concept of "hegemonic formation" as an "articulated totality of differences" characterized by "regularity in dispersion." A hegemonic (or discursive) formation can be understood as a relatively stabilized ensemble of multiple discourses that manages to reproduce itself over an extended period of time while reining in the threat of antagonistic division. One example of this logic at work can be seen in Wullweber's (2017) analysis of the "Keynesian welfare state" as a discursive formation reproducing itself across multiple decades via an ensemble of sedimented practices such as macroeconomic demand management, progressive taxation, and universal old-age insurance, held together by a broad consensus of political forces reproducing these elements in their own discourses. An example of a political logic, on the other hand, would be New Deal-era discourses of "soaking the rich" that provided the antagonistic moment(s) of institution for this formation, or indeed the Thatcherite discourse of "the nanny state" that directly challenged it – the political *qua* antagonism thus making its appearance as the (re-)instituting moment of the social. A fantasmatic logic, finally, would be something like the Fordist imaginary of an ever-expanding middle class sustained by continuous economic growth, industrial peace, and consumerist *jouissance* – an imaginary understood in the sense of "a horizon […] which structures a field of intelligibility" (Laclau 1990, 64).[4] Populism, understood as an equivalential construction of a popular subject in antagonistic demarcation against a power bloc, clearly fits the mold of a political logic (or indeed *the* political logic *par excellence*, following Laclau's "royal road" metaphor). A post-foundational discourse analysis of populism, however, must also account for how populist discourses are embedded in social and fantasmatic logics. Glynos and Howarth (2007) refer to this integrated inquiry into social, political, and fantasmatic logics as "critical explanation."

Research questions and case selection

This book undertakes an integrated approach to examining, from a post-foundational discursive perspective, how the popular subject is constructed in populist discourses in the party systems of the four Visegrád countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia) in the first 30 years since the

end of state socialism. As the preceding discussion suggests, this ostensibly simple research question entails multiple interrelated dimensions of inquiry: not only the interpretive work of unpacking the discursive infrastructure of signifying relations behind the various constructions of the "people" – which in turn allows for analytical distinctions between the empirical (co-)occurrence of populism and other -isms – but also the critical dimension of uncovering how populist discourses are embedded in hegemonic formations and imaginaries, corresponding to the interplay of social, political, and fantasmatic logics. A useful way of capturing these interrelated dimensions is with Bernstein's (1976, 235; emphasis in original) notion of integrated social-science research straddling "*empirical*, *interpretative*, and *critical*" inquiry, which constitutes the starting point for Glynos' and Howarth's discussion of critical explanation. To put it again in these terms, the study of populism as a political logic requires not only the *empirical* identification of specific populist discourses on the basis of *interpretive* work with signifying practices, but also a *critical* contextualization that sheds light on their interplay with the social logics of hegemonic formations and the fantasmatic logics of imaginaries.

A systematic application of a post-foundational discursive approach to populism, in other words, must entail all three dimensions, yielding the following (more or less generalizable) set of research questions:

- *Empirical*: Which discourses in these countries can be classified as populist, and in which time frames? How does populism, understood dynamically as a political logic, come and go at different junctures?
- *Interpretive*: How is the popular subject constructed in these populist discourses? How is populism articulated in discursive combinations with other political logics?
- *Critical*: In what ways are these constructions of popular subjects embedded in hegemonic formations and imaginaries as well as competing political claims to institute social order?

In short, the three lines of inquiry can be summarized as follows: *Which* discourses are primarily populist (and *when*)? *How* are they populist? *In what contexts* of hegemonic structuration and struggle are they populist? These three dimensions are closely linked: empirically classifying a discourse as populist requires the interpretive work of examining how collective subjects are constructed, while the critical operation of uncovering the embeddedness of populist discourses in hegemonic processes constitutes both a starting point for and a product of the interpretive analysis. All three dimensions of inquiry are grounded in a conception of populism as a dynamic set of discursive practices as opposed to a stable identity that can be assumed for certain parties over time. As a first step in the research process, therefore, the discourses of all electorally relevant parties contesting national parliamentary elections in the V4 countries since 1989/90 underwent initial screening

(the interpretive dimension) in order to both define a narrower set of populist discourses (the empirical dimension) and establish an overall picture of established structurations of the discursive terrain of party competition (the critical dimension); what is presented in the chapters that follow is the in-depth analysis of the discourses identified as primarily populist, situated within the discursive context delineated at the beginning of each chapter.

The V4 countries provide particularly fruitful contexts for examining these questions, allowing for a productive interplay of discourse theory and empirical research with a regional focus. All four countries are characterized by imaginaries of post-1989 transition structuring the discursive terrain – with 1989/90 serving as an imagined break, or an instituting moment of the political *par excellence* – that, in turn, condense into nodal points such as "democracy," "freedom," "market economy," "Europe," or "nation" that are suddenly opened up to competing attempts at re-signification, albeit within the bounds of hegemonic partial fixations of the meaning of 1989/90. The hegemonic effects of these partial fixations can be seen in how certain meanings crosscut competing party discourses synchronously and/or over time and are thus reproduced across the discursive terrain of party competition. One example is the Czech Civic Forum's famous slogan "Back to Europe" in the 1990 elections and its subsequent incorporation into syntagmas such as the Civic Democrats' notion of a return to "basic values of European civilization" and the Social Democrats' advocacy of the "European social model." In the Czech context, the "post-November" imaginary of a break instituted by the events of November 1989 condenses into a "post-November" hegemonic formation: a hegemonically structured terrain on which competing party discourses articulate largely differential and non-antagonistic variations on the founding promises of "post-November" order. As the following chapters will show, the Czech Republic represents a unique case of post-1989 hegemonic stabilization (at least until the mid-2000s) in this respect, with the other three party systems characterized by deeply divided imaginaries of what it means to be a society after 1989/90. In this context, each chapter presents an integrated diachronic account of how successive populist discourses situate themselves in relation to established post-1989 imaginaries – such as by dislocating the founding promise of '89, "Your government, people, has returned to you!" in appealing to the "people" against the "politicians" that have supposedly failed to represent them, or by radicalizing the unredeemed promise of the unity of "15 million Hungarians" into the ethno-nationalist appeal to a community of "Hungarianhood" against a "foreign"-like "elite."

In this vein, the rationale for the case selection in this book roughly corresponds to the logic of the "diverse-case method," which is in turn particularly conducive to "typological theorizing" (Gerring 2007, 97–98). While the V4 countries exhibit very similar temporalities in the transformative events of 1989/90 that brought about the fall of state socialism – allowing, in turn, for a common time frame for the four-country analysis – they also offer something

like "maximum variance along relevant dimensions" (Gerring 2007, 97): the key background dimension here being the formation of post-1989 imaginaries and their crystallization into a discursive terrain of party competition. While the "post-November" imaginary in the Czech Republic condenses into a "post-November" hegemonic formation capable of defusing antagonisms into differences, the post-1989 imaginaries in the other countries are deeply divided, leading to a clustering of party discourses around opposing conceptions of the meaning of post-1989 transition – from "Hungarianhood" vs. "Hungary" to post-"Solidarity" vs. anti-"liberalism" or pro- vs. anti-Mečiar. These differences can, in turn, be traced back to contrasting historical contexts – such as the unresolved national question in post-Trianon Hungary, the hegemonization of the struggle against one-party rule by the Solidarity trade union in Poland, or the hegemonization of the project of national independence by Vladimír Mečiar in Slovakia – which are discussed in the historical background section at the beginning of each empirical chapter. To be clear, a post-foundational discourse analysis cannot offer causal explanations for *why* a given discourse exhibits one particular structure as opposed to another or is (electorally) more successful than others at a certain juncture, but it can provide the critical contextualization of tracing *how* that discourse emerges from a context of prior instituting moments, hegemonic stabilizations and partial fixations as well as dislocations (see also Nonhoff 2006, 16–17). The analysis of populist discourses, in turn, can contribute to typology-building through this combination of interpretive analysis and critical contextualization that allows for the identification of different empirical types of populism in different discursive combinations as well as hegemonic or counter-hegemonic guises. The concluding chapter brings the results together in these terms and identifies patterns in the emergence of populism across the four countries.

Source material and selection

When it comes to the selection of source material for the discourse analysis, this book takes its bearings from two theoretical premises grounded in the "methodological holism" of post-foundational discourse analysis: 1) an expansive theoretical understanding of discourse as encompassing all forms of signifying practice, linguistic and non-linguistic (Laclau and Mouffe 2001); and 2) the self-reflexive recognition of the contingent nature of the analyst's own claims as second-order constructions (or "constructions of constructions" following Bourdieu; see also Marttila 2015, 110–11). The combination of these two premises means that a healthy dose of analyst's discretion is needed in order to decide which specific forms of discursive practice, from the potentially endless list of possibilities, constitute relevant source material for the analysis and in which contexts. Generally speaking, the discourse analysis here seeks to triangulate between numerous different types of sources, from party programs, leaders' speeches, and published

interviews to electoral campaign slogans, broadcasts, and billboards, in order to form a holistic picture of the populist discourse in question. In doing so, the analysis seeks to take into account differences in the forms of performativity of each discourse. In the Czech case, for instance, the Rally for the Republic – Republican Party of Czechoslovakia (SPR-RSČ) featured a discursive repertoire of frequent protest actions, making party leader Miroslav Sládek's speeches at protest rallies an important form of discursive practice, whereas more recent (post-2010) populist discourses feature little in the way of street protest and tend to rely on leaders' presence in the media in particular. Fidesz in Hungary, to take another example, has refrained entirely from issuing election programs beginning with its landslide election victory of 2010, while Viktor Orbán's periodic speeches – such as on national holidays or at the annual Tusványos festival of the Hungarian minority in Romania – have turned into high-profile settings for announcing the programmatic orientations of the ruling party. These differences in performativity can be established with the help of both primary and secondary sources but rest in the last instance on the case knowledge and judgment of the analyst. Indeed, a key aspect of the methodological holism of post-foundational discourse analysis in this vein is that the theoretical premise of the necessarily contingent nature of discursively mediated social reality also extends onto a recognition of the contingency of the analyst's own claims (or, in other terms, the necessity of contingent moments of decision on an ultimately undecidable terrain). This, of course, should not be understood as an invitation to an "anything goes" approach, but rather as a reminder of the need to make explicit the grounds for each decision taken. As such, the selection of source material is accordingly given an explicit justification as well as a summary in tabular form at the end of each chapter.

For these reasons, one limitation that requires explicit acknowledgment here is that the analysis cannot fall back on a systematized corpus of source material – the price for doing justice to both an expansive theoretical understanding of discourse and the differences in the performativity of specific discourses. This is an important contrast to contributions in the literature that are based on content analysis of populism in election manifestos (Rooduijn, de Lange, and van der Brug 2014), election campaign broadcasts (Jagers and Walgrave 2007), or executive speeches (Hawkins 2009). All of these approaches allow for some form of interpretive analysis by identifying the occurrence of populism in terms of the meanings assigned to certain terms (and the frequency with which they occur), but they all rely on a narrowly defined genre of source material in order to maximize cross-case systematicity in the selection at the expense of circumscribing the range of different sources analyzed. A post-foundational discourse analysis of populism, in a sense, faces the reverse problem of expansive coverage and case-specific versatility in the source material at the cost of less systematicity in the selection. Here, again, the ultimate criterion for selection lies with the judgment of the analyst.

In the following, the analysis of each populist discourse is structured around the identification of signifying relations (difference, equivalence, contrariety) on the basis of source material whose performative function is embedded in the history of each party in question (e.g. founding declaration, election programs). The analysis also draws on visualizations along the lines of Figure 2.1, mapping out the antagonistic frontier construction that emerges from the construction of opposing chains of equivalences, which are also summarized in tabular form at the end of each chapter. It is worth emphasizing that each visualization corresponds solely to the vantage point of the populist discourse in question and is meant to be a selective snapshot of the latter for illustration purposes, with no claim to exhaustiveness (also *vis-à-vis* the more extensive in-text account). All sources were examined in the original languages and all translations of quotes into English are the author's own except where otherwise noted.

Notes

1 It is worth emphasizing that Laclau's understanding of antagonism is a formal one and does not imply a Schmittian war of annihilation as its horizon; there is a wide range of specific forms that antagonism can take, from agonistic pluralism (following Mouffe) to civil war.

2 Compared to the likes of Mudde (2007), this book deploys a more restrictive understanding of nativism as opposition to (actual or would-be) immigration, which is distinguishable from but can certainly overlap with nationalism as the interpellation of a "nation" against foreign Others (e.g. foreign capital, supranational organizations, other nations, or indeed immigrants). Understood thus, nativism does not even have to be based on a national identity; it can be regionalist, "civilizationist" (following Brubaker 2017), etc.

3 For an analytical conceptualization of illiberalism and "illiberal democracy" as a discursive practice that plays off democratic norms (popular sovereignty) against liberal ones (rule of law, minority rights), see Kim (2020).

4 Discourses, in other words, operate within the structuring horizon of an imaginary. Stavrakakis (2010) notes that imaginaries have a "metapolitical" status, with his examples being the utopian, the democratic, and the post-democratic imaginaries. As the example of the Fordist imaginary indicates, fantasmatic logics entail the affective dimension of enjoyment or *jouissance* following Lacanian psychoanalysis (which would then have to be combined with discourse analysis); this, however, is beyond the scope of this book.

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3 Populism in the Czech Republic

Introduction

Populism in the Czech party system since 1989 emerges in two distinct phases: 1) the anti-communist nationalist populism of the Rally for the Republic – Republican Party of Czechoslovakia (SPR-RSČ), which took aim at the perceived continuity of Communist Party rule in the period immediately following the Velvet Revolution and interpellated the "simple people" or the "majority" against a power bloc encompassing the "communists and their cooperators" who are allegedly alternating among themselves in power without bringing about real change; and 2) the concentrated emergence of populist discourses since 2010, all of which pit the "people" (*lidé*) or "citizens" against a monolithic power bloc of established "politicians" and "parties" of both "left" and "right." This latter phase includes the centrist populism of Public Affairs (VV) in the 2010 elections; ANO's centrist entrepreneur populism (2011–13) and centrist populism of "hard work" in power (2014–present); the neo-liberal nativist populism of Dawn of Direct Democracy in the 2013 elections and the neo-conservative nativist populism of Dawn's offshoot Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD) in the 2017 elections; and the liberal populism of the Czech Pirate Party in the 2013 and 2017 elections. The period since 2010 is characterized not only by the multiplication and recurrence of populist discourses, but also by the emergence of competing populisms that interpellate each other as part of the very power bloc that the other claims to oppose (in the case of ANO and SPD) as well as a counter-populism (in the case of the Pirates) that seeks to dislocate the dominant populist discourse of ANO by articulating an equivalence between the latter and the power bloc constructed by ANO's own discourse. The considerable time gap between the Republicans' populism in the early 1990s and the post-2010 populisms corresponds to the rise and fall of the *"post-November" hegemonic formation*, which entailed the differential stabilization of party competition into competing but largely non-antagonistic projects of "left" and "right" within a common horizon inaugurated by the imagined break of November 1989. The protracted breakdowns in this hegemonic stability starting in 2006 gave rise to a series of dislocations from

which subsequent populist challenges would emerge – most notably the apparent inability of "politicians" and "parties" in their "left" and "right" variations to reproduce institutional stability as well as their allegedly shared complicity in problems of corruption and mismanagement of the state. The multiplication of competing and counter-populisms also point to the lack of a clear hegemonic re-stabilization since 2010 and the relative openness of the struggle over the construction of popular signifiers during this period.

This chapter first presents a brief historical background of populism in the Czech lands before 1989 with targeted snapshots of how the "people" emerged as a signifier in mass politics, from the "people's camps" of the 1860s and 70s to the democratic populism of T. G. Masaryk as a founding moment of an independent Czechoslovak state and the authoritarian populism of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ) as a founding moment of one-party rule with the February 1948 coup. From here, the analysis works its way to the emergence of the "post-November" hegemonic formation by examining how the break with the "pre-November" period was articulated in the discourse of Václav Havel and the Civic Forum (OF) as well as how subsequent party discourses took up these discursive elements in the context of post-1989 party competition. Embedded into this account, in turn, is a detailed analysis of the populist discourses, beginning with the SPR-RSČ in the early 1990s and then the various iterations of populism since 2010.

Historical background: the saga of "the people" from the "people's camps" to Masaryk to Gottwald

Discourses of the popular have a long history in the Czech lands, but only in certain contexts can they be said to have been specifically populist. "The people" came to the fore as a category of mass politics not least in connection with protest mobilizations against Habsburg rule in the mid- to late 19th century. The "camp movement" (*táborové hnutí*) or "people's camps" (*tábory lidu*) typically consisted of unauthorized open-air protest assemblies of thousands of participants, mostly workers from the cities and towns, demanding greater autonomy rights for the Czech lands in the wake of the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867. While the camps brought to the fore the notion of a "people" (*lid*) as collective subject, this was tied above all to the emergence of a national imaginary in the context of the Czech National Revival, as seen in the centrality of demands for the promotion and propagation of a specifically "national" culture. Kubíček (2014, 55–61) gives the example of one of the larger camps that took place in 1869 near Hořice (present-day Hradec Králové Region), which adopted a resolution calling for a series of measures such as the formation of

> associations in which the youth would read different Czech works [...]. The development of the neglected national school system. [...] A call for

> the emergence of Czech specialist schools. […] In performing armed service, Czechs must always realize that they are defending the Czech nation and homeland. […] A call for thrift and support for products from national producers. (cited in Kubíček 2014, 60–61)

As this snapshot of a certainly heterogeneous (and otherwise not particularly well-documented) protest discourse suggests, the demands were articulated in terms of the differential expansion of "national" syntagmas and especially the notion of a culturally grounded "Czech nation." Early forms of party competition likewise played out within this horizon of the "national question," with the National Party first emerging in the context of the 1848 Revolutions and subsequently fragmenting into the "Old Czech" and "Young Czech" parties as a result of differences on tactical questions of passive resistance (Garver 1978). It was one of the Young Czechs, the sociologist Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, who would subsequently articulate the national question in populist and humanist terms with his understanding of democracy as "rule by the people" (*lidovláda*) and as a movement toward the emancipation of all humanity (*lidstvo*) against what he referred to as "theocracy" or "theocratic autocracy." Skilling (1994, 20) argues that Masaryk, who left the Young Czechs in 1893 and founded the Czech People's Party in 1900 (which subsequently became the Czech Progressive Party), "[b]y the end of the century […] began to use the terms democratic and populist more or less synonymously." It is worth noting that Masaryk pitted this concept of democracy as popular rule against both the bourgeois liberal understanding of limited democracy and "theocratic autocracy" (Skilling 1994, 20); in doing so, he also recast the national question in the populist terms of the underprivileged many vs. the privileged few and thus explicitly displaced both the liberal notion "that the politically active classes were the nation" and the Marxist conception of "the stark confrontation of but two classes" (Skilling 1994, 20, 32). In his 1908 tract *The Czech Question*, Masaryk (1908, 230–31) argued that

> in our country the idea of nationality has, in the course of the development of the [Czech national] revival, changed and in such a way that the nation has become understood more and more democratically and, specifically, as the people [*lid*] […] therefore in our country today, like elsewhere, we also understand the state not only as democratic, but also as popular [*lidově*]. As opposed to the older […] liberalism, we formulate today our more correct modern mindset in the statement: we must socialize politics and the state. […] [W]e mean by socialization not only the extension of political rights onto the widest strata (this is already happening), but most importantly that the state and political work ought to take into account the needs of all classes and, of course, of the largest class, the people.

Masaryk's intervention in the constitution of the national imaginary thus emphasized the humanist and populist articulation of the cause of national independence in terms of "humanity" and rule by "the people" against the system of "theocratic autocracy," and not only a nationalist opposition between the Czech nation and hostile or oppressor nations. Indeed, Masaryk, who had been instrumental in organizing the Czechoslovak Legion to fight against Austro-Hungarian forces during World War I and winning Allied recognition for the independence cause, hailed the result of the war as a victory for all of "humanity" over "autocracy" rather than for certain nations over others – as expressed in the declaration of an independent Czechoslovak Republic in October 1918 as head of the provisional government:

> We solemnly declare that from here onwards we constitute a free and independent people and nation. We take on and join ourselves to the ideals of modern democracy, they have been ideals of our nation for centuries. [...] Democracy has defeated theocratic autocracy, militarism is destroyed, democracy is victorious. (Masaryk, Štefánik, and Beneš 1918)

In this founding moment of an independent Czechoslovak state, the populist and humanist strain in Masaryk's discourse thus came to the fore in inaugurating "democracy" as rule of the "people" and a movement of all humanity toward emancipation from an oppressive system of "theocratic autocracy."

With the spread of mass political parties throughout the Czech lands in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, popular signifiers were also taken up by competing political forces, often in various forms of class or religious reductionism – from the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Workers' Party (ČSDSD), which referred to "the people" in conjunction with the central signifier "worker," to the Czechoslovak People's Party (ČSL), which deployed "the people" as an equivalential category displacing class frontiers while coupling it with a "Christian" essence. The ČSL's discursive strategy is exemplified in the following 1923 statement by the party's executive committee on its agenda within the framework of a coalition government:

> The People's Party is the party of all, and it therefore sees to it within the governing majority that there is no class rule for the benefit of one group, but on the contrary, it will always work so that there is equally just rule for all groups and classes of society. All are citizens of this state, all have a right to a living. (cited in Křesťanská a demokratická unie – Československá strana lidová, n.d.)

This equivalential construction of "all" people to incorporate different "groups and classes" and displace the divisions between them was coupled,

in turn, with a reduction of this collective identity onto a specifically "Christian" essence, as expressed in the 1929 programmatic document "The ČSL and the state":

> The Czechoslovak People's Party expects that only with the penetration of Christian practice and Christian morality will all the detrimental social, political, economic, national, and international discrepancies be suppressed, and it therefore wants all life to be penetrated by these opinions and the will of all individuals to be guided by these moral laws. (cited in Křesťanská a demokratická unie – Československá strana lidová, n.d.)

Popular signifiers were thus incorporated into various forms of class or religious reductionism in which the equivalential construction of "the people" was circumscribed by the reduction of the latter onto an essential differential core. The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ), during the course of its "Bolshevization" under Klement Gottwald's leadership in the late 1920s and early 30s (Skilling 1961), exhibited a tension between a class reductionism of "the working class" on the one hand and the Comintern-mandated strategy of calling for the formation of a Communist-led anti-fascist "Popular Front" on the other, which entailed an equivalential loosening of class reductionism in "embracing the working peasantry, the small traders and artisans and working intellectuals" in order to "really fight against the fascists," as Gottwald put it in his speech to the 1935 Comintern congress (cited in Skilling 1961, 651; translation in original). The formation of a broad "National Front" opposed to the Nazi occupation followed in 1943, notably incorporating the KSČ, ČSDSD, ČSL, and the civic nationalist ČSNS; it was this alliance that formed a coalition government with Gottwald as prime minister following the multi-party elections of 1946, in which the KSČ emerged as the largest party with 38% of the vote – a historic electoral success for a European communist party, but not enough for a parliamentary majority. With the February 1948 coup, however, the KSČ took solitary control when President Edvard Beneš, under KSČ pressure, accepted the resignations of the non-KSČ ministers that had been tendered in protest against KSČ-led purges of the police force and agreed to the formation of an exclusively Communist government. In this founding moment of one-party dictatorship, Gottwald (1948) exalted "the unity of the people, the unity of the working class, the unity of the workers, farmers, traders, and intelligentsia" at a party rally in Prague in which he announced Beneš's acceptance of a KSČ-only government; "the wish, will, and voice of the people," Gottwald declared, had prevailed over "the determined strike against our popular-democratic system." If Masaryk's democratic populism had been a founding moment of the interwar republic, authoritarian populism thus emerged as a founding moment of one-party rule, with an antagonistic frontier between a united "people" represented by the Communist Party and an anti-popular bloc

within the government coming to the fore in justifying the takeover of all organs of state by a single party.

Under the KSČ dictatorship, which declared itself to be a "popular democracy" in the May 1948 constitution, the constituent "people" was declared to be in fundamental harmony with Communist power – with the notable exception of campaigns against "anti-socialist" or "anti-state" threats to this harmony, such as the 1952 show trials against "the anti-state conspiratorial center" supposedly led by the party's own general secretary, Rudolf Slánský. An authoritarian institutionalism that proclaimed the oneness of "the people" and its government thus alternated with moments of authoritarian populism, which returned in a deeply conspiracist guise: the logic of the purges consisted not only in identifying "anti-state" elements, but also in tracing them back to a deeper power bloc supposedly lurking in the background, such as the allegation of a "Zionist-imperialist" conspiracy behind Slánský. In an ironic twist, a combination of populism and conspiracy theory would also be found in the anti-communist populism of the Republicans in the immediate post-1989 period (see next section).

In this context, the most prominent attempts to reform or resist KSČ rule were arguably centered on an institutionalist reclamation of individual rights and freedoms rather than a populist reclamation of "the people" against the regime. Alexander Dubček's reform agenda "socialism with a human face," for instance, entailed a differential expansion of signifiers such as "democracy" and "freedom" into syntagmas such as "democratization of the economy" and "the freedom of different views, guaranteed by the Constitution" (Komunistická strana Československa 1968). On the one hand, the subversive potential of these signifiers was circumscribed by the fact that they did not equivalentially break with the established terrain of ruling-party discourse; on the other hand, it was precisely this differential, non-antagonistic logic that had subversive implications in denying the continued existence of class antagonisms and extending the construction of signifiers such as "freedom" onto previously unheard-of syntagmatic combinations such as the freedom of enterprises to operate under market conditions.[1] The Dubček-led KSČ's "Action Program" of April 1968 was, in effect, a justification of political and economic reforms within the logic of one-party rule; while affirming the commanding role of the party as well as the centrality of the working class in the project of constructing a socialist society, the document posited a new situation in which

> antagonistic classes no longer exist […] the methods of direction and organization of the national economy up to now are outdated and urgently require changes […] a broad space for societal initiative, open exchange of opinions, and democratization of the entire societal and political system becomes literally the condition for the dynamics of socialist society – the condition for us to hold our own in competition with the world and to honorably fulfill our obligations toward the international labor movement. (Komunistická strana Československa 1968)

In this vein, the project of "socialism with a human face" was characterized by a liberalizing institutionalist discourse that, in the name of advancing the socialist cause, called for the expansion of freedoms and sought to defuse the antagonistic divisions instituted by the earlier regime discourse – even acknowledging that "[t]he survival of methods from the period of class struggle unleashed an artificial tension among the social groups, nations and nationalities, different generations, communists and non-party people in our society" (Komunistická strana Československa 1968).

In a similar vein, prominent strands of dissident discourse such as the Charta 77 manifesto and Václav Havel's influential 1978 essay "The Power of the Powerless" were characterized not by an anti-regime populism seeking to reclaim "the people" against the system of one-party rule, but rather by a liberalizing institutionalism that either targeted the regime's unfulfilled human rights promises (in the case of Charta 77) or located the subversive power of the oppressed not in their collectivity as a popular subject, but in their individual capacity to "live in truth" (in the case of Havel). The Charta 77 manifesto of January 1977 bemoaned "the extent to which basic civil rights, in our society, unfortunately count only on paper" in spite of constitutional provisions and the government's signing of the 1976 Helsinki Accords, citing violations of specific rights such as "freedom of public speech" and "freedom of religious confession" (Charta 77 1977). The document is indicative of an institutionalist strategy of differentially articulating demands on the terrain of the regime's own promises while refraining from an antagonistic break with the formal regime framework altogether – similarly to the strategy of the Helsinki Groups in the Soviet republics of campaigning against regime non-compliance with the Helsinki Accords. Havel's "Power of the Powerless," on the other hand, articulated a humanist notion of individuals' capacity to step outside an ideological system built on "living in a lie" and to start "living in truth" as the starting point for overcoming "powerlessness" (Havel 1978). As opposed to the power of a collective subject, therefore, Havel appealed above all to the power of the individual – a construction whose hegemonic effects would become evident in the post-1989 period.

"Your government, people, has returned to you!" The "post-November" imaginary and the anti-communist nationalist populism of the Republicans

The events of November 1989 in Czechoslovakia, which came to be known as the "Velvet Revolution" within the Czech lands, constitute the founding moment of a "post-November" imaginary – an imagined break that inaugurates a temporal horizon within which subsequent reality becomes registered as part of a movement away from the "pre-November" period. Indeed, the signifiers "pre-November" (*předlistopadový*) and "post-November" (*polistopadový*) have long become staples in the everyday political and academic lexicons alike as

temporal markers that situate any given moment in relation to the imagined break of November '89. This imagined break, in turn, came in the form of a hegemonic partial fixation of meaning – of what it means to move away from the "pre-November" period – articulated by the humanist institutionalist discourse of Havel and the Civic Forum (OF) in particular. The violent suppression of a student demonstration in central Prague on November 17, 1989, had prompted large numbers of students throughout the country to organize themselves into strike committees and agitate for a general strike on November 28 in support of a series of demands, including an independent investigation of the "Prague massacre" as well as criminal proceedings against those responsible, an end to "the spread of false information about current events in Czechoslovakia," the release of "political prisoners," the legalization of banned opposition newspapers, and the "initiation of effective dialogue with all segments of society without exceptions" (Prohlášení studentů pražských VŠ 1990). These demands were characterized by a largely differential articulation that lacked the designation of a constitutive outside blocking their collective realization and, indeed, stopped short of calling for a change in political system or leadership. However, the emergence of oppositional citizens' initiatives such as the Civic Forum, founded on November 19 in Prague by a group of dissidents around Havel, saw a snowballing of the protest demands to include the immediate resignation of leading party figures in addition to the release of "all prisoners of conscience," as the OF's founding four-point declaration put it, and eventually also the formation of a majority non-KSČ government (see also Krapfl 2013, 15–17). The first of the OF's four demands placed the blame for recent events squarely with those who had presided over the country for the last two decades:

> That the members of the board of the Central Committee of the KSČ who were directly connected with the preparation of the intervention by five states of the Warsaw Pact in 1968 and who are responsible for the long-standing devastation of all spheres of social life in our country immediately resign. […] The destructive politics of these people, who have rejected all form of democratic dialogue with society for years, has inevitably led to the terrible events of the last days. (Provolání Občanského fóra o jeho ustavení a jeho požadavcích 1990)

The OF thus hegemonized the fledgling protest discourse by articulating this moment of equivalential break with the existing regime – pointing to a fundamental incommensurability between the fulfillment of the protest demands and continued one-party rule – and then performatively taking up the speaker position of addressing the protest demands directly in one-on-one negotiations with the KSČ government. Once these negotiations began on November 26, however, the OF shifted gears onto an institutionalist and distinctly non-antagonistic logic of mending over the antagonistic divide between the governing and the governed. Havel now declared that

"the dialogue of power with the public has begun. […] From this moment we shall *all* take part in the government of this land and *all* of us therefore bear responsibility for its fate" (cited in Krapfl 2013, 19; emphasis and translation in original), while the OF leadership called for an end to mass demonstrations and the conversion of strike committees into local OF branches following the general strike (Krapfl 2013, 19). When President Gustáv Husák finally agreed to resign on December 10 and suggested a direct popular vote to choose his successor, the OF insisted on a parliamentary vote to elect Havel as the consensus candidate, even citing the "tradition" of indirect presidential elections since the interwar First Republic (Krapfl 2013, 21). The OF thus sought to direct the protest movement onto institutionalized channels and defuse the antagonistic divide between "the public" and "power," apart from the moment of equivalential break entailed by the demand of an immediate change in executive leadership ahead of multi-party parliamentary elections to take place in 1990.

Havel's new year's address three days after his election as president in December 1989 – which amounted to an inaugural declaration of the "post-November" era – brought to the fore this deeply institutionalist notion of individuals taking back their government and, through the establishment of a new democratic order, putting an end to the antagonistic division that had momentarily erupted between the governing and the governed after four decades of dictatorship. On the one hand, Havel (1990) chided his fellow citizens for having sustained the "totalitarian machinery" by "accepting it as an unchangeable fact" and becoming "not only its victims, but […] at the same time its co-creators"; yet, he went on, the overthrow of this system "in a completely decent and peaceful manner" had shown that "the individual […] is always also capable of relating to something greater." Havel thus articulated the meaning of November '89 as the realization of his humanist notion of the individual taking back responsibility and starting to live in truth; it followed that the coming republic had to be one of, by, and for the individual person: "a humane republic that serves the individual [*člověk*] and can therefore hope that the individual will also serve it. A republic of universally educated people [*lidé*], because without them none of our problems can be solved – human, economic, ecological, social, and political" (Havel 1990). Havel (1990) then closed his speech by declaring: "Your government, people [*lid*], has returned to you!" This famous line is notable not only for the institutionalist claim *par excellence* that the government has finally come over to the side of "the people" with the end of one-party rule, but also because Havel plays on the slippage between "the people" as a singularity (*lid*), which was the standard interpellation in official Communist discourse, and "the people" as a plurality of individuals (*člověk* in the singular and *lidé* in the plural), corresponding to Havel's humanist institutionalist discourse centered on the "individual person." The closing reference to "*lid*" can thus be understood here in an ironic vein – suggesting that the founding promise of Communist rule could only come true with the end of Communist rule,

albeit in a rather different sense of "the people" than what Gottwald and his successors had articulated in February 1948 and thereafter. The founding promise of the "post-November" imaginary, in other words, was about instituting another kind of "people" – "the people" as an irreducible plurality of individuals who have assumed responsibility for their fate and re-established a government that properly represents them. It is this claim that "the people" have finally found adequate representation through the "post-November" order that would be dislocated in later populist discourses that likewise take up the "people" in the plural (*lidé*), but in antagonistic demarcation against those in power who, contrary to Havel's inaugural promise, have allegedly failed to represent them.

In the context of multi-party parliamentary elections to the Czech National Council in June 1990,[2] which the OF won with nearly 50% of the vote, the Civic Forum discourse foregrounded both Havel's humanist-institutionalist construction of "the people" as individuals taking back responsibility for their government and the central demand for a "return to Europe." The OF's election program presented a narrative of "our common home, Czechoslovakia" as a formerly successful European nation – "the only democratic country in central Europe" between the World Wars – that was abruptly and forcibly cut off from its European development to detrimental effect:

> After the war, we entered the sphere of interest of one of the victorious powers. […] We were forced to not participate in an extensive aid program for Europe and turn ourselves over to a country whose leading representative was, besides Hitler, the most significant mass murderer of the 20th century. […] At the same time, we lost sight of what happened in the rest of the world. […] We became a primitive closed-off society. (Občanské fórum 1990, 3–4)

Against this background, the OF declared that "Our basic goal is a return to Europe. By this goal, we mean the renewed inclusion of Czechoslovakia among the developed European countries that it once belonged to" (Občanské fórum 1990, 4). This "return to Europe" – featured prominently in the OF campaign slogan "Back to Europe" – took on the function of a nodal point linking an equivalential chain of characteristics of what it means to "belong to Europe," in common demarcation from the "totalitarian system" that the country is leaving behind:

> Belonging to Europe is not only belonging to states with a high productivity and standard of living, but also belonging to a community sharing the same cultural and political values. Basic European cultural values include diversity, not uniformity; the basic political value is democracy, not the totalitarian system. […] [W]e have to ground our return […] in what all developed countries have in common – political democracy and market economy […]. (Občanské fórum 1990, 4)

"Europe" functioned as an empty signifier in this discourse not only by equivalentially linking the three aspects of cultural pluralism, political democracy, and market economy, but also by crystallizing an entire imaginary of what it means to break with the old order and institute a new one. In formulating its vision of a "return to Europe," the Civic Forum took up Havel's notion of individuals taking back responsibility and called on its would-be voters to assume "responsibility" for the difficult path ahead:

> Citizens who will vote for the Civic Forum know that we do not offer them an easy road. […] We do not make promises, but rather a call to responsibility. We recall the words of John Kennedy: Do not ask what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country. (Občanské fórum 1990, 7)

Both the promise of a "return to Europe" and the central construction of "the individual" in terms of the defining characteristic "responsibility" – giving rise to syntagmas such as "individual responsibility" – would emerge as a recurring theme in subsequent "post-November" party discourses, as will be seen in later sections.

The anti-communist nationalist populism of the Rally for the Republic – Republican Party of Czechoslovakia (1990–92)

The discourse of the Rally for the Republic – Republican Party of Czechoslovakia (SPR-RSČ, or "Republicans" for short) can be analyzed in this context as an anti-communist populist challenge declaring opposition to the perceived lack of a true break with the old system after November 1989. The founding congress of the party took place in February 1990 in Prague; in his speech to the congress, founding chairman Miroslav Sládek defined the SPR-RSČ as a "truly radical right-wing party" that finds itself

> in a completely different situation than the already constituted parties mostly compromised by cooperation with the communist dictatorship. We are coming with a clean slate, unburdened by the past, and we want freedom, democracy, and market economy. We are the only safeguard against any attempts to return to dictatorship. […] We are aware that it is necessary in the present political situation, which is overloaded with parties of liberal-democratic-socialist orientation, to build a truly radical right-wing party that would be a guardian of democracy and that would reject all form of cooperation not only with the communists, but also with parties close to them. (Sdružení pro republiku – Republikánská strana Československa 1990, 2)

Sládek thus constructed the party's "radical right" identity in terms of the equivalential triad "freedom, democracy, and market economy" in common

contrariety to the threat of "dictatorship" represented by the established "liberal-democratic-socialist" forces supposedly compromised under KSČ rule – suggestive of the likes of the Social Democratic and People's Parties that were part of the National Front and the Civic Forum that negotiated with the KSČ. Sládek went on to specify his suspicions of the Civic Forum and the Public Against Violence, characterizing them as supra-party forces with authoritarian potential just as much as the KSČ-led National Front before them:

> If we are for democracy, we cannot, for reasons of principle, recognize any organ superior to political parties. Whether this was called the National Front in the past or Assembly, Civic Forum, or Public against Violence in the present. The OF and the VPN did much for the defeat of the dictatorship, but they could easily get to the position of dictators themselves. We have no guarantee that there are moral and capable people in the coordinating centers and on other levels of these organizations. It rather seems like puppets[3] are making the decisions here. (Sdružení pro republiku – Republikánská strana Československa 1990, 8)

This anti-communist discourse constructed an equivalence between the Communists and other established forces, including even professed opponents of the KŠC such as the OF, in terms of either their alleged history of working together or their alleged potential for bringing about a return to "dictatorship." The equivalential chain of demands for "freedom," "democracy," and "market economy" thus faced an opposing one of "communists" and "parties close to them," including the Civic Forum.

Within the equivalential chain "freedom" ≡ "democracy" ≡ "market economy," the key demand became that of a return to a fully market-driven developmental path as the precondition for solving all the other problems – thus taking up the imaginary of a "post-November" return to a pre-1948 path in economic terms. Taking stock of the "catastrophic" results of the "long-term disintegration of our economy brought about by bureaucratic and unqualified means by the ruling party," Sládek proposed that

> [t]he basic goal of economic policy has to be the thoroughgoing and fastest-possible implementation of a market economy leading to the renewal of economic prosperity [and] the fundamental and accelerated solving of the ecological situation. The only possible solution is to continue the path that we abandoned 40 or 50 years ago and on which Western European countries have long overtaken us. (Sdružení pro republiku – Republikánská strana Československa 1990, 3–4)

A neo-liberal discourse thus took shape that called for far-reaching privatizations and price liberalizations while maintaining that "[s]tate intervention in

the market mechanism has to be limited solely to the creation of conditions for the growth of economic prosperity, the solving of the ecological situation, and the improvement of social policy in accordance with global trends" (Sdružení pro republiku – Republikánská strana Československa 1990, 4). This discourse constructed the free activity of the working individual as the basic building block of society:

> We recognize that the driving force for the strivings of every person [*člověk*] is the longing for self-realization and we are aware that every person longs for self-realization and not just those whose parents were leading proponents of the KSČ or the like. After all, simple people [*prostí lidé*] are the salt of this country, they work, they bear the burden of care for the family, they were here even in the most difficult times of relying on beggarly wages. They did not emigrate, nor did anyone support them in a professional dissident career. They are the ones who constitute this country. They, therefore, should have the possibility of influencing the fate of their country and actively contributing to the formation of public affairs. And not just passively look on as groups of people with still the same names transfer power among themselves. (Sdružení pro republiku – Republikánská strana Československa 1990, 7)

The "simple people" as a collection of these free working individuals thus took on the role of the political subject that the SPR-RSČ sought to represent – in collective demarcation against the same old "groups of people" merely taking turns in power and thereby threatening to sideline the "simple people." Thus, a populist frontier of "people" vs. "power" emerged in the SPR-RSČ discourse that linked up to both the neo-liberal interpellation of the working individual and the anti-communist allegation that all the other established political forces were somehow guilty of working with the Communists and did not represent a true ("post-November") break with the latter. The promise of providing the true break that these established forces could not offer, in turn, rested on the neo-liberal agenda of far-reaching market reforms as well as the conservative demand for a return to all the "traditional values" that were suppressed under KSČ dictatorship:

> We demand the renewal of traditional values and all of the concepts that were discredited under communist domination. Not only their forms, of course, but also their contents, of what they express. We demand the return to a traditional conception of society, law, justice, morality, honor, family. (Sdružení pro republiku – Republikánská strana Československa 1990, 6–7)

What thus emerged was a joint articulation of populism, anti-communism, neo-liberalism, and conservatism, in which the popular subject was constructed

as a collection of free working individuals pitted against established forces transferring power among themselves (populism) that are collectively compromised by having worked with the Communists (anti-communism) and are thus unable to bring about a true break that can, in turn, only be delivered by a return to a full-fledged market economy (neo-liberalism) and traditional values (conservatism). Figure 3.1 illustrates this construction, in which "simple people" and "communism" emerge as empty signifiers holding together opposing sides of the antagonistic frontier – the argument here being that "simple people" are blocked from exercising their rights by the same "people in power" just as they were under "dictatorship" and "communism," while the elimination of the "communism" that the "people in power" and all other forces except the SPR-RSČ are allegedly upholding constitutes the precondition for the fulfillment of the entire chain of demands.

The SPR-RSČ won just 1% of the vote in the June 1990 parliamentary elections as part of an alliance with the People's Democratic Party, but subsequently gained increasing media attention with its "strategy of outrageous headline grabbing protest stunts" (Hanley 2012, 70). These included various open-air rallies such as a protest of US President Bush's November 1990 state visit with slogans accusing Bush of "talking to communists" and the Civic Forum of "telling lies." As the rhetoric at these rallies suggested, the period between 1990 and 1992 saw a radicalization of the SPR-RSČ's anti-communist populism up to the point of alleging that the events of November 1989 had been staged by the Communists and that the new OF-led government was firmly in league not only with the KSČ (anti-communism), but also with foreign interests (nationalism). The nationalism of the SPR-RSČ thus came to the fore not only with this conspiracist narrative of a regime change co-orchestrated from abroad, but also in the claim that the nation was being sold off – both by a government catering to foreign interests and by centrifugal forces on both the Czech and the Slovak sides working to break up the country. At an April 1991 rally in Prague, Sládek (1992, 116) accused the "post-communist or crypto-communist crew" in power of presiding over the "political and economic deterioration" as well as the "continuing liquidation of our homeland." Here, the earlier neo-liberalism of demanding full marketization became increasingly overtaken by economic nationalism: in

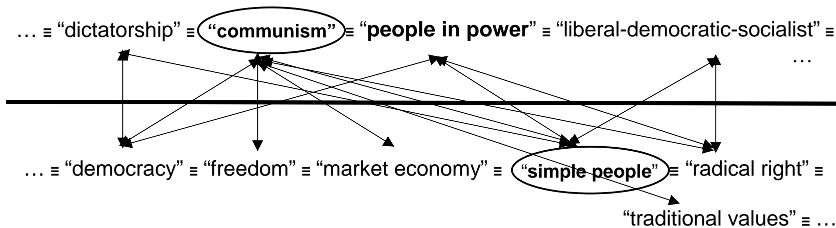

Figure 3.1 Anti-communist populism of SPR-RSČ (1990).

accusing the government of "selling off national property" instead of supporting the "entrepreneurial activities of our people [*lidé*]," Sládek (1992, 117, 118) now articulated the Republican economic agenda in the primarily nationalist terms of national vs. foreign rather than market vs. state. This nationalist logic did not stop with the claim that foreign interests were being put ahead of national ones, however; Sládek's explanation for why the government was pursuing such a policy in the first place was that the ex-dissidents now in power had been financed by foreign interests all along and were merely paying back their debts:

> These are people about whom we can say today with a clear conscience that they are gradually liquidating the Czechoslovak Republic. These are people who were supported from abroad [and] in whose obvious interest it is to settle their debts, preferably by selling off national property. These are people who are, under the pretext of so-called economic reform, gradually working toward the liquidation of our national economy and the selling off of national property. (Sládek 1992, 117)

Sládek constructed this existential threat of "liquidation" of the nation not only in terms of the anti-"national" economic policy of the government, but also in the form of Czech premier Petr Pithart and his Slovak counterpart Vladimír Mečiar both "actively working toward the breakup of the Czechoslovak Republic" (Sládek 1992, 118) in the context of high-profile disagreements between the Czech and Slovak executives at the federal level over economic policy. Sládek (1992, 118) additionally singled out Mečiar for criticism for having "promised in the USSR the unchangeability of the eastern borders of the Czechoslovak Republic" and thus renouncing all claim to Subcarpathian Ruthenia as an integral part of Czechoslovakia. The SPR-RSČ's nationalism thus took on an irredentist dimension in demanding the return of pre-1938 Czechoslovak territory in the east in addition to constructing the twofold threat of foreign interests driving government policy and centrifugal forces tearing the country apart.

This equivalentially more wide-ranging (and hence radicalized) nationalism linked up with anti-communist populism via the claim that the "current governing crew in Czechoslovakia" (Sládek 1992, 116) had gotten to power not only by being funded by and working for foreign interests, but also by working with the KSČ to fake a revolution from above that allowed the Communists to continue ruling under a different guise – a radicalized version of the earlier (more vague) allegation of prior "cooperation" by established political forces with the KSČ. Sládek thus constructed a wide-ranging power bloc (populism) encompassing "the communists and their cooperators"[4] (anti-communism) who had remained in power all along by staging a bogus revolution:

> What we are witnessing today is the result of the unsuccessful puppet theater of November 17, 1989, which the communists and their cooperators planned in advance and carefully prepared, hoping that they can get away with making fools of the nation and continuing to govern. We demand extra-ordinary elections, which are the only possibility of cleansing the political scene in the Czechoslovak Republic of people compromised by the past regime. (Sládek 1992, 116)

The populist frontier of people vs. power thus crystallized in the demand for early elections as the mechanism for sweeping away the entrenched power bloc of "communists and their cooperators" in the interest of "the majority of voters." Sládek positioned the Republicans on the side of this majority: "The success of our actions across the entire republic shows that we express today the will of the majority of the voters" (Sládek 1992, 119). Sládek also rejected alternative measures such as "lustration and any kind of screening commissions" in favor of early elections as the only possible way for the voters to have their say:

> Let the voters themselves establish with their votes who has their trust and who does not, who has gained their trust in the past year and who, conversely, has lost it. […] We are demanding the removal of the leadership of the Czechoslovak Republic by a completely democratic parliamentary path. (Sládek 1992, 116)

The demand for early elections thus took on the function of an empty signifier insofar as the fulfillment of this demand was articulated as the precondition for overcoming the opposing power bloc in its entirety. Populism thus came to the fore as a defining aspect of the SPR-RSČ discourse in conjunction with anti-communism and nationalism (but less so now with neo-liberalism) in articulating the "will of the majority" in opposition to a power bloc (populism) encompassing both the Communists allegedly still in power (anti-communism) and the OF government in league not only with the Communists, but also with foreign interests and centrifugal forces working to break up the country (nationalism). Figure 3.2 illustrates this discourse, with "early elections" functioning as the empty signifier (equivalentially linked to the "will of the majority") that holds out the promise of overcoming the opposing chain as a whole.

It is worth noting that this populist discursive structure was a precarious one operating specifically in a context in which only one multi-party election had taken place after 1989 and the demand for new elections could be articulated as a proxy for sweeping away the entrenched ruling forces and bringing about a true break with the old order. The fact that new elections did take place in June 1992 meant that this demand was fulfilled, at least in its differential particularity, but the clear victory of parties that the SPR-

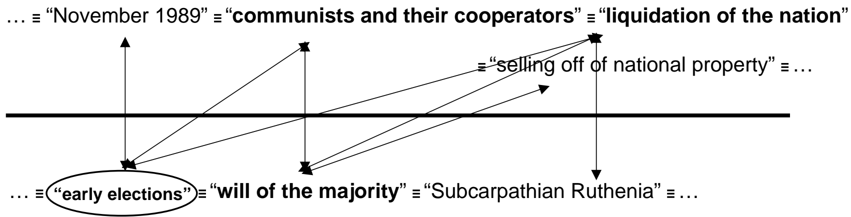

Figure 3.2 Anti-communist nationalist populism of SPR-RSČ (1990–92).

RSČ regarded as part of the Communist-led power bloc – led by the Civic Democratic Party (ODS), which emerged from a split within the OF – meant that the demand for early elections could no longer perform the function of representing the promise of sweeping away the opposing power bloc of "communists and their cooperators."

The period between 1990 and 1992 can thus be understood as the peak of the SPR-RSČ's populism (Mareš 2000), whereas a consistent feature of the party's subsequent discourse was the equivalential expansion of its nationalism around ever more targets and foreign Others – from the Roma, (former) Sudeten Germans, and asylum seekers to the continued "selling off of national property." Hanley (2012, 75) has argued that "[t]he Republicans' most original contribution to this radical anti-communist discourse of elite collusion and manipulation was […] to link domestic elites with external threats and foreign interests"; this can also be said to be the party's most lasting contribution insofar as the nationalist opposition to the alleged promotion of foreign interests remained a mainstay of the SPR-RSČ discourse even as the anti-communist populism became less pronounced. In the 1992 parliamentary elections, in which the party won parliamentary representation for the first time with close to 6% of the vote, the SPR-RSČ campaigned on a range of measures to cut the costs of government while demanding in starkly nationalist and nativist terms an "end to the pilferage of national property in Dutch auctions," the limitation of the "provision of asylum to foreigners to entirely exceptional cases," and the "application of equality of all citizens, i.e. the cancellation of subsidies for nationality groups such as the Roma Civic Initiative" (Sdružení pro republiku – Republikánská strana Československa 1992). Opposition to so-called positive discrimination for ethnic minorities – as expressed in the 1998 election slogan "No to the favoring of Gypsies" – became a recurring theme in the Republican discourse, while Sládek gained notoriety for a 1996 speech in parliament in which he quoted an opinion that he allegedly heard from another citizen that "Gypsies should be criminally liable from birth, because that is practically their biggest crime." While Sládek subsequently emphasized that his oft-quoted soundbite was merely citing another person's opinion rather than expressing his own, even this supposed act of citing fed

directly into the SPR-RSČ's ethno-nationalist construction of the "Gypsy question": namely, that the mere existence or presence of the Roma as a foreign Other on national territory – even prior to any specific misdeeds that they might have committed – is a problem that needs to be solved. In its 1996 election program, the SPR-RSČ proposed "solving" this problem (with a hint of finality) in the following terms:

> Solve [or solve to completion, *dořešit*] the question of unadaptable [*nepřizpůsobivé*] ethnicities such as the Gypsies – *inter alia* with the re-introduction of homeland rights and the elimination of unjustified advantages. (Sdružení pro republiku – Republikánská strana Československa 1996)

As populism receded in the SPR-RSČ discourse, therefore, the latter came to be increasingly defined by an ethno-nationalism directed against "un-adaptable ethnicities," rejecting their supposedly preferential treatment and even calling for their spatial segregation. Even as the Republicans declined and soon faded from electoral relevance – from a peak of 8% at the 1996 parliamentary elections to failing to enter parliament with just under 4% in 1998 and remaining below the 1% mark in all subsequent elections[5] – the notion of "unadaptables" would be taken up with a vengeance by other parties in subsequent combinations of populism and anti-minority politics.

The "post-November" hegemonic formation (1992–2006)

The anti-"November" populism of the Republicans, concentrated in the period from 1990 to 1992, represented an early challenge to the "post-November" imaginary, which would gradually stabilize into a hegemonic formation capable of accommodating competing political projects situating themselves within a common horizon of continuing – rather than openly contesting, as the Republicans did – the "post-November" break articulated by the Civic Forum. The Civic Forum itself, which had won a landslide majority in the 1990 elections, was hampered from the beginning by internal divisions between demands for radical "decommunization" from numerous local branches and the more structural-conservative approach of Czech premier Pithart, in addition to conflicting economic paradigms such as the neo-liberalism of Finance Minister Václav Klaus on the one hand and those advocating a "social market economy" and state-led restructuring on the other (Hanley 2008, 75–78). The OF finally broke up in April 1991, after these divisions escalated in the wake of Klaus's election as chairman in October 1990 and his stated intention of transforming the OF into a right-wing political party as opposed to an "all-embracing political umbrella movement" (Hanley 2008, 85–89). An agreement brokered by President Havel stipulated that the OF be replaced by two successor organizations – the Civic Democratic Party (ODS) and the Civic Movement (OH)[6] – with an

even splitting of assets. The ODS, with Klaus as founding chairman, immediately took up a discourse combining anti-communism with neo-liberalism. In the 1992 parliamentary elections, which it won with nearly 30% of the vote, the party presented a stark choice between "socialism" and "market economy," including a campaign video featuring the message "Say no to socialism" followed by successive clips of Lenin, Stalin, Mussolini, and Hitler, contrasted with footage of Reagan and Thatcher next to the message: "History has confirmed that only a free-market economy leads to freedom and prosperity. Right-wing conservative parties are winning across the entire world." The ODS thus partially incorporated the SPR-RSČ's anti-communism in conjunction with neo-liberalism, promising to deliver a definitive break with communism through its project of a "market economy" as a continuation, rather than a putting in question, of the imagined break of November 1989. Following the 1992 elections, Klaus became prime minister of an ODS-led coalition government with the Civic Democratic Alliance (ODA) and the Christian Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party (KDU-ČSL), the reconstituted iteration of the historical ČSL.

In this context, the relational structure of party competition in the Czech Republic from 1992 onwards (until 2006) can be understood in terms of a "post-November" hegemonic formation whereby competing party discourses, such as those of the ODS and ČSSD, presented largely differential and non-antagonistic variations on signifiers such as "Europe," "market economy," and "democracy" while situating themselves within the common "post-November" horizon instituted by the imagined break of November '89. These discourses, in other words, shared a basic commitment to a "return to Europe" as articulated by the OF in terms of political democracy, market economy, and cultural pluralism, albeit with variations on the meaning: from Klaus' "market economy without adjectives" to the KDU-ČSL's "social market economy" and the ČSSD's "socially and ecologically oriented market economy," or the ODS's conservative articulation of a "path to Europe" as a return to "basic values of European Christian civilization" (Občanská demokratická strana 1992, 1), as opposed to the ČSSD's appeal to "the European social model" in social-democratic terms as "the entry to European institutions with their social, ecological, economic, and moral standards" and a process of "the Czech Republic join[ing] the main current of European thought" (Česká strana sociálně demokratická 1996, 2). The crystallization of the "post-November" imaginary into a hegemonic formation can be seen in the manner in which these competing constructions not only played out within the partial fixation of meaning inaugurated by the Civic Forum's earlier discourse, but were also embedded in an institutionalized system of largely differential and non-antagonistic relations between the parties. While the ODS and the ČSSD, as the two largest parties emerging from parliamentary elections between 1996 and 2010, articulated moments of antagonistic division in the context of electoral competition – such as Klaus'

recurring defense of "freedom" against "socialism" and the ČSSD's 1996 and 1998 election slogan "Humanity against selfishness" – these antagonisms could be defused into differences whenever the stability of the "post-November" order as a whole was at stake. This was illustrated in exemplary fashion by the so-called Opposition Agreements of 1996 and 1998: the ČSSD agreed to tolerate Klaus' ODS-led minority government following the 1996 parliamentary elections (in exchange for ČSSD chairman Miloš Zeman's election as president of the lower chamber) after the ODS won a plurality but could not form a majority coalition, while the ODS returned the favor following the snap 1998 elections (this time in exchange for Klaus' election as president of the lower chamber) after the ČSSD won a plurality of the vote for the first time. In the latter instance, the two parties concluded a written agreement that justified the compromise in the following terms:

> The above named parties, in awareness of the threat of political instability and in the interest of the preservation of basic democratic principles, aware of the responsibility given to them by the voters, aware of the responsibility for the securing of long-term political stability in the Czech Republic and for the continuation of the economic and societal transformation initiated in November 1989, and aware of the further responsibility for the standing of the Czech Republic in the world, conclude between themselves this agreement on the creation of a stable political environment in the Czech Republic. (Česká strana sociálně demokratická and Občanská demokratická strana 1998)

It becomes possible to speak here of a hegemonic formation insofar as the two largest parties thus not only situated themselves within a common ("post-November") horizon of "economic and societal transformation," but also chose to embed themselves in an ensemble of institutionalized practices (such as the formalized toleration of minority governments) capable of reproducing itself across one or more legislative terms (1996–2002) by defusing moments of antagonistic break into differences – the ODS and ČSSD as representing simply *differential*, rather than mutually exclusive, paths to "Europe" and a "market economy" after 1989 – and thus overriding left vs. right divisions in defining the two main parties' identities in relation to each other at key post-election junctures in the 1990s.[7]

The SPR-RSČ, in addition to the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM), was situated outside this hegemonic formation both in terms of the contents of its discourse and the *cordon sanitaire* that all other parliamentary parties maintained against it at the national level. In the Republican discourse, as analyzed in the previous sub-section, "the economic and societal transformation initiated in November 1989" that the 1998 Opposition Agreement spoke of was nothing less than a sham orchestrated by the "communists and their cooperators." While the Republicans likewise articulated demands for "market economy" and "democracy," they

articulated a fundamental incommensurability between their conception of "market economy" and what was actually happening under this guise, which they referred to as the "selling off of national property"; the SPR-RSČ also opposed EU membership outright, thus placing itself outside the imaginary of a "return to Europe" (and promoting instead the irredentist imaginary of a return to a Greater Czechoslovakia incorporating Transcarpathia). The KSČM, for its part, affirmed its commitment to communist ideology in the Kladno program of 1992, while acknowledging "serious errors and systemic mistakes" committed under its predecessor (Komunistická strana Čech a Moravy 1992, 1); inaugural chairman Jiří Svoboda's attempt to rebrand the party as a "democratic socialist" one that would pronounce a formal ideological break with the pre-1989 period ended in failure in the 1993 party congress with his resignation and the victory of the "neo-communist" current that has held the leadership ever since (see also Kunštát 2013, 182–86). The *cordon sanitaire* that other parties placed against both the SPR-RSČ and the KSČM is exemplified by the ČSSD's Bohumín congress resolution of 1995, which affirmed "the impermissibility of cooperation by social democracy with extremist political parties" and specifically "rule[d] out political cooperation" with a list of parties including the KSČM and SPR-RSČ. The ČSSD thus circumscribed the extent to which it could enact a left vs. right divide on the level of government formation and, in effect, locked itself into the two options of either a deal with the ODS (which it made in 1998) or a coalition with smaller center-right parties such as the Christian Democrats (which it formed in 2002) in order to govern, barring the unlikely scenario of an outright parliamentary majority.

In short, the basic premise of the "post-November" hegemonic formation was that after the imagined break of 1989 – "Your government, people, has returned to you!" – there was no antagonistic divide separating the "people" from the politicians and parties in their "left" or "right" variations tasked with representing them within the institutional framework inaugurated by the 1989 revolution. The assumed normality of "post-November" politics, in other words, was institutionalism in its differential ("left" or "right") variations without the emergence of populism. Miloš Zeman exemplified this ethos with his emphasis on the need for "politicians" to be close to the "people" (*lidé*), thus maintaining a non-antagonistic relation between the two, while also affirming his own identity as a "politician" who practices politics as a "craft" – in direct contrast to subsequent populist discourses that would pit the "people" against the class of "politicians" and thus dislocate the established order of "post-November" politics. In his voiceover for a 1998 ČSSD campaign broadcast, for instance, Zeman declared that

> politicians should speak not only to the people [lidé], but also with the people. That is why we went on tour with our election bus "Zemák," so that we can give anyone who is interested the possibility to ask us any questions.

In a similar vein, the later ČSSD discourse under the leadership of Jiří Paroubek (2006–2010) would take up the signifier "ordinary people" (*obyčejní lidé*) and construct it in the social-welfarist and institutionalist terms of the socio-economic rights of citizens, rather than pitting it in populist fashion against a power bloc that needs to be dismantled.

If the "post-November" hegemonic formation was characterized by differential variations within a partial fixation of meaning, one key line of differentiation consisted in competing constructions of the state and its relation to the citizen. Here, the ODS's discourse was centered on an opposition between "individuals" and their activity in the "free market" on the one hand and the "state" whose function must be confined to the "protection of private property and of freely concluded contracts" on the other (Občanská demokratická strana 1992, 13):

> Right now the decision is between a prosperous market economy built on the initiative of the individual or the hopeless inefficiency of a state-controlled economy. (Občanská demokratická strana 1992, 1)

> The basis of economic prosperity is not the state, but the individual as the carrier of economic activity and initiative. (Občanská demokratická strana 1992, 13)

> The ODS is convinced that the basis of the prosperity of society is the free decision and activity of the individual and the basis of economic policy is the free market. (Občanská demokratická strana 1996, 24)

In this neo-liberal discourse, the nodal point "individual" as the building block of economy and society was linked to a specific set of differential characteristics: in its self-designation as a "civic" party, the ODS affirmed that it "is oriented toward hard-working, enterprising, and responsible people" (Občanská demokratická strana 1998, 1). The category of "the individual" in the ODS discourse thus presupposed an exclusion: only the "hard-working, enterprising, and responsible" could live up to the function of "the individual" as "the basis of economic prosperity." Indeed, in response to the electoral rise of the ČSSD and the latter's call for a "society of solidarity," the ODS sought to re-articulate the signifier "solidarity" in an explicitly delimited sense, in contrariety to the non-"enterprising" and non-"responsible":

> The ODS is also the party of solidarity between people. It starts from the premise that a responsible person, whether of old age, weak, or disabled, has an unquestionable claim to the solidarity of others, while the lazy and dishonest can have no such high claim. (Občanská demokratická strana 1998, 1)

In the ODS discourse, therefore, "work" took on the function of an exclusionary criterion that set apart those actually interpellated by the nodal point "the individual" from those who were not. In the ČSSD discourse, too, the nodal point "work" – which, as a counterpart to the ODS signifier "the individual," took on the privileged function of designating the basic driver of economy and society – was constituted through an exclusion, with the qualifier "honest" work setting it in contrariety to those with ill-gotten gains:

> In its electoral program, Czech social democracy upholds the values of honest work, which is the sole source of the actual wealth of society. We therefore want to address labourers, technicians, agricultural workers, service workers, doctors, teachers, artists, academics, and entrepreneurs. We do not address fraudsters or those who became wealthy through abuse of their functions. (Česká strana sociálně demokratická 1996, 24)

> We want to live in a society in which it is possible to become wealthy only through honest work and where each member can develop under dignified living conditions. (Česká strana sociálně demokratická 1998, 4)

> Our goal is a modern solidaristic society and prosperity for all honest people. (Česká strana sociálně demokratická 2002, 2)

Already in the dominant party discourses of the 1990s and early 2000s, therefore, privileged signifiers such as "work" and "the individual" were constituted in exclusionary terms – "*honest* work" and "*hard-working*, *enterprising*, and *responsible* individuals" – which would later prove to be fertile ground for challenger discourses that would radicalize these nodal points by equivalentially expanding the exclusionary scope. In the case of the ODS, there was a clear tension between the neo-liberal exclusion of non-"enterprising," non-"responsible" individuals on the one hand and a political liberalism that recognized the inalienable rights of *all* individuals and even the collective rights of "disadvantaged groups" on the other:

> Liberalism means the recognition of the sovereignty of the individual, the securing of his rights and freedoms, and also the rights of disadvantaged groups – social, religious, national, and political. (Občanská demokratická strana 1992, 5)

> [The ODS] is a liberal party because it honors the individual as the main carrier of basic rights and freedoms. (Občanská demokratická strana 1998, 1)

As will be analyzed in later sections, this equivalential link between economic and political liberalism would be decoupled in the subsequent

discourses of Public Affairs and Dawn/SPD that deny the rights of "unadaptable minorities" such as the Roma who supposedly live on welfare benefits without working.

In this broader context, the ODS introduced in the 1998 election campaign the concept of a "cheap state" with the citizen as its "customer," in opposition to the "populist" welfare promises of "left-wing parties" (Občanská demokratická strana 1998, 9–10) – a continuation of an anti-populist strategy (seen in previous ODS election campaigns) of associating "populism" with "the left" and its "social demagoguery." The ODS constructed its "cheap state" both in terms of low taxes (including a flat tax on income) as well as an "orientation toward the citizen as a customer" (Občanská demokratická strana 1998, 11). In the 2006 campaign, ODS prime ministerial candidate Mirek Topolánek went still further, opening his preface to the party's electoral program with the statement: "I would wish our state to be like my office: small, functional, and friendly" (Občanská demokratická strana 2006, 3). In the 2010 campaign, the ODS called for a "cheap and safe state" and, in an extension of its neo-liberalism, claimed that "the state is like a family" that must cut its expenses and learn to live within its means in order to avoid a sovereign debt crisis: "The Hungarians, the Latvians, and now the Greeks have learned for themselves. It is very irresponsible to claim that this doesn't threaten us" (Občanská demokratická strana 2010, 4, 6). The hegemonic effects of this anti-debt discourse could be seen in the manner in which the ČSSD, in the same 2010 election campaign, reproduced the emphasis on a "rational budgetary policy against indebtedness" with the goal of reducing the deficit to below 3% of GDP by 2013, while affirming that "[t]he citizen is a customer of the state" insofar as the state's role is to "ensure the citizen's equal access to quality services" (Česká strana sociálně demokratická 2010, 4, 6).

By this point, however, the "post-November" hegemonic formation had begun to unravel in the context of the 2006 parliamentary elections and their aftermath. One aspect of this development was that the ODS, in 2006 (after eight years in opposition), 2010, and 2013, repeatedly ran anti-communist electoral campaigns accusing the ČSSD of secretly planning a coalition with the KSČM, thereby also positioning itself as the sole guardian of the post-1989 order and suspending the common horizon of post-November transformation as one existing above and beyond – indeed, capable of differentially incorporating – left/right differences. A key aspect of this anti-communist discourse was the emphasis on the newness of the alleged threat coming jointly from the ČSSD and KSČM; Topolánek wrote in his preface to the ODS's 2006 election program: "For the first time since November 1989 there is the real possibility of a breakup of the democratic consensus and the return of the communists to running state affairs" (Občanská demokratická strana 2006). Following the 2006 elections, the failure of talks between the ODS and ČSSD on an Opposition Agreement-like arrangement and the Topolánek minority government's subsequent defeat in a confidence vote – the first time after 1989

that a government formed after an election had failed to secure the confidence of parliament – constituted a major dislocation in the "post-November" hegemonic formation and its capacity to defuse left vs. right divisions in reproducing the conditions of "political stability" that the 1998 Opposition Agreement had referred to. Following this unprecedented defeat, Topolánek formed a coalition government of the ODS, the KDU-ČSL, and the Green Party (SZ), which held exactly half of the seats in the lower chamber and finally won a confidence vote seven months after the election, after two ČSSD MPs left the chamber during the vote to allow the government to secure a majority. The new government lasted just over two years, however, before the ČSSD-KSČM opposition, which controlled the other half of lower-chamber seats, succeeded with its fifth attempt at a motion of no confidence in March 2009, in the middle of the Czech presidency of the European Council, supported by a sufficient number of ODS and ex-Green opponents of the government.

The period between the 2006 elections and the 2009 confidence vote was thus characterized by protracted breakdowns in hegemonic stability, especially the inability of parties and politicians to suspend "left" vs. "right" divisions in reproducing institutional order as they had done in exemplary fashion with the Opposition Agreements of 1996 and 1998. It ultimately took a caretaker government of independents headed by non-politician Jan Fischer – who had been serving as president of the Czech Statistical Office – to receive the backing of a working majority of ODS and ČSSD until early elections scheduled for October 2009. Just one month before the election, however, the Constitutional Court, in response to a legal challenge by a ČSSD MP, declared the early election to be unconstitutional due to the one-off shortening of the parliamentary term. Both chambers of parliament responded by passing a constitutional amendment that introduced a mechanism for parliament to dissolve itself and call early elections, but the ČSSD then withdrew its support for an early election prior to the vote. The May 2010 elections thus took place following a protracted delay, after large amounts of money had already been spent by the parties and the election authorities since late summer 2009 (Stegmaier and Vlachová 2011). It was in the context of this unforeseen time window that two notable developments arose that would have far-reaching implications for populism in the Czech Republic. Firstly, ODS chairman (and now ex-PM) Topolánek, in the run-up to the November 2009 party congress, declared his intention to root out "godfathers" (*kmotři*) supposedly running the party from behind the scenes at the regional level – a notion that was quickly taken up in the media, with the center-right daily *Lidové noviny* publishing an entire list of alleged "grey eminence[s]" within regional ODS branches who "govern, but only 'from the hidden'" (Kolář and Čápová 2009). While Topolánek was widely believed to be trying to shore up his power base within the party after the fall of his government and ahead of the delayed elections, it soon became clear that the notion of "godfathers" controlling political parties from behind the scenes

would come back as a boomerang against the ODS, as the next section will show in the context of populist discourses from 2010 onwards. Petr Nečas, who replaced Topolánek as ODS prime ministerial candidate ahead of the 2010 elections, even likened this construction to "self-mutilation" in a post-election interview:

> I never use the word godfather and never will. […] In relation to the ODS, it's a word that I would liken to self-mutilation. I don't understand at all why Mr. Topolánek used it, as he had to know that it has connotations with organized crime and the mafia. (Honzejk, Valášková, and Svozílek 2010)

The second major development in this timeframe was the emergence of the Public Affairs (VV) party, which was polling around 1% ahead of the originally planned October 2009 elections and only reached the 5% threshold in the February 2010 opinion polls (Stegmaier and Vlachová 2011) before storming into parliament with nearly 11% of the vote in the May 2010 elections. The populist discourse of Public Affairs, which will now be analyzed in the next section, marks the beginning of a period of recurring populism (and of competing populisms) in Czech party politics.

"People" vs. "politicians" (2010–present): a break in the "post-November" imaginary

The centrist populism of Public Affairs (2010)

Public Affairs (VV), which was founded in 2001 and registered as a political party in 2002, was active mostly at the local level in Prague (and won seats to a few district councils), campaigning on issues such as traffic congestion and opposition to the privatization of municipal housing (Havlík and Hloušek 2014, 556). Beginning in early 2005, businessman Vít Bárta, who had been co-owner of the private security firm White Lion Agency (ABL), began using his business contacts to exert influence within – and financially back – the party (Havlík and Hloušek 2014, 562). In 2009, VV announced that it would contest parliamentary elections for the first time, with the investigative journalist Radek John as party chairman and lead candidate and Bárta as campaign manager. The VV campaign discourse articulated a frontal challenge to the "post-November" order by drawing a populist antagonistic frontier between the "political dinosaurs" who had run the country since 1989 on the one hand and the "people" (*lidé*) or "citizens" left behind on the other – articulating in these terms the demand for direct-democratic mechanisms such as referenda in order to "change the current political (non-)culture by means of greater involvement of citizens in decision-making" (Věci veřejné 2010a, 5). John laid out the construction of

this "people" vs. "dinosaurs" frontier in an April 2010 interview, defining "dinosaurs" in the following terms:

> We are the only post-communist country that still has not replaced the political generation of post-November politicians with the young generation. So as a general definition, [political dinosaurs] are people who were in all these corruption scandals involving privatization, restitution, army purchases of Gripens, Pandurs, and more.

This "dinosaur" generation, John contended, has held power for too long and lost touch with the wider "people":

> [T]his is not a personal attack against dinosaurs. They carried out their work and should step down. When they are here longer than two electoral periods, it smacks of a big risk because a politician loses contact with the normal lives and normal problems of people.

John went on to position himself and Public Affairs on the side of the "people" by virtue of their outsider status, as opposed to the "dinosaurs":

> I am a person of flesh and bone who has been on the streets with people, I have not been in the glass tower of state institutions in which politicians have lived for 20 years like little greenhouse flowers. (Danda 2010)

The populist opposition to this power bloc of "political dinosaurs" in the name of the wider "people" became the dominant theme of the VV campaign, including a giant billboard near the government quarter in Prague featuring the slogan "The end of political dinosaurs" (with a crossed-out sign of a *T. rex*) and a clock counting down to election day. The party's campaign broadcast began with an image of a *T. rex* forming on a drawing board, with a simultaneous voiceover constructing an equivalential chain of ills – an insidious "they" menacing the "all of us," culminating in the "dinosaurs" whose elimination is the precondition for solving all other problems:

> They are everywhere. They encroach into the space of all of us: the corruption, the public debt, the parasitism, the low-quality education, the scandalous pensions – the dinosaurs of the past years. The end of the dinosaurs is here. (Věci veřejné 2010b)

The constitutive outside "dinosaurs" was equivalentially articulated not only with the various issues of corruption and mismanagement of public services, but also with the left/right structuration of politics that had been characteristic of the post-1989 period, as Vít Bárta made clear in an interview:

> The classic example of political dinosaurs is a strict right-left perception of society. This is the view of a past political generation that is gone. This perception of the world has unleashed dissatisfaction in our country, ceased to work, and this is why the call for change is being heard. (Buchert 2010)

Against the "dinosaurs" and their left/right logic, Bárta declared: "There is also a centrist ideology, an ideology of correct solutions. This is what I subscribe to" (Buchert 2010). The VV discourse can be understood in this vein as "centrist populist" (Havlík and Hloušek 2014) insofar as the populist construction of the power bloc "political dinosaurs" linked up not only with the claim to be beyond the left/right logic of the "dinosaurs" (centrism as a marker of self-identification), but also with a set of demands that combined center-left and center-right contents (centrism as an analytical designation). In the same interview, Bárta summarized the party's election priorities – and its conditions for forming a coalition government – in terms of "basic programmatic points such as deficit reduction, health and pension reform or investment in schools […] and personnel questions"; when asked what he meant by the last point, Bárta replied: "The purging from politics of people who have discredited themselves. The departure of political dinosaurs" (Buchert 2010). This answer neatly captures the two constituive dimensions of the VV discourse: on the one hand, resolute populist opposition to a power bloc of "political dinosaurs"; on the other, the attempt to triangulate between the ČSSD's and the ODS's economic policies, while sharing the ultimate goal of "deficit reduction" – the hegemonic effects of which can be seen in the manner in which it cross-cut competing party discourses in the 2010 campaign (as seen in the previous section). The economic program of Public Affairs was characterized by a moderate neo-liberalism that foregrounded "support for entrepreneurship" as the key to economic growth and declared the "long-term goal" to be "low taxes," while also proposing new forms of progressive taxation such as a wealth tax of 25% and industry-specific taxes in areas such as gambling and prostitution (Věci veřejné 2010a, 7–8); the party called for cuts to the civil service while promising increased funding for schools and universities. In thus appealing to "centrism" not only as a self-identifying label, but also in terms of policy contents, Bárta even invoked his speaker position as a businessman to set himself apart from the hardcore neoliberalism of the likes of Václav Klaus:

> When I was young, I greatly respected Professor Klaus. I appreciated his intelligence. When I started to do business, however, I saw that the market does not solve everything, that the rule of law is fundamental and that the stimulation of civic engagement is the right thing in certain situations. (Buchert 2010)

In referring to his own business activities, Bárta aggressively called for strict regulations on ties between business and politics, taking up an outsider position in this regard – in line with the anti-"dinosaurs" populism – by referring to his own ABL company as a small outsider in the world of shady business dealings. Arguing that "[t]he anonymous businessman is the root of the evil that we are talking about," he argued:

> When it comes to contacts between business and politics, we have to play on a defined playing field and according to rules. [...] I want to raise attention to the fact that the ABL company had only about 7% of contracts from the public sector during the period of my activity. (Buchert 2010)

Despite the fact that Public Affairs itself clearly had a businessman backer in Bárta, therefore, the logic of anti-"dinosaurs" populism was that because of its newness and outsider status, the party was unburdened by – and indeed fighting against – the powerful interests lurking behind the established "large parties," which are "unreformable or only very difficultly so":

> The democracy of robber barons wins out in them, which holds some regions of the country under its control and even influences multiple political parties at the same time. Because of their influence, fundamental change is not possible in the ODS and the ČSSD.

Bárta drew here a clear contrast between these parties and Public Affairs:

> On our candidate lists, over 80% are people who were not in politics previously. They are educated, relatively young people. Moreover, Public Affairs operates as a unit, there is no shady business directing it from behind the scenes like it happens in other parties. (Buchert 2010)

The VV discourse thus not only dislocated the promise of established party discourses to deliver the goods of "post-November" transition in their "left" and "right" variations, but also took up Topolánek's notion of "godfathers" (or "robber barons") running political parties from behind the scenes and turned it against an entire power bloc of parties spanning the left-right spectrum. If the populism of Public Affairs was about displacing the frontiers defining "post-November" party politics from "left" vs. "right" to "dinosaurs" vs. non-"dinosaurs," this was also reflected in the party's coalition signaling strategy, with John denouncing individual politicians across the party spectrum as "dinosaurs" – most notably the ODS ex-PMs Mirek Topolánek and Václav Klaus, TOP 09 co-founder Miroslav Kalousek, and especially ČSSD PM candidate Jiří Paroubek – while explicitly accepting ODS PM candidate Petr Nečas as a non-"dinosaur."

Yet VV went even further in taking up elements of the established ODS and ČSSD discourses – namely, the exclusionary construction of "*responsible* people" and "*honest* work" – and radicalized them by extending the exclusionary scope: those who enriched themselves by dishonest means now suddenly encompassed the entire "post-November" political class (populism); the problem with the welfare system did not consist in isolated non-"responsible" individuals, but in an entire class of "scroungers" and "unadaptables" (*nepřizpůsobiví*) (welfare chauvinism). In its election program, VV headlined its social policy with the slogan "Social benefits: for the needy yes, for scroungers no" and called for "an end to the misuse of social benefits," pointing to security issues in "neighborhoods with unadaptable citizens" – including certain "unadaptable minorities" (referring, of course, to the Roma) – and proposing disciplinary measures such as "the uncompromising resettlement of chronic tax dodgers and unadaptables," "checks on standard of living when social benefits are paid out" (in order to control for "over-standard apartment furnishings and the like"), and the forced enlistment of those with "unpaid debts and penalties" into "public-benefit works for the cleanup of problem localities" (Věci veřejné 2010a, 14–15, 26–27). While the old notion of "unadaptables" thus made its re-appearance, Public Affairs articulated this notion not so much in the ethno-nationalist terms of national vs. foreign (indeed, it even avoided specifically mentioning the Roma), but following a welfare-chauvinist logic of stigmatizing non-"working" and non-"responsible" individuals and groups – thus extending the ODS's earlier neo-liberalism of the "working" and "responsible" individual. Here, VV's otherwise moderate neo-liberalism was radicalized into a hyper-neoliberal welfare chauvinism directed against "scroungers," which – in contrast at least to the earlier ODS – linked up with an illiberalism directed against "minorities," with the signifier "unadaptable" equivalentially linking both categories of undesirable citizens. What had been a joint articulation of economic and political liberalism with the earlier ODS now morphed into a paradoxical mix of hyper-neoliberal welfare chauvinism and anti-minorities illiberalism (at least in the area of welfare policy), radicalizing the construction of individual responsibility to exclude entire groups of "unadaptables."

The VV discourse can thus be understood as a primarily centrist populism with both a neo-liberal and illiberal strain, in which the "people" or "citizens" as the collective subject took on an empty signifier function holding together the discourse by being pitted not only against the corrupt power bloc "political dinosaurs" (populism), but also against the latter's left/right logic (centrism) and against "unadaptable minorities" and "scroungers" (illiberalism and hyper-neoliberalism), while being equivalentially linked to a combination of moderately neo-liberal and moderately progressive fiscal policy demands (centrism) as well as demands for direct democracy in

particular. Figure 3.3 summarizes the VV discourse, in which the "people" and the "dinosaurs" take on the function of empty signifiers symbolizing the two opposing sides of the antagonistic frontier in their entirety.

With VV winning nearly 11% of the vote in the May 2010 elections (and the ČSSD underperforming expectations with 22%), Bárta declared victory in "the battle against the biggest dinosaur Paroubek" (Danda and Rovenský 2010) – setting the stage for the equivalential link with the non-"dinosaur" Nečas, who became prime minister of an ODS-TOP09-VV coalition cabinet. VV singled out the tackling of "corruption risks" in specific business sectors as the main priority in government, with John presiding over the newly created Government Committee for Coordinating the Fight against Corruption (Dolejší 2010). Soon enough, however, the VV discourse suffered a massive and abrupt dislocation in April 2011 when the center-right daily *Mladá fronta DNES* published a leaked strategy paper authored by Bárta in October 2008. Titled "Strategy 2009–2014," the document detailed Bárta's intentions to use Public Affairs as a vehicle to enhance both his commercial success and political connections, in none too subtle terms such as the following:

> Vision: the integrated buildup of stable economic and political power. […] Means: -ABL, economic power base in the upcoming years […] -VV, own political power base (Kmenta and Dolejší 2011)

These revelations flew in the face of the party's populist self-presentation as a crusader against precisely such secret business links that supposedly lurked behind every established political party. The dislocatory nature of this event became apparent with VV's inability to justify its continued status as a party of government led by Bárta and John: Bárta immediately resigned as Transport Minister, while Nečas replaced the other two VV ministers (John being one of them) in the cabinet. Just a year later in April 2012, the party split when Karolína Peake, who had succeeded John as vice-premier for VV, left the party, citing disagreements with a "political style of destruction and incomprehensible steps" (Karolína Peake bourá VV. Nečasova vláda se otřásá 2012). Nečas used the opportunity to cut coalition ties with VV

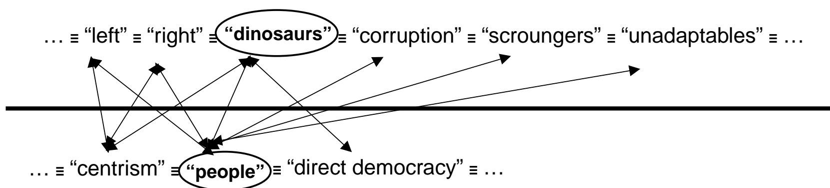

Figure 3.3 Centrist populism of VV (2010).

entirely, while Peake's new party, LIDEM – Liberal Democracy, remained in the government with enough VV defectors to maintain a parliamentary majority. The government carried on until June 2013, when an even bigger scandal involving bribery and abuse-of-office allegations against cabinet officials in Nečas' inner circle (most prominently his lover and soon-to-be wife, Jana Nagyová) led to yet another premature collapse of a government.[8]

ANO: from centrist entrepreneur populism (2011–13) to a centrist populism of "hard work" in power (2014–present)

The early parliamentary elections of October 2013 thus took place in a context of continuing erosion of institutional stability in which Public Affairs as a party had already faded into irrelevance,[9] yet the context of emergence for the latter's populist discourse – notions such as godfathers, shady business dealings, and rampant corruption within the established parties – had gained heightened prominence, partly also by VV's own doing. In this context, the mantle of a populism directed against the class of "politicians" and "parties" of both "left" and "right" was taken up and indeed radicalized – albeit in different directions – by Andrej Babiš's ANO and Tomio Okamura's Dawn of Direct Democracy (to be analyzed in the next sub-section), founded by their businessman leaders in November 2011 and July 2013, respectively. In November 2011, Babiš released the "Appeal of ANO 2011" to the public, introducing the Action of Dissatisfied Citizens (ANO, which also means "yes") and its aspiration to be a "civic movement composed of trustworthy and independent personalities in the Czech Republic in the next parliamentary elections" (ANO 2011). Babiš presented a damning diagnosis of the present political situation in which

> the politicians of our country since the revolution not only do not know how to lead, but also look on as it gets pilfered […] we live in a dysfunctional state […] we do not have money for teachers, scientists, doctors, police officers, firefighters, for sport, and for the education of our children. […] And politicians, in the meantime, quarrel. Among themselves in the governing coalition, Nečas with Kalousek, Bárta with everyone. (ANO 2011)

Against this equivalential chain of politicians – of which Babiš proceeded to provide a laundry list: "[ČSSD chairman Bohuslav] Sobotka," "his fellow party member [and Sobotka rival] Hašek," "Zeman and Paroubek," "President Klaus" – Babiš interpellated people of different professions, the "so many smart and enterprising people" in the country, even the "demonstrations of trade unionists [that] politicians do not take seriously," and the "majority of you [that] thinks" what he himself is merely "say[ing] out loud" (ANO 2011). A populist discourse thus took shape that constructed the "people" (*lidé*) as an

empty signifier equivalentially linking the various individuals and groups from all walks of life against the entire class of "politicians" (and not just the "dinosaurs" among them, but also professed newcomers such as Bárta), while also taking up the familiar language of entrepreneurship that had long been the mainstay of the ODS. Indeed, a key component of this discourse was the claim that precisely Babiš the businessman was on the side of the "people" against the out-of-touch "politicians." In a November 2011 interview, the ANO founder declared that "I want to show that there is an initiative here that is for the benefit of the people [*lidé*]" and suggested that he could offer a certain proximity to "the people" that "politicians" could not:

> And it is absurd to a certain extent that I, of all people, came up with it. On the other hand, I'm not capable of speaking like politicians. They speak like they are not even listening to the people, these politicians just put them to sleep. (Rychlík 2011)

In constructing his own speaker position as a rather unlikely tribune of the "people," Babiš articulated an equivalence between the "people" and his identity as a successful businessman who, unlike the "politicians," is capable of tackling the "crisis" of public finances for which the "politicians" are responsible. Arguing that he "earned billions through honest work," Babiš argued:

> I pay 600 million koruna in yearly taxes, I know who is stealing it, but I don't want it back anymore… The Czech Republic is simply a firm that has some money, some revenues, expenses, debts… It is a firm in crisis and someone has to reverse this development. (Rychlík 2011)

The basic thrust of ANO's and Babiš's discourse, then, was not only the populism of "people" vs. "politicians," but a specifically *entrepreneur* populism centered on the promise that the successful businessman could represent the "people" because he would not steal and would run the state competently like "a firm" against the corruption of the "politicians." In addition to the empty signifier "people," therefore, Babiš's identity as a "businessman" took on a nodal point function holding together the equivalential chain insofar as the contrariety between being a "businessman" on the one hand and being a kleptocratic "politician" on the other accounted for the promise to serve the "people" by running the state competently like "a firm." At an election campaign rally in Plzeň in September 2013, Babiš declared outright that he was incorruptible thanks to his business wealth:

> If you [*turning to the audience*] were to come to me and tell me "I'll give you 100 million, but I don't want to be listed online," then I'll say to you, "Dear sir, thank you, I don't want it." Nobody will buy me off, I have enough. (Šváb 2013)

The equivalential chain "people" ≡ "businessman" ≡ "state as a firm" also extended onto the claim that ANO is a "movement" and not a "party," in the same vein that Babiš is a "businessman" and not a "politician." Asked in an interview during the 2013 election campaign why ANO chose to call itself a movement rather than a party, Babiš replied that "it's basically a declaration that we don't belong with them":

> Because we didn't want to be a party. All those who governed here the last 23 years are parties and I don't feel like a politician. I don't want anyone to say I am a politician because I am a businessman. (Šváb 2013)

Another key link in the equivalential chain was the notion of "work" or "hard work" as an attribute that the businessman-led ANO shared with the "people" against the class of "politicians." In the 2013 campaign, ANO featured the now famous slogan "We are not like politicians. We work hard [*makáme*]," while listing as the first of its policy priorities in its election program that of "giv[ing] work to the people." This demand was notably articulated in terms of greater state investment in job creation and public works:

> We are convinced that the state has to invest in times of crisis and save in times of growth. We will revive employment with state investments in the construction of infrastructure, highways, railways, and waterways. (ANO 2013)

Babiš, in effect, thus took up the ODS's emphasis on entrepreneurial initiative while displacing the latter's neo-liberalism onto a "managerial" (Císař and Štětka 2017) or even "technocratic" (Buštíková and Guasti 2019; Havlík 2019) position perfectly compatible with a Keynesian expansionary and counter-cyclical fiscal policy – under the premise that only a "businessman" possessed the requisite know-how, immunity from corruption, and "hard work" ethic for taking these necessary measures, as opposed to the "politicians" (this being the element of populism). In contrast to the ODS's "cheap state" or "state as a family" (in the context of the party's 2010 anti-debt discourse), therefore, Babiš's "state as a firm" construction emphasized managerial competence as opposed to small size and, indeed, pointed to a centrist logic of combining policy contents of both left and right – while, at the same time, the logic of centrist *populism* held that labels such as "left" and "right" were a meaningless game played by the "politicians." ANO's discourse thus entailed displacing the antagonistic frontier from "left" vs. "right" to hardworking and capable "people" vs. corrupt and incompetent "politicians." Babiš made this clear in a June 2013 interview with the liberal weekly *Respekt*, in which the interviewer pushed him to express his coalition preferences and pointed out that "[n]atural allies exist in party politics," to which Babiš replied: "But I am going to behave differently. Left and right

don't exist. What exists are the decent and the competent and the indecent, criminals, and the incompetent" (Sacher 2013). Figure 3.4 summarizes this "people" vs. "politicians" construction, with Babiš's "businessman" identity serving as the additional nodal point that holds out the promise to serve the "people" by running the state competently "as a firm" and not "stealing," as opposed to the "politicians."

After ANO outperformed expectations with over 18% of the vote in the 2013 elections, Babiš initially favored going into opposition before eventually agreeing to a coalition government with the ČSSD and KDU-ČSL, which took office in January 2014. With the entry into government, a notable displacement occurred in ANO's discourse: Babiš, now Finance Minister, defined himself and ANO in demarcation against "*traditional* politicians" and "*traditional* parties" (especially the ČSSD as the larger coalition partner), respectively, as well as the various "power groups" supposedly connected to them, while the signifier "hard work," instead of the "businessman," took on the structuring function of a nodal point that set Babiš and ANO apart from the "traditional" politicians and parties. In an August 2014 interview, Babiš articulated a clear contrariety between ANO as a "movement" open to all and the "traditional parties" with their position of "privilege" setting them apart from ordinary "citizens":

> We're not the same [as traditional parties], we're different in that we're still citizens and we're open. The fact that one is a member of ANO doesn't come with some privilege. We're a movement, and we keep saying: all citizens who want to change something in our country can join. (Tvarůžková 2014)

ANO's discourse could thus remain populist to the extent that it articulated this contrariety between "movement" and "traditional parties" in terms of the latter's equivalential link to power – namely, as a power bloc that had overseen the corrupt mismanagement of the country for all these years and enjoyed the backing of all kinds of behind-the-scenes "power groups." In a January 2015 interview, Babiš spoke openly of "power groups" lurking behind the "traditional political parties":

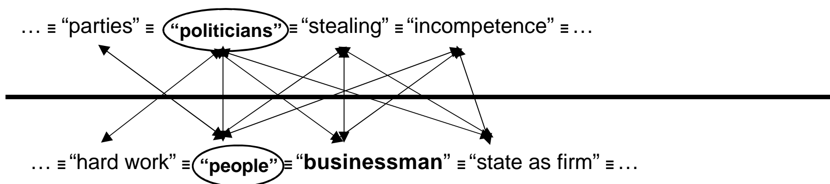

Figure 3.4 Centrist entrepreneur populism of ANO (2011–13).

> Power groups have rather changed. Today, they can be various lawyers or marketing agencies. And they still exist behind the backs of traditional political parties. Moreover, some controversial ex-ministers still exert influence in their former portfolios.

He referred to his larger coalition partner in this vein as a prime example of a "traditional political party" with its shady practices:

> [ČSSD] is a traditional party with such an enormous apparatus that I can't even imagine how they can finance everything. We're building up the movement gradually. […] We're open to new people and try to convince the public that it is worth joining us. We're different from traditional political parties. (Koutník 2015)

The similarly constructed notion of "godfathers," introduced by Topolánek and taken up by Public Affairs, now underwent its latest twist with ANO's populist discourse in power, which identified various behind-the-scenes "power groups" as an opposing power bloc impeding the "movement" (constrained by being in coalition with two "traditional parties") from governing for the "people." This discourse continued into the 2017 parliamentary election campaign; Babiš's preface to ANO's election program brought to the fore this logic of a (centrist) populism in power:

> Our movement emerged as a protest against the corruption of traditional political parties that played the game of left and right. […] After everything we experienced in government and parliament, we are not so naïve anymore. We know that the government is actually not led by the prime minister, but by all sorts of behind-the-scenes groups, lobbyists, and advisors. […] But that changes nothing in our basic program, which remains the same and which is totally foreign to traditional politicians. We won't lie, we won't steal, we will fight against corruption and inefficiency and we will work for the people [*lidé*] and our country. (ANO 2017)

ANO's election campaign again featured dichotomous messaging that increasingly pitted the "hard work" that ANO stood for against the "babble" of the "traditional parties," as seen on billboards with slogans such as "Fight for the capable and hardworking. And not babble." The discourse thus de-emphasized the technocratic function of the "businessman" as the solution to corruption and mismanagement, emphasizing instead the "hard work" ethic common to ANO and the common people. Babiš even altered his "state as a firm" thesis to this effect in his book *What I Dream About When I Happen to Sleep* (which was published and distributed by ANO as electoral campaign material):

> They often criticize me for saying that the state should be run like a firm. Well, maybe I should say it's better to run the state like a family firm, or even better, that the state should function to some extent like a family. The greatest wealth, whether of a family, of a firm, or of a state, is people, though it's often forgotten. [...] People should go into politics who have proven something in their lives, people who understand politics as a service and a calling, people who have some kind of vision. (Babiš 2017)

In contrast to the ODS's earlier construction of the state as a family to justify an anti-debt and austerity agenda, Babiš articulated the equivalential link between "state" and "family" in terms of a people-centric image of the state, forging a wide-ranging equivalential chain of such "people" who belong to politics more than the politicians themselves:

> We have so many smart craftspeople, teachers, doctors, academics, self-employed people, entrepreneurs, paramedics, athletes, police officers, firefighters, and other professions. Maybe some of them could help society in politics as well because our country needs their help. I cannot come to terms with the notion that decent people cannot be in politics. (Babiš 2017)

ANO's populism thus underwent a twofold shift in the 2014–17 period as the opposition to the entire class of "politicians" and "parties" was now moderated by the differential qualifier "traditional" politicians and parties, while the de-emphasis on Babiš's identity as a "businessman" meant that the notion of "hard work" took on a more prominent nodal point function in accounting for the equivalence between ANO as a "movement" open to the "capable and hardworking" people who should be running the state, as opposed to the previous notion of the "businessman" serving the (hard-working) "people" simply by running the state like a firm. Babiš's introductory remark that "we are not so naïve anymore" after seeing how government is actually run by behind-the-scenes power groups corresponds to this shift away from the "businessman" as the tribune of the "people" within the state (entrepreneur populism) and toward bringing the wider "people" into the state in the struggle against the "traditional" politicians and parties (populism of "hard work"). Figure 3.5 illustrates this shift, with "hard work" taking on the function of an additional nodal point equivalentially linked to the "people" in common contrariety against the "stealing" and "incompetence" of the "traditional parties" and "traditional politicians."

ANO's populism of "hard work" thus constitutes a form of populism in power that constructs an opposing power bloc (opposed to the "people") in order to claim an underdog status from a position of government. One episode that forcefully illustrated this logic at work was the so-called *Čapí*

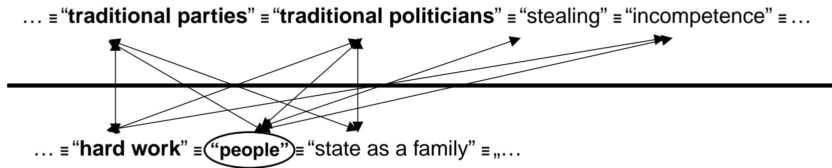

Figure 3.5 Centrist populism of "hard work" in power of ANO (2014–present).

hnízdo affair, which centered on subsidy fraud allegations against Babiš and ANO parliamentary group leader Jaroslav Faltýnek in relation to EU subsidies received by a farm after it formally changed ownership from Babiš's Agrofert group. In March 2016, Babiš addressed the accusations in a parliamentary speech, in which he accused "the traditional political nomenklatura" – pointing especially to "the ODS and the corrupt [TOP 09 chairman Miroslav] Kalousek, the symbol of corruption" – of conducting a smear campaign to stop him from undermining their privileged status, ranging from allegations of his secret police past and conflicts of interest to this latest "pseudo-affair":

> For two years, the traditional political nomenklatura here has realized that I don't lie, don't steal, don't do anyone's bidding [*shouts and laughter on the right*] and nobody can corrupt me. […] This is the reason why we now have this pseudo-affair *Čapí hnízdo* that all of a sudden bothers you so much. (Parlament České republiky 2016)

In January 2018, with Babiš as acting prime minister of an ANO minority government that had failed to win a confidence vote days earlier, parliament voted to suspend Babiš's and Faltýnek's immunity for criminal proceedings; Babiš himself voted for the measure and, in his speech prior to the vote, again denounced the "politically motivated" accusations, while going even further with his counter-accusation that the police proceedings against him were

> mainly the order of a mafia. A mafia that has stolen billions here in cooperation with elected politicians. […] This is politics. We live in a country where you can order a prosecution and order, [and] probably get, someone into prison. (Parlament České republiky 2018)

In constructing a corrupt "mafia" lurking behind the "traditional politicians," Babiš deflected the accusations against him in this high-profile and protracted *Čapí hnízdo* affair and thus found another means of continuing ANO's populism in government – even in a context in which it briefly ruled alone as an interim minority government (December 2017 to June 2018)

without "traditional parties" in the coalition to take aim at. At the same time, *Čapí hnízdo* generated a dislocation that could be taken up by other populist challengers (likewise unburdened by association with the "traditional parties") in accusing Babiš of being part and parcel of the corrupt power bloc that he claims to oppose, as will be seen in the following sections.

Dawn of Direct Democracy and Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD): from neo-liberal nativist populism (2013) to neo-conservative nativist populism (2017)

Dawn of Direct Democracy was founded in April 2013 by businessman Tomio Okamura, who had been elected to the Senate as an independent in 2012 and unsuccessfully tried to gather signatures to stand in the January 2013 presidential elections. The discourse of Dawn featured a populist opposition between the "citizens" and the "godfather party mafias," coupled with a more strident version of the neo-liberalism and anti-minorities illiberalism mix already seen in Public Affairs. The preface to Dawn's program for the October 2013 parliamentary elections called for an

> end to the demo-democracy [*sic*] in which godfather party mafias rule. The misguided game of the political parties of left and right has led our republic into a vicious circle of economic crisis, deep debts, and high taxes. We must push through changes that return trust in democracy to the citizens. (Úsvit přímé demokracie 2013)

Foremost among these "changes," Dawn called for direct-democratic mechanisms such as referenda, direct election of the executive at every level of government, and recall mechanisms for officeholders in order to secure the "recallability of politicians and the accountability of politicians to the citizens" (Úsvit přímé demokracie 2013). More so than VV, Dawn took up a straightforward neo-liberal economic agenda of tax cuts, "support for the business environment," and "strategic investments in transport and infrastructure that support the business environment"; likewise more so than VV, it also articulated these neo-liberal demands in the populist terms of "citizens" vs. "godfather party mafias":

> The public sector must serve the citizens and not the enrichment of godfather party mafias. [...] The taxes of the citizens cannot serve the inefficient and unnecessary projects of the political godfathers of governments and party secretariats. (Úsvit přímé demokracie 2013)

In the discourse of Dawn, therefore, a more clear-cut neo-liberalism linked up directly with populism via the construction of the "godfather party mafias" as a self-enriching power bloc wasting public funds that should be going to the "citizens" (populism) and the "business environment" (neo-liberalism)

instead. As with Public Affairs before it and ANO in the same time frame, the populism of Dawn constructed a monolithic ("godfather"-backed) power bloc of both "left" and "right" and sought to displace the "left" vs. "right" frontier – as exemplified by the slogan "Left? Right? Direct! Don't vote for the parties and their godfathers!" – while referring to itself as a "movement" in contrariety to the "parties." Despite the claim to go beyond left and right, however, Dawn's populism cannot be considered a centrist insofar as the contents of its demands did not point to a meaningful triangulation or combination of discursive elements of both left and right. On the one hand – much like VV – Dawn took up a hyper-neoliberal welfare chauvinism in the area of social policy, radicalizing established neo-liberal constructions of "work" and "honest work" by denouncing a "social system" that supports "people who have no interest in working" and calling instead for a "system supporting all decent people" that "restores the meaning of 'fair' entrepreneurship and honest work" (Úsvit přímé demokracie 2013). In addition to this, the discourse of Dawn radicalized the central ANO demand in the same election campaign – "work to the people" – by articulating this demand in nativist terms against the supposed threat of "immigrants" taking away jobs, as exemplified by the slogan "Support for families, NOT unadaptables. Work to our [people], NOT immigrants." The construction of "unadaptables" in the Dawn discourse thus went further than that of Public Affairs by adding a strongly nativist dimension to this hyper-neoliberal welfare chauvinism: in calling for a stricter immigration policy, the program declared that "[w]e do not want unadaptable immigrants or the entry of religious fanatics here," thus equivalentially extending the notion of "unadaptables" onto the threat of foreigners coming in from the outside (Úsvit přímé demokracie 2013). In this joint articulation of populism, neoliberalism, and nativism, the "citizens" were pitted not only against the "godfather party mafias" (populism), but also against an equivalential chain of high taxes, public-sector inefficiency, and the non-working (neo-liberalism and welfare chauvinism) as well as the threat of "unadaptable immigrants" (nativism). Figure 3.6 summarizes this discourse, with "citizens" functioning as the empty signifier linking these oppositions.

The nativist dimension of this discourse took center stage in 2014 with the European Parliament election campaign, in which Dawn prominently featured billboards with the slogan "Support for families, NOT unadaptables. Work to our [people], NOT immigrants" – together with an illustration of white sheep kicking out a black sheep, originally used in Swiss People's Party billboards – and launched a petition demanding that the Czech and EU member-state governments undertake

> [t]he fundamental tightening of the immigration policy of the European Union. We must retain our cultural identity founded on Christian values. […] Europe belongs to Europeans and those who respect European values. Our compassion cannot be interpreted as weakness

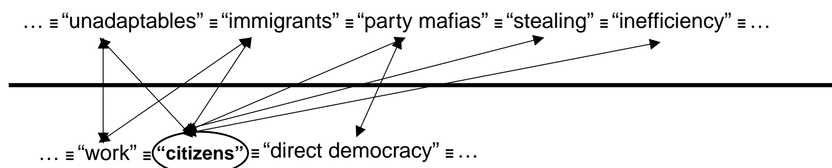

Figure 3.6 Neo-liberal nativist populism of Dawn (2013).

> or indifference. Europe must remain and will remain European. (Úsvit přímé demokracie 2014)

By this point, the discourse of Dawn had become a predominantly nativist one, in which the central demand for a stricter immigration policy was not articulated in terms of populist opposition to a power bloc such as the "godfather party mafias," but in terms of a "Christian" cultural essence set in opposition to the perceived threat of foreign cultures and immigration.

While Dawn had entered the Chamber of Deputies with 6.9% of the vote in the 2013 parliamentary elections, the parliamentary group split in early 2015 when a number of Dawn MPs accused Okamura of funneling party funds for private uses and called for the creation of a new party. Okamura, now expelled from the parliamentary group by the majority faction, formed Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD) in May 2015. SPD established a primarily nativist profile from the beginning; its first set of press releases published that month were centered on opposing EU refugee quotas, any support for which it referred to as "betrayal of the homeland," and designating Islam as "no longer only a religion, but an ideology" that "threaten[s] Western civilization" and must be kept out of the Czech Republic (Svoboda a přímá demokracie 2015a, 2015b). In this context, the construction of "citizens" as collective subject not so much followed a populist logic of opposition to a power bloc, but rather a nationalist and nativist logic of demarcation against foreign outsiders. An element of populism could be seen in the construction of "Brussels" as a locus of power trying to impose immigrants on the nation, as exemplified by the claim in one press release that "[a]t this moment, they are frantically deliberating in Brussels about how to force Muslim immigrants from Africa and the Middle East upon us. We have to say with courage – sorry, but return home – you are not welcome here" (Svoboda a přímá demokracie 2015b). Here, too, however, "Brussels" was constructed as a specifically foreign locus of power articulated internally to the nationalist and nativist opposition of the national "us" vs. "foreign" outsiders.

In the context of the 2017 parliamentary elections, Dawn's earlier populism of "citizens" vs. "godfather party mafias" re-emerged in the SPD

discourse in conjunction with a neo-conservatism that called for banning Islam and leaving the EU in the name of "freedom," while the earlier neo-liberalism gave way to an eclectic mix of hyper-neoliberal welfare chauvinism in social policy and demands for heightened state intervention, including re-nationalizations, in certain economic sectors. In SPD's election program, much of the populism was taken straight out of the 2013 Dawn platform – direct-democratic mechanisms to "limit the power of party mafias" as well as low taxes and a public sector that serve "citizens" and not the "godfather party mafias" – while, at the same time, the neo-liberalism of low taxes and public-sector efficiency was now complemented by an economic nationalism that called for putting "our natural wealth back in the hands of the state" (including the "de-privatization" of sectors such as water) and serving "the interest of the citizens and not multinational corporations" (Svoboda a přímá demokracie 2017). With this shift in economic policy discourse, the populism of SPD was now less clearly a neo-liberal one, although the hyper-neoliberal welfare chauvinism in the area of social policy remained. If a key shift in ANO's discourse between 2014 and 2017 had been the privileging of "hard work" as a nodal point in order to set itself apart from the "traditional" parties and politicians, the SPD discourse played right along and radicalized the signifier "hard work" by extending its exclusionary scope, pitting "decent people" and "working families" against "people who have no interest in working," "unadaptable citizens who parasitically live off the generous and effortless social system," and the heightened threat of "unadaptable immigrants or the entry of Islamic religious fanatics" (Svoboda a přímá demokracie 2017). Yet this equivalential chain "unadaptable citizens" ≡ "unadaptable immigrants" ≡ "Islamic religious fanatics," which had pointed to a joint articulation of hyper-neoliberal welfare chauvinism and nativism in the previous discourse of Dawn, now took on a different structuration through the nodal point "freedom." With the campaign slogan "No to Islam, no to terrorism," SPD foregrounded the provocative demand to ban Islam entirely in the Czech Republic because it constitutes a "hateful ideology" that "propagates intolerance, superiority over others" and must be outlawed precisely in the interest of "freedom," as Okamura emphasized in a pre-election interview (Janoušek and Janouš 2017). In addition, the program now prominently featured the demand for leaving the EU "the English way" (via referendum) in order to avoid incorporation into a "multicultural European superstate" (Svoboda a přímá demokracie 2017). "Freedom" – now part of the movement's name – thus took on a nodal point function linking nativism ("Islam" as a threat to "freedom") with opposition to the EU as a threat to "freedom and democracy in Europe." This pro-"freedom," anti-"Islam," anti-"terrorism," and anti-EU combination closely resembled what Vossen (2011, 183–84) has referred to as a "neo-conservative" strain in the discourse of Geert Wilders' Party for Freedom (PVV) in the Netherlands. Figure 3.7 summarizes the SPD discourse, with "freedom" serving as an additional

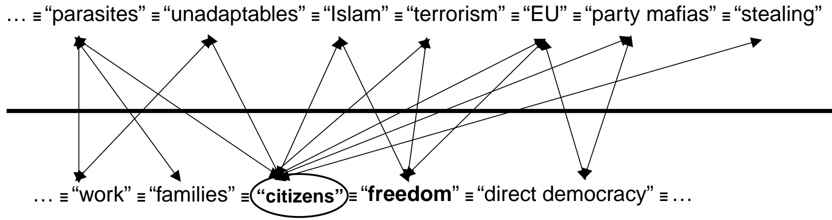

Figure 3.7 Neo-conservative nativist populism of SPD (2017).

nodal point organizing the neo-conservative opposition to "Islam," "terrorism," and "EU," alongside the nativism of "citizens" against "Islam" and "unadaptables" as well as the populism of "citizens" against "party mafias" and "stealing" (with "citizens" being the empty signifier sharing all these contrarieties against elements on the other side).

ANO and SPD as competing populisms (2017)

In the context of the 2017 elections, ANO and SPD constituted competing populist discourses that interpellated each other as part and parcel of the opposing power bloc that the other claims to oppose. Okamura, in his references to ANO and Babiš, emphasized that the latter are no different from the rest of the establishment – or worse, that Babiš is purely looking after his self-enrichment interests as a businessman (in contrariety to the interests of the "citizens"). In an April 2017 interview with the right-wing *Parlamentní listy*, Okamura argued that Babiš had fallen short of his promises:

> I think when you look at Babiš's actual results, namely that the overwhelming majority of citizens don't have more left in the wallet than they did under Kalousek, then we can see he's no political magician or earth-shattering economist. He didn't fulfill the promises he made to the citizens. (Koulová 2017)

Okamura went on to argue that Babiš's entire strategy was predicated on remaining in government in order to enrich his company: "If Babiš were to not be in government, he would of course be in danger of missing out on billions in subsidies for Agrofert and [his] business." In other words:

> without state money and subsidies, he isn't, I think, capable of surviving, so he's going for broke and naturally doing everything to be in government and preferably be prime minister. […] The question is whether this is good for the citizens. I think it isn't. But the citizens should know this. (Koulová 2017)

In the weeks leading up to the elections, following the controversial decision by a ČSSD minister in the outgoing cabinet to sign a memorandum of understanding with an Australian company on lithium extraction, ANO ran newspaper adverts with a picture of a defiant Babiš and the slogan "I will not let the ČSSD steal lithium just like the OKD" (referring to a previous scandal involving ČSSD ministers). SPD, however, responded in an election campaign pamphlet with caricatures of both Babiš and Prime Minister Sobotka as thieves running away with the country's lithium, thus articulating an equivalence between Babiš and the power bloc that he claimed to oppose. Conversely, in an online interview with readers of *Lidové noviny*, Babiš referred to Okamura as a "puppet of godfathers" – the very category that Okamura constructed as the corrupt power bloc – who is in politics just for the money and constitutes "the real threat to democracy":

> The attacks of traditional political parties and the Prague café,[10] which sees in me a threat to democracy, help Okamura, who is in politics as a puppet of godfathers. He is there in order to make money, he is dangerous. He is the real threat to democracy. (Povolební spolupráce? Piráti by nebyli špatní, odepsal Babiš čtenářům 2017)

However, ANO's discursive strategy in relation to SPD was also more complex, combining both formal demarcation and a differential incorporation of demands. In pre-election interviews, Babiš repeatedly ruled out a coalition with SPD and denounced the latter for its "absolutely unreal program," while acknowledging that "we have the same opinion that it's necessary to stop migration, on the accountability of politicians, or on direct democracy… Why not? But that's the only thing" (Leinert and Srnka 2017). Babiš thus sought to rein in the populist – and partly also the nativist – dimensions of SPD's discourse as elements already present on ANO's agenda, while otherwise rejecting SPD as a partner and portraying it as the radical, irresponsible foil to ANO: Okamura, after all, "is trying to spread fear among people, although we do not have and will not have any migrants" (Leinert and Srnka 2017). In the 2017 elections, ANO came first with close to 30% of the vote and SPD fourth with close to 11%; in the months of uncertainty that followed, ANO voted together with SPD on numerous parliamentary committee posts but otherwise avoided rapprochement on the issue of government formation, ultimately preferring to form a coalition with the severely weakened ČSSD with external support from the KSČM. The confidence-and-supply deal with the KSČM, which was immediately controversial for bringing the Communists into a governing arrangement for the first time since 1990, followed a similar logic of differential incorporation on issues such as minimum wage rises and taxation of restituted church property. While the nature of the confidence-and-supply arrangement meant that ANO could largely limit its cooperation with the KSČM to this differential logic of isolated concessions rather than

an equivalential articulation of a common identity, Babiš's controversial reference to the KSČM as a "democratic party" in a July 2018 interview entailed a momentary equivalence with the KSČM in terms of the latter's "state-constructive" behavior and in contrariety to the outright refusal of other parties (especially the ODS) to cooperate. Babiš singled out the ODS for not leaving him with any other choice:

> But the KSČM today is a democratic party. People vote for them, they are in parliament. This situation came about only thanks to the ODS. With them we had 103 votes [out of 200 in parliament].

The KSČM was "democratic," in other words, insofar as it enabled a working majority where other parties such as the ODS failed to do so:

> Everyone says: the oligarch, the big businessman, and the communists. But they behaved in a state-constructive manner and made the formation of the government possible. Why didn't the ODS do this? (Kolář 2018)

Babiš thus interpellated the ODS – the party that had long positioned itself as the guardian of the "post-November" order – as responsible for the dislocation in the anti-communist consensus that had defined the rules of "post-November" party competition, thus deflecting one dislocation (the KSČM partly being in power) with reference to another (the promise of institutional stability that had been eroding since 2006, not least under the ODS's watch).

The liberal populism of the Czech Pirate Party (2013, 2017)

The Czech Pirate Party, founded in 2009, featured a liberal populist discourse in the context of the 2013 and 2017 election campaigns that constructed the "citizens" in terms of an equivalential chain of civil rights and liberties against the "corruption" and "unaccountability" of "politicians." In its 2013 election program, the party referred to the upcoming elections as an opportunity to express "disagreement with the current understanding of politics that is founded on organized corruption, struggle for power, and black funding of political parties by businessmen and interest groups" (Česká pirátská strana 2013). The program called for direct-democratic mechanisms such as referenda, direct elections of the executive at all levels, and recall rights in order to tackle the problem of the "unaccountability of politicians to the citizens" (Česká pirátská strana 2013). Here, the populist construction of "citizens" vs. "politicians" came to the fore, featuring a wide-ranging equivalential chain of "politicians" willfully disregarding the "citizens":

> For example, Foreign Minister Schwarzenberg (TOP 09) had the anti-piracy agreement ACTA signed and the citizens only found out about it from the press statement of the Japanese foreign ministry. MPs of VV, ODS, and ČSSD who have taken part in bribes continue to sit in the Chamber of Deputies. The political party LIDEM does not have any trust from the citizens. (Česká pirátská strana 2013)

On the surface, the Pirate discourse built up a similar populist opposition to that of ANO and Dawn in the same election campaign – "citizens" vs. "politicians" of all stripes – while articulating, much like Dawn, "direct democracy and accountability" as a key demand in these terms. Yet the Pirates differed radically from Dawn in terms of how the collective subject "citizens" was constructed in an equivalential chain with other demands: the signifier "citizens" was articulated in terms of basic civil rights such as "openness" and the "right to information" in contrariety to "corruption," a "free Internet" as opposed to "censorship," and the protection of "privacy" against "surveillance" (Česká pirátská strana 2013). Thus, a liberal populist discourse took shape that interpellated the "citizens" not only against the entrenched power of "politicians" (populism), but also in terms of a host of citizens' rights and freedoms against digitalized forms of control (liberalism) that the "politicians" are pushing through. This discourse constructed the notion of "free Internet" as a space that, above all, has to be protected from encroachments by the state – pointing to a kind of cyber-liberalism, in contrast to what Gerbaudo (2017) refers to as cyber-populism, which sees the Internet as a space for the mass mobilization of a collective subjectivity. In the case of the Czech Pirates, it was specifically the cyber-liberalism of "freedom," "privacy," and "openness" against state controls in a digitalized world that found equivalential expression with a populism of the "citizens" against the "politicians" (whose "unaccountability," in turn, extended well into this sphere of digital rights and freedoms, as with the example of ACTA).

While the Pirates won nearly 3% of the vote in the 2013 elections, its electoral breakthrough and entry into parliament came in 2017, when it won nearly 11% and finished third behind ANO and the ODS. As a still young and extra-parliamentary party, the Pirates once again featured a populist discourse pitting the "citizens" against the entire class of "politicians" that had come before them. The party's continued use of the newness factor came out in chairman Ivan Bartoš's preface to the 2017 election program, which he referred to as a "tough and uncompromising contract with the citizens":

> We are the only party not connected with scandals, corruption, bureaucracy. We have been here for eight years. We defend freedom, bring fresh ideas, and are not afraid to say what we think. Politicians promise the blue from the sky, bright futures, and other empty slogans.

> The Pirates offer clear and concrete goals – black on white. Let us have a go at them! (Česká pirátská strana 2017b)

Asked in a pre-election interview about his coalition preferences, Bartoš emphasized the populist opposition to politicians of all stripes with "a corrupt past" who have pursued their corrupt ways "for 20 years" and alienated the citizens with their unaccountability:

> The second condition is that there will be no people involved who have a corrupt past. […] These are people who've been in politics for 20 years and whose names are connected with big scandals. […] Why is there mistrust in politics? Because these politicians haven't even stepped down after 20 years. (Pokorný and Zahradnická 2017)

The Pirates' election program likewise foregrounded the demand for the "accountability and recallability of politicians" and articulated this in terms of the rights of "citizens" ("The citizen has the right to know how their elected representatives manage public money extracted from the taxes of all of us"), while forming an equivalential chain of citizens' rights such as "freedom" and "privacy" in contrariety to "censorship, limitations on freedom, and suppression of human rights" or digitalization as opposed to "bureaucracy" (Česká pirátská strana 2017b, 3).

The centrality of the populist opposition of "citizens" vs. "politicians" in the context of the party's 2017 election campaign could be seen in the campaign slogan "Let us have a go at them" – "them" being the politicians – as well as a campaign bus painted over with illustrations of five politicians sitting inside as if in a prison: Babiš (with a stork's nest on his head, as *Čapí hnízdo* literally means "stork's nest"), David Rath (ČSSD), outgoing Prime Minister Sobotka (ČSSD), Miroslav Kalousek (TOP 09), and Jana Nagyová holding her puppet, ex-PM Petr Nečas (ODS). This equivalential chain of the corrupt was juxtaposed with an illustration of Bartoš watching over them like a prison warden with a truncheon on his hip. In addition, the Pirates' election campaign broadcast featured clips of Pirate candidates riding the "prison bus" while singing a tune that went as follows:

> They swindled with impunity, they transferred without payment
> Then they got mad that people swindled them […]
> Everyone steals, he said
> He repeated it for four years
> But just did not add
> That he is one of them too (Česká pirátská strana 2017a)

The part with "Everyone steals, he said" was a clear reference to the populist discourse of ANO and Babiš; the corresponding sequence in the video featured a stopover of the Pirate bus next to a roadsign reading "*Čapí*

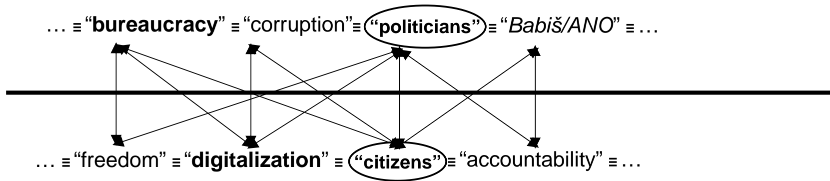

Figure 3.8 Liberal populism of the Pirates (2017).

hnízdo," at which point Jakub Michálek, one of the Pirate candidates, crosses out and replaces the first word so that the sign now reads "subsidy nest" (instead of the literal "stork's nest"). This interpellation of Babiš as part and parcel of the corrupt class of "politicians" pointed to a *counter-populist* strategy: the populism of the Pirate Party sought to dislocate the established populist discourse of ANO by constructing an equivalence between the latter and the very power bloc that ANO and Babiš claimed to oppose ("he is one of them too"). Unlike with the competing populisms of ANO and SPD, however, the discourse of ANO did not respond in kind with an equivalential construction of the Pirates' identity with the corrupt power bloc; indeed, Babiš affirmed in pre-election interviews that he would be amenable to a coalition with the Pirates. Bartoš, by contrast, categorically rejected any talks with ANO in its current form led by Babiš:

> ANO without Andrej Babiš is not ANO. If you can imagine a functional ANO from which Babiš, Jaroslav Faltýnek, and all employees of Agrofert depart, I would talk with such an ANO. (Pokorný and Zahradnická 2017)

Figure 3.8 illustrates the Pirate discourse, with "citizens" functioning as an empty signifier organizing the opposition to "politicians" and all the ills for which the latter are responsible, while "politicians" functions as an empty signifier on the opposing side blocking the realization of each demand. The counter-populist dimension consists in turning the identity of Babiš and ANO into a floating signifier (in italics) belonging to the corrupt "politicians" side of the frontier, in contrast to ANO's own discourse situating the identity of Babiš and ANO firmly on the "people" side.

Conclusion and summary

This chapter presented an analysis of populist discourses in the Czech party system, tracing their emergence in the context of hegemonic processes of producing ("post-November") social order. The chapter began with a brief exploration of constructions of the popular in the Czech lands before 1989 and worked its way from there to an analysis of the institutionalist and

distinctly non-populist discourse of Václav Havel and the Civic Forum that inaugurated the "post-November" imaginary as a movement toward a horizon of "Europe," "democracy," and "market economy." Subsequent Czech party politics played out within the framework of a "post-November" hegemonic formation insofar as competing party discourses positioned themselves within this common horizon as differential ("left" or "right") variations of "post-November" transformation – with the early exception of the Republicans (SPR-RSČ), who articulated an anti-communist nationalist populism that fundamentally questioned the imagined break of November '89 and alleged that the Communist Party (KSČ) and those who succeeded them were part of the same power bloc of old forces bent on "liquidating" and "selling off" the nation. With the exception of SPR-RSČ (and its short-lived populism) and KSČM, a context of largely differential and non-antagonistic party competition took hold, which was capped by the fact that the largest parties in parliament opted to override left/right divisions in the interest of reproducing institutional stability, as evidenced by the Opposition Agreements of 1996 and 1998. The protracted breakdowns in this hegemonic stability starting in 2006 gave rise to dislocations from which populist challenges would subsequently emerge, pitting the "people" or "citizens" against the "politicians" or "parties" of both "left" and "right" and their perceived inability to deliver on the promises of "post-November" transformation. A common theme in the populist discourses of Public Affairs (VV), ANO, Dawn of Direct Democracy, Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD), and the Czech Pirate Party is the construction of a monolithic power bloc encompassing the entire class of established "parties," "politicians," "political dinosaurs," or "godfather party mafias" who have merely taken turns in power since '89 and are collectively responsible for corruption, stealing, and mismanagement of the state.

Beyond this, however, a dynamic struggle over the construction of the "people" or the "citizens" characterizes the period starting in 2010; Table 3.1 summarizes the different types of populist discourse in terms of their constructions of the popular subject. From both a diachronic and a synchronic perspective, a certain radicalizing dynamic can be observed in the populist discourses in relation to each other. While VV articulated an opposition to "political dinosaurs" coupled with the promise to dismantle shady links between politics and business even in spite of its own identity as a businessman-sponsored project (albeit one occupying an outsider position, according to Bárta), the April 2011 revelations about Bárta's "Strategy 2009–2014" constituted a massive dislocation that fed into Babiš's and ANO's subsequent construction of an antagonistic frontier against *all* "politicians" and "parties" (including professed newcomers such as Bárta), coupled with the promise that only the successful businessman Babiš possessed the managerial competence and immunity from corruption for properly representing the "people" against the "politicians" (this being the specifically

Table 3.1 Summary of populist discourses in the Czech Republic

Party	*Type of discourse (time frame)*	*Construction of popular subject*
SPR-RSČ	Anti-communist nationalist populism (1990–92)	"early elections" ≡ "will of the majority" ≡ "simple people" ≡ "Subcarpathian Ruthenia" ***vs.***"November 1989" ≡ "communists and their cooperators" ≡ "liquidation of the nation" ≡ "selling off of national property"
VV	Centrist populism (2010)	"centrism" ≡ "people" (*lidé*) ≡ "direct democracy" ***vs.*** "left" ≡ "right" ≡ "political dinosaurs" ≡ "corruption" ≡ "scroungers" ≡ "unadaptables"
ANO	Centrist entrepreneur populism (2011–13)	"hard work" ≡ "people" (*lidé*) ≡ "businessman" ≡ "state as a firm" ***vs.*** "parties" ≡ "politicians" ≡ "stealing" ≡ "incompetence"
ANO	Centrist populism of "hard work" in power (2014–present)	"hard work" ≡ "people" (*lidé*) ≡ "state as a family" ***vs.*** "traditional parties" ≡ "traditional politicians" ≡ "stealing" ≡ "incompetence"
Dawn	Neo-liberal nativist populism (2013)	"work" ≡ "citizens" ≡ "direct democracy" ***vs.*** "unadaptables" ≡ "immigrants" ≡ "godfather party mafias" ≡ "stealing" ≡ "inefficiency"
SPD	Neo-conservative nativist populism (2017)	"work" ≡ "citizens" ≡ "families" ≡ "freedom" ≡ "direct democracy" ***vs.***"parasites" ≡ "unadaptables" ≡ "Islam" ≡ "terrorism" ≡ "EU" ≡ "godfather party mafias" ≡ "stealing"
Pirates	Liberal populism (2013, 2017)	"freedom" ≡ "digitalization" ≡ "citizens" ≡ "accountability" ***vs.*** "bureaucracy" ≡ "corruption" ≡ "politicians" ≡ "Babiš/ANO"

entrepreneur populism of ANO). Similarly in the 2013 elections, the discourse of Dawn took up the notion of "godfather party mafias" that had been floating in the discursive space since 2009 at the latest; the Pirates, on the other hand, likewise declared their opposition to the entire class of "politicians" that had come before them, while linking this to a cyber-liberal discourse of digital rights and freedoms. With ANO's entry into government and the *Čapí hnízdo* affair, Babiš used the allegations against him to reproduce his populism in government against an opposing power bloc supposedly trying to destroy him because of his opposition to "traditional politicians"; at the same time, SPD and the Pirates took up *Čapí hnízdo* and other corruption

allegations to extend their populist construction of the corrupt power bloc to include Babiš. What can thus be seen is an intensifying dynamic from the mid-2010s onwards (following ANO's entry into government), culminating in the competing populisms of ANO and SPD, which interpellate each other as part and parcel of the power bloc that the other claims to oppose, and the counter-populism of the Pirates that seeks to dislocate the dominant populism of ANO by interpellating the latter as part of the same corrupt power bloc.

Another important result of the analysis is that while all of these post-2010 populist discourses articulate a direct challenge to the "post-November" hegemonic formation and its largely differential and non-antagonistic logic of left/right party competition, they also selectively take up and indeed radicalize elements of established party discourses. A key element of the discourses of the ODS and the ČSSD in the 1990s and early 2000s was the exclusionary construction of "hardworking, enterprising, and responsible individuals" as well as "honest work," respectively; all subsequent populist discourses radicalized the notion of "honest work" by extending the exclusionary scope onto an entire class of "politicians" that steals and accumulates ill-gotten gains, while the populism of ANO specifically took up the notion of "hard work" and the entrepreneurial ability of Babiš in contrariety to the "politicians" and their mismanagement of the state – without, however, adopting the ODS's neo-liberal construction of a small, low-tax state. In addition, the discourses of VV, Dawn, and SPD feature a combination of hyper-neoliberal welfare chauvinism and anti-minorities illiberalism that takes up the stigmatization of "scroungers" and "unadaptables" from the ODS's exclusionary construction of "hardworking, enterprising, and responsible individuals," while extending the exclusionary scope to encompass entire minority groups such as the Roma, or indeed foreign immigrants (Dawn) and Islam in its entirety (SPD).

Finally, Table 3.2 summarizes the source material used for the analysis of each populist discourse. The selection of source material reflects differences in the performativity of each discourse: the Republicans pursued what Hanley (2012, 70) referred to as a "strategy of outrageous headline grabbing protest stunts," in which Sládek's speeches at party-organized protest rallies were an important form of discursive practice, whereas Babiš declared in a 2011 interview shortly after ANO's founding that "we will not be calling for demonstrations. We will now start working normally" (Rychlík 2011). Indeed, a pattern that can be observed across the post-2010 populist discourses is their reliance on leaders' presence in the media to get their messages through, which is reflected in the extensive use of media interviews for the analysis. In addition to examining election programs and campaign material for each party, the analysis also incorporates the 2017 campaign broadcast and bus livery of the Pirate Party, which constituted a highly visible (and indeed controversial) form of populist messaging in the election context.

Table 3.2 Summary of source material used

Party	*Source (year)*
SPR-RSČ	Founding congress speech by Miroslav Sládek (1990)
	Protest rally speech by Miroslav Sládek in Prague (1991)
	Parliamentary election campaign leaflet (1992)
	Parliamentary election program (1996)
VV	Parliamentary election program (2010)
	Parliamentary election campaign billboard (2010)
	Parliamentary election campaign broadcast (2010)
	Pre-election interview with Radek John (2010)
	Pre-election interview with Vít Bárta (2010)
	Post-election interview with Radek John (2010)
ANO	Founding declaration (2011)
	Interview with Andrej Babiš (2011)
	Parliamentary election program (2013)
	Parliamentary election campaign billboard (2013)
	Pre-election interview with Andrej Babiš (2013)
	Parliamentary election campaign rally speech by Andrej Babiš in Plzeň (2013)
	Interviews with Andrej Babiš (2014, 2015)
	Parliament speeches by Andrej Babiš (2016)
	Parliamentary election program (2017)
	Parliamentary election campaign billboard (2017)
	Parliamentary election campaign monograph by Andrej Babiš (2017)
	Pre-election interviews with Andrej Babiš (2017, 2017)
	Parliament speeches by Andrej Babiš (2018)
	Interview with Andrej Babiš (2018)
Dawn	Parliamentary election program (2013)
	Election campaign billboards (2013, 2014)
	Petition (2014)
SPD	Press releases (2015, 2015)
	Parliamentary election program (2017)
	Parliamentary election campaign pamphlet (2017)
	Pre-election interviews with Tomio Okamura (2017, 2017)
Pirates	Parliamentary election program (2013)
	Parliamentary election program (2017)
	Pre-election interview with Ivan Bartoš (2017)
	Parliamentary election campaign broadcast (2017)
	Parliamentary election campaign billboards and bus design (2017)

Notes

1 From the April 1968 "Action Program": "Enterprises facing a demanding market must be given freedom of decision on all questions directly concerning the direction of the enterprise and its management and must be allowed to react creatively to the needs of the market" (Komunistická strana Československa 1968).

2 Elections took place simultaneously to the Czech, Slovak, and federal parliaments within the framework of the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic established in April 1990.

3 This seems to be a misprint in the original transcription (or a slip of the tongue during the speech), which reads "*lokty*" (elbows); what is probably meant is "*loutky*" (puppets).

4 I have opted for the somewhat clunky translation "cooperators" in order to distinguish from "collaborators" (which has more specific connotations with the Nazi occupation) and to make clear that Sládek is not using the term "*kolaboranti*," but rather "*spolupracovníci*."

5 The explanations offered in the literature for the demise of the SPR-RSČ tend to emphasize the scandals that emerged ahead of the 1998 elections regarding Sládek's nepotism and embezzlement of party funds as well as voter migration to Miloš Zeman's ascendant Social Democrats (Hanley 2012, 71–72). The party was re-branded in 2001 (as the Republicans of Miroslav Sládek) and disbanded in 2013, but then re-established under Sládek's leadership in 2016, contesting the 2017 parliamentary elections in which it won a meager 0.2% of the vote.

6 The OH fell short of the 5% threshold in the 1992 elections and eventually disbanded in 1996. Numerous prominent figures of the OH eventually left for other parties, such as Miloš Zeman to the Social Democrats (ahead of the 1992 elections) and Petr Pithart to the Christian Democrats (after 1996).

7 The notion of post-November transformation as a hegemonic formation is similar to what Palonen (2009) refers to as "bipolar hegemony" in the context of post-1989 Hungary, but with an important difference: while Palonen similarly speaks of a "system of dual consensus" sustained by the dualism of Socialist Party vs. Fidesz, she also notes that this was an *antagonistic* bipolarity characterized by the lack of a common discursive terrain, all the way up to fundamentally conflicting notions of what the boundaries of "the homeland" or "the nation" are – which differs from the understanding here of a hegemonic formation sustained by a common horizon of carrying through the imagined break of November 1989 and defusing antagonisms into differences.

8 This government collapse was followed by President Miloš Zeman's appointment of a caretaker government of independents headed by his preferred candidate for prime minister, Jiří Rusnok, which then lost the vote of confidence in August 2013 – the second such occurrence following Topolánek's defeat in 2006 – leading to the dissolution of parliament and early elections.

9 The rump VV did not even contest the 2013 elections, while a handful of LIDEM politicians unsuccessfully stood on the lists of the likewise marginal Freeholder Party. Bárta, on the other hand, joined Tomio Okamura's Dawn of Direct Democracy.

10 The notion of "Prague café," popularized by Miloš Zeman during his presidency, is a stereotypical reference to groups of urban intellectuals (café-goers, hence the name) with broadly liberal viewpoints. It is debatable to what extent this corresponds to a populist construction of a power bloc; in a 2016 interview with *Parlamentní listy*, in which he gave one of his more detailed elaborations of the concept, Zeman referred to the "Prague café" as "a group of people who are disappointed with fate […] people who were something at some point, occupied certain functions, then fate spit them out […] they are frustrated people who issue various manifestos and their misfortune is that no one – except friendly media – reads these manifestos anymore" (Žantovský 2016).

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4 Populism in Hungary

Introduction

Populism in Hungary emerges in the 1990s as a secondary feature of the primarily nationalist discourses of the Hungarian Justice and Life Party (MIÉP) and Fidesz (following the latter's post-1994 nationalist turn). In both cases, populism is articulated largely internally to nationalism insofar as an underdog "nation" is pitted against a specifically anti-"national" or "foreign"-like elite. The populist nationalisms of the MIÉP and Fidesz during this phase are firmly situated within an ethno-national imaginary of the "system change," as encapsulated by Prime Minister József Antall's (MDF) claim to represent both the "country of 10 million" and the community of "15 million Hungarians." Fidesz, beginning in the mid-1990s, stakes out a hegemonic positioning within the national-conservative right by incorporating this imaginary into a nationalist discourse of "civic Hungary," also featuring moments of populist nationalism directed against a "foreign"-like government ahead of the 1998 and after the 2002 elections. Populism only becomes the main feature of Fidesz's discourse in 2006, however, in the form of a national-conservative social populism directed against "luxury politics" beginning in the pre-election context and intensifying in opposition to the "new aristocracy" in the context of the MSZP-SZDSZ government's post-election austerity measures. Ahead of the 2010 elections, however, Fidesz shifts gears onto the institutionalist promise of a new era of harmony between the nation and its government, which it proceeds to enact in an authoritarian manner after winning a two-thirds constitutional majority. Populism once again emerges as a secondary element to illiberalism, nationalism, and nativism in a more militant phase of Fidesz's discourse inaugurated by the 2014 "illiberal state" speech, continuing into the "migrant crisis" and the "Stop Soros" campaign. In this context, populism is also taken up most notably in the challenger discourse of Jobbik, which is predominantly nationalist since the party founding in 2003 but takes on primarily populist iterations in the contexts of the 2010, 2014, and 2018 election campaigns. The 2018 election campaign also features a left-wing populist challenge in the form of the Dialogue for Hungary – Hungarian Socialist Party (PM-MSZP) alliance led by Gergely Karácsony.

This chapter begins with a brief historical background of populism in Hungary before 1989 with targeted snapshots of how popular signifiers emerged as categories of mass politics, especially in the context of the imagined breaks of 1848, 1956, and 1989 as key moments in the formation of a national imaginary. The analysis then works its way to the discursive terrain of party competition inaugurated by the "system change" (*rendszerváltás*) of 1989/90 and the divisions that emerge around Antall's inaugural promise of national redemption for the unredeemed community of "Hungarianhood" (*magyarság*). It is from this terrain that the populist nationalisms of the MIÉP – founded by the radical ethno-nationalist wing of the Antall-led Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) – and Fidesz subsequently emerge. Embedded into this account, in turn, is a detailed analysis of Fidesz's social-populist turn; the post-2010 "System of National Cooperation" as a hegemonic reordering around Fidesz's exclusive claim to represent the nation and enact the dislocated promise of ethno-national redemption; the emergence of Jobbik and its shifting iterations of nationalism and populism; and, finally, the short-lived left-wing populism of PM-MSZP in the context of the 2018 elections.

Historical background: the saga of "the people" between 1848, 1956, and 1989

With the emergence of a Hungarian national imaginary in the 19th century – including the 1848 Revolution as a defining moment of this process – populism already made its appearance as a secondary feature of nationalist discourses pitting an underdog "nation" (*nemzet*) against foreign powers. The "12 Points," a list of demands adopted by revolutionaries gathered in central Budapest on March 15, 1848, featured the title "What the Hungarian nation wants," followed by a series of demands for civil rights ("freedom of the press, abolition of censorship," freeing of "political prisoners") and the formation of "national" institutions ("chief ministry in Buda-Pest," "national army," "national bank"), including the demand that "our Hungarian soldiers are not to be taken abroad [and] foreign ones are to be taken out of our country" (A 12 pont, avagy "Mit kíván a magyar nemzet" 1848). The declaration inscribed itself in the language of democratic revolution – closing with the triad "Equality, freedom, fraternity!" – while interpellating "the nation" as the central subject of this democracy in contrariety to "foreign" control. This democratic nationalism, while emphasizing ethnic difference in calling for the unification of the Hungarian-populated lands, also appealed to the generalizable sovereign rights of "peoples," even taking on a populist inflection – albeit one articulated internally to the contrariety of "nation" vs. "foreign" – insofar as it pitted an oppressed "nation" against foreign oppressors. This populist element could likewise be seen in the "Declaration of independence of the Hungarian nation," written by Lajos Kossuth and adopted by the National Assembly of the short-lived Hungarian State in April 1849, which referred to the Hungarian nation as a "people of

fifteen million" (i.e. the entire population of the Kingdom of Hungary, not just ethnic Hungarians) fighting for "people's freedom" (*népszabadság*) against the oppressive rule of "the Habsburg-Lothringen house in Hungary" (A magyar nemzet függetlenségi nyilatkozata 1849).[1] While the revolution itself was soon crushed by Austro-Russian military force, the so-called Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867 entailed a differential incorporation of the (populist-inflected) nationalist demand for the sovereign unification of the Hungarian-populated lands by turning the Kingdom of Hungary into a semi-sovereign entity encompassing a much larger territory. However, the trauma of Trianon – the 1920 treaty that reduced the newly independent Hungarian state into a fragment of the post-1867 territory of the Hungarian crown and separated it from over three million Hungarian speakers – meant that the ethno-national imaginary of "Hungarianhood" (*magyarság*) as an ethnically defined community transcending state borders took on a redemptive twist and, indeed, would return to the fore in the context of the "system change" of 1989/90.

In the context of post-1920 Hungary, the so-called "popular writers" (*népi írók*) movement of the 1920s and 30s brought to the fore the notion of a "popular" identity articulated beyond a purely "national" vs. "foreign" opposition. Broadly speaking, the "popular writers" were characterized by interest in the social problems of the countryside as well as peasant culture as the true source of national identity (Bozóki 2015, 280–81). In a 1932 essay, leading "popular writer" Géza Féja articulated a "popular" (*népi*) notion of nationhood in contrariety to the "aristocratic" (*úri*) or "noble" (*nemes*) one represented by the likes of Kossuth and his successors, including (by implication) the ongoing era of Miklós Horthy's regency. Arguing that "[t]he era of 'aristocratic Hungarianhood' [*úri magyarság*] has failed" and that "Hungarian aristocratic thought has, unfortunately, meant anti-democratic thought from 1867 onwards," Féja (1990, 7–8) defined "popular thought" as follows:

> Our popular thought not only means that we want to solve the burning social questions, […] but, above all, that we want to give a new face, a new orientation to all of national life. […] The present historical breakthrough of the Hungarian peasantry means the breakthrough of labor and production thought as opposed to the aristocratic past, its privileges and narrowly set boundaries. It is the more universal, cleaner life face, therefore it is the true "great Hungarian" thought. (Féja 1990, 8)

"Popular thought," in other words, firmly situated itself within the national imaginary of society as an irreducibly "national" community, while articulating this "national" identity in terms of the peasantry as constituting the true "people." Bozóki (2015, 280) sums it up as follows: "To the *népi* movement, peasantry meant the people, and the people must be identical with the nation." The *népi* discourse was thus also characterized by a tension

between a populist appeal to an underdog subject whose fate has been "sacrifice, bloodshed, and sweat" in contrariety to the "ruling classes" (Féja 1990, 8), and a class reductionism that inscribed in the subject position of the peasantry alone (as opposed to the likes of "the proletariat") the only possible source of "popular" and "national" identity.

After the end of World War II, the Soviet-backed Hungarian Communist Party (MKP) thus faced the special challenge of legitimizing its takeover in a context in which "popular" signifiers had come to be strongly associated with agrarian rather than industrial working-class identity. In the 1945 parliamentary elections – arguably the first free elections in Hungary's history and the last until 1990 – the Independent Smallholders Party (FKGP) won a landslide with 57% of the vote, well ahead of the Social Democrats (MSZDP) and Communists (MKP) at around 17% each. In this context, the MKP pursued "salami tactics" – a phrase expressly coined for this purpose by MKP leader Mátyás Rákosi – by sowing divisions within the FKGP, accusing parts of the latter of "fascist" tendencies, while using its control of the Interior Ministry in the FKGP-led coalition government to harass political opponents. This combination of direct repression and a differential logic of divide and conquer succeeded in provoking a split within the FKGP ahead of the 1947 elections, in which the MKP (with the help of widespread rigging) emerged as the largest party, eventually assuming solitary control of the government by 1949. In contrast to the February 1948 coup in Czechoslovakia, therefore, the Communist takeover in Hungary did not condense into a singular moment of imagined break, in which the party leader standing in front of a massed crowd laid out the antagonistic frontier for all to see, but rather took the form of a more creeping differential process. By 1948, the MKP had reconstituted itself as the Hungarian Working People's Party (MDP) following a formal (but largely one-sided) merger with the MSZDP; the signifier "working [people]" (*dolgozók*), which featured in the name of the new party and was broad enough to encompass industrial workers and peasants alike (compared to the more proletarian-connoted *munkások*), became the standard interpellation in the discourse of the one-party state.

Rákosi, like Gottwald in Czechoslovakia, inaugurated his rule with a wave of purges; shortly after Rákosi's removal in the wake of Nikita Khrushchev's "secret speech" of 1956, however, the first major dislocation in the reproduction of one-party rule emerged in the form of the 1956 Revolution. On October 22, 1956 a group of students took part in an anti-Soviet protest in Budapest in support of "16 Points," which featured an equivalential articulation of demands for civil rights ("universal, equal, free elections," "[c]omplete freedom of opinion, speech, and press"), economic reforms ("reorganization of all of Hungarian economic life"), and "national" independence (the very first point being "the immediate withdrawal of all Soviet troops") in common contrariety against "the Stalinist Rákosi era," demanding that "every criminal leader of the Stalinist Rákosi era is to

be dismissed" and replaced by a government led by MDP reformist Imre Nagy (A műegyetemisták 16 pontja 1956). As violence erupted in Budapest and across the country in response to police crackdowns against the initially peaceful demonstrations, the government resigned and Nagy took over as first secretary. Nagy initially moved to differentially incorporate the protest demands by promising to negotiate "the withdrawal of Soviet troops stationed in Hungary" while, at the same time, denouncing the "armed attack against the order of our people's republic" by "[s]mall numbers of counter-revolutionary instigators" (October 25 radio speech; Nagy 1956b). By October 30, however, he had equivalentially embraced the uprising as a "national democratic movement encompassing and linking into one our entire people" (October 28 radio speech; Nagy 1956c) and declared an end to "the one-party system" in favor of the "democratic cooperation of the coalition parties reborn in 1945" (October 30 radio speech; Nagy 1956a). The discourse of the short-lived Nagy government thus culminated in a democratic populist attempt to re-institute the People's Republic in the name of the entire "people" against an authoritarian "system." It was at this juncture that the Soviet Union decided to intervene militarily; János Kádár, a member of the Nagy government who had led the formation of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (MSZMP) as the successor formation to the MDP, defected amid the Soviet invasion and declared a "Hungarian Revolutionary Worker-Peasant Government" on November 4. The new government issued a declaration summarizing its program in fifteen points, including the following:

> 1. The securing of our national independence and our country's sovereignty. 2. The defense of our popular democratic and socialist system against every attack. […] 3. The ending of the fratricide and the restoration of order and internal peace. […] 6. A rapid and significant increase in the living standards of working people [*dolgozók*] – especially the working class [*munkásosztály*]. […] 7. Modification of the five-year plan and change in the method of economic management. […] 15. After the restoration of order and calm, the Hungarian government will begin negotiations with the Soviet government and the other participants of the Warsaw Pact on the withdrawal of Soviet troops from the territory of Hungary. (A Kádár-kormány felhívása 1993)

Kádár's post-1956 order instituted itself with this double movement of committing to the "popular democratic and socialist system" in contrariety to "counter-revolutionary" forces while differentially co-opting the revolution's demands for "national independence" and economic reforms in particular.[2] A period of post-revolutionary repressions (1956–62) saw the dimension of equivalential defense of the system against its opponents come to the fore, while the subsequent period of what came to be known as "Goulash Communism" relied on a distinctly non-antagonistic mode of

governance sustained by the differential incorporation of demands, including relatively high levels of openness to market mechanisms (under the "New Economic Mechanism" introduced in 1968) as well as cultural and political pluralism, which could even serve as a differential national identity (as "the happiest barrack") within the Soviet bloc. Emblematic of this approach was Kádár's notion that "whoever is not against us is with us"; in a December 1961 speech to the national council of the Patriotic People's Front, Kádár (1961) noted that "Western commentators" like to claim that "the Rákosiites used to say: whoever is not with us is against us; these Kádárites say, whoever is not against us is with us." Kádár then embraced this attribution in the following terms:

> I stand by this with complete calm and claim that I, for example, consider that whoever is not against the Hungarian People's Republic is with it; whoever is not against the MSZMP is, indeed, with it; and whoever is not against the popular front is with it. (Kádár 1961)

The notion that "whoever is not against us is with us" came to summarize the *modus operandi* of Kádárite institutionalism of generating permissive consensus via differential incorporation of demands for economic prosperity and national independence in particular.

By the late 1980s, however, even Kádárite institutionalism had run into dislocations, with increasing talk of a "crisis" of social, economic, and (not least) national life. The so-called Lakitelek meeting of September 1987, featuring nationalist-minded dissident intellectuals but also the prominent MSZMP reformist Imre Pozsgay, brought together some 150 members of "Hungarian spiritual life" in the Great Plain village of Lakitelek. The Lakitelek Declaration, adopted by the participants at the end of the one-day meeting, opened with a diagnosis of "crisis" articulated in the ethnicized terms of "Hungarianhood" (*magyarság*) and the "Hungarian ethnicity" losing its capacity to hold together:

> Hungarianhood [*magyarság*] has drifted into a serious crisis in its history. It is broken in its popular-movement force, it is shaken in its self-belief and togetherness, its links of cohesion have tragically loosened, its self-awareness is appallingly deficient. […] The Hungarian ethnicity is afflicted with an unprecedented fragmentation. Our nation does not have a jointly viable vision. (Agócs and Medvigy 1991 Agócs 1991., 177)

The declaration went on to identify a "socio-economic crisis" tied to an equivalential chain of ills: "the failure of the political system of institutions, of democracy, the deepening problems of public ethics, the worrying symptoms of public education, of cultural life" (Agócs 1991. Agócs and Medvigy 1991, 177). The declaration thus pointed to dislocations in the regime's ability to reproduce social order, while foregrounding "Hungarianhood" as the

unredeemed collective subject in contrariety to these various ills. At the same time, the declaration remained largely within the discursive terrain of Kádárite institutionalism, refraining from demands for a change in political leadership or system; instead, the document called for "the formation of the Hungarian Democratic Forum, which would be a stage for continuous and public dialogue" characterized by a broadly "democratic and national orientation" and geared toward the "cooperation of people of different worldviews and party standings" (Agócs 1991. Agócs and Medvigy 1991, 177–78).

The Lakitelek Declaration, while not directly challenging the one-party regime, signaled the beginnings of a breakdown in the hegemonic stability of Kádárite institutionalism as the dislocations soon snowballed. To begin with, the MSZMP leadership decided to force Kádár into retirement in early 1988, removing the symbolic figurehead of the post-1956 order; in addition, the founding of the MDF was soon followed by other formations, such as: Fidesz – Alliance of Young Democrats, founded in March 1988 by a group of liberal student activists from one of Eötvös Loránd University's residential colleges; the Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ), established in November 1988 by a group of liberal dissident intellectuals informally known as the "Democratic Opposition"; and the Independent Smallholders (FKGP), reconstituted as an independent party in November 1988. A mass demonstration on March 15, 1989, took place in support of "12 Points" (taking the name of the declaration made on that day in 1848), demanding in particular an expansion of popular sovereignty and individual rights in contrariety to the system in place ("[t]rue representation of the people and a multi-party system," "[r]ule-of-law state instead of a police state," "[f] reedom of speech, press, conscience, and education") (Diószegi-Horváth 2019). Soon after, an "Opposition Round Table" was formed and took part in Round Table negotiations with the MSZMP on institutional reforms; the talks produced a series of compromise results, including a unicameral parliamentary system with multi-party elections in 1990, a half-majoritarian and half-proportional electoral system, and an altered constitution that could be changed in future by a two-thirds parliamentary majority. The differentially co-opted nature of this process – with the MSZMP leadership initiating the changes while still in power, rather than being forced out by mass demonstrations – suggested a potential for subsequent challenger discourses claiming an incomplete or unredeemed transition (as will be seen in later sections).

A key event in the midst of all this was the reburial of Imre Nagy in Budapest in June 1989 following his posthumous rehabilitation. The reburial, attended by an estimated 200,000 people, arguably constituted one of the few moments in which the imagined break of '89, which came to be known as the "system change" (*rendszerváltás*), condensed into a single event. One of the speakers on the program was a young Viktor Orbán, founding member of Fidesz and recent law graduate who had written his

thesis on Gramsci's theory of hegemony. Orbán momentarily captured the public spotlight by using the occasion of Nagy's reburial to openly demand "an end to the communist dictatorship" and "the withdrawal of Russian forces" from the country as a consummation of the unfulfilled demands of the 1956 Revolution:

> Today, 33 years after the Hungarian Revolution and 31 years after the execution of the last sitting Hungarian prime minister, we have the chance to attain by peaceful means all that the '56 revolutionaries obtained in bloody struggle, if only for some days, for the Hungarian nation. If we believe in our own power, we are capable of bringing an end to the communist dictatorship; if we are determined enough, we can bring the ruling party to submit itself to free elections. If we do not miss the ideas of '56 before our eyes, we can elect a government that will immediately begin negotiations on the speedy initiation of the withdrawal of Russian forces. (Orbán 1989)

Orbán thus sought to hegemonize the disparate demands for change by articulating the moment of equivalential break with the regime framework as such, articulating one of the main demands of '56 ("the withdrawal of Russian forces") as a dislocated one in the present. At the same time, Orbán's speech was characterized by a tension – a characteristic one for Fidesz at the time, a youth party with a maximum age limit of 35 for members – between the interpellation of "the Hungarian nation" as collective subject and the more particular identification with "we, the youth." Indeed, another well-remembered part of Orbán's speech referred to a specifically generational experience of a future stolen by the crushing of the 1956 Revolution ("in 1956, the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party took from us – today's youth – our future"). In this context, Fidesz would not emerge for the time being as the main political force laying claim to the "system change," but it had made an early intervention in the constitution of the post-1989 imaginary that would be taken up again years later.

"Hungarianhood" (*magyarság*) vs. "Hungary" (*Magyarország*): the divided imaginary of the "system change"

"The prime minister of 15 million Hungarians": the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) between institutionalism and populist nationalism (1990–93)

The 1990 parliamentary elections produced a coalition government of the MDF (with 24.7% of the party list vote), the FKGP (11.7%), and the Christian Democratic People's Party (KDNP; 6.5%), with MDF chairman József Antall as prime minister. This was a coalition of parties invoking "national" and "Christian" values, with varying accents: the FKGP,

recalling its historical roots, defined itself as both a "party of the entire nation" and the "party of the Hungarian countryside, the Hungarian village, Hungarian agriculture based on private property, and the Hungarian peasantry" (Független Kisgazda, Földmunkás és Polgári Párt 1990, 501), while the KDNP defined itself as a party of "Christian worldview and Christian approach to society" (Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt 1990, 511). The MDF, for its part, had campaigned with a broad appeal to "change" in contrariety to the "crisis" in the country, articulating this objective in the following terms in its election program: "that our people [*népünk*] shake off the remains of Stalinist tyranny and that the rebirth of our nation [*nemzetünk*] take place without catastrophe" (Magyar Demokrata Forum 1990, 520). The MDF's discourse at this juncture thus articulated the demand for change in terms of national revival (reminiscent of Lakitelek), but also a rather weak opposition between the "people" and "the remains" of authoritarian rule in a context in which far-reaching democratic reforms had already been enacted at the negotiating table and embraced by the ruling party and its successor formation (Hungarian Socialist Party, MSZP) taking part in the same elections. In his inaugural speech as prime minister-elect in parliament in May 1990, Antall invoked "the Hungarian people" as the legitimizing instance for the new government:

> The parliament freely elected by the Hungarian people for the first time in 43 years now inaugurates a government. The government, therefore – if I receive confidence from the National Assembly and the government receives confidence – will truly be a government of the Hungarian people. […] I now therefore turn from this place to the Hungarian people: may it rid itself of its decades-old, centuries-old habits of mistrust [and] regard the institutions as its own, which function in its interests, defense, and service. May the Hungarian people thus stand with confidence and criticism behind its new state, National Assembly, and government. (Antall 1994, 43–44)

Antall thus articulated an institutionalist notion – reminiscent of Havel in Czechoslovakia – of a government that has come over to the side of the people with the end of one-party rule. This redefining of the relation between the governing and the governed emerged, in turn, from the imagined break of the "system change" as a partial fixation of meaning around a series of demands; in particular, Antall (1994, 44–45, 47) articulated this break in terms of the objective of a "social market economy" in contrariety to the "43 years of the so-called socialist planned economy" as well as "democracy, pluralism, openness" in contrariety to the "totalitarian one-party system." Yet the MDF chairman equivalentially linked the meaning of the "system change" not only to these demands for market reforms and political democratization (prominently articulated in '56 and then differentially co-opted by the Kádár system), but also to an ethno-nationalist commitment to "Hungarianhood"

(*magyarság*). Antall (1994, 64) went on to declare that the new state carries a "special responsibility" for the maintenance of this "cultural and ethnic community":

> In view of the fact that a third of Hungarianhood lives outside our borders, support for maintaining the Hungarian nation as a cultural and ethnic community everywhere is a special responsibility of the Hungarian state.

At the June 1990 MDF congress, Antall made his widely quoted remark: "As much as the prime minister of this country of 10 million, I would like to be the prime minister of 15 million Hungarians in spirit." The newly elected prime minister thus lent expression to an ethno-national imaginary of the "system change" as a movement toward not only democracy and market economy, but also something like national redemption for the ethnically defined community of "Hungarianhood" – a process whereby the entire community of "15 million" transcending state borders would find proper representation in the Hungarian state for the very first time.

Antall, however, made this gesture to "Hungarianhood" while not pitting it against national Others such as the Romanians or Slovaks; in his characteristically statesman-like manner, Antall simultaneously emphasized the need for cordial relations with "neighboring countries" and "neighboring peoples" in his inaugural speech. In line with the institutionalist notion of the government returning to the side of the people, the MDF-led government thus sought to differentially incorporate an ethno-national dimension into the founding promise of the "system change" while reining in the antagonistic implications of the claim to a community of "15 million" transcending state borders. In this context, it did not take long for a challenger discourse to emerge that would radicalize the demand for ethno-national redemption as part of a wider narrative of unredeemed transition. In August 1992, MDF politician (and Lakitelek participant) István Csurka wrote a lengthy essay titled "Some thoughts in connection with the two years since the system change and the MDF's new program." In his text, Csurka (1992) criticized the "improvised" nature of the transition and the MDF's underestimation of the fact that "it is only possible to climb out of the putrid gorge of goulash communism onto the pinnacle of the new free, independent life by powerful collective effort." Even with the MDF's 1990 election victory, according to Csurka (1992), all the powers-that-be were stacked against the new government: to begin with, the latter "gave away the press and the media […] to the forces opposing it"; the "Hungarian financial sphere" was characterized by "preservation, smoothness, and the retention of all influence" relative to the pre-1989 period – including the maintenance of the "nomenklatura" and the "hegemonic situation of the Hungarian Jewry" as a segment of the population continuing to provide "material support" for "the domestic left, the communist residue"; the "liberals," namely SZDSZ and Fidesz, were being funded

by "American backers" such as "Soros"; coupled with all this was a global economic context in which "[t]he big multinational enterprises have inconceivable power at their disposal." In this situation – faced with an equivalentially wide-ranging power bloc at home and abroad – Csurka (1992) urged the MDF to pursue a strategy of "breakout" against the enemies encircling it and to build its identity around three pillars: "Hungarianhood [*magyarság*], justice, popular-ness [*népiesség*]." Csurka explicitly took up Antall's reference to the "15 million Hungarians" – "Hungarianhood" as an ethnically defined community transcending state borders – as a redemptive promise that had to be re-activated ("We have to bring our nation to its feet"; "We have to recover this mobilizing power"). Csurka interpellated an underdog subject that took on an underdog status precisely in virtue of its ethnic "Hungarianness": "we must defend all our honest people [*emberünk*] and all who depend on it, because the attacks, the offenses afflicting them are because of their belonging to us and their Hungarianness [*magyarság*]." For Csurka, therefore, popular identity was inscribed within an ethno-national one, while this, in turn, was equivalentially linked to the populist opposition to the wealth and power of the "nomenklatura": "We must begin the curtailment of the nomenklatura's power, that is, we must take away its access to state wealth and examine how it came to be 'capital-holding' [*tőkés*]."

A joint articulation of (ethno-)nationalism and populism thus took shape, albeit one in which the populist opposition to the power bloc of the "nomenklatura," "Hungarian Jewry," "American backers," and "multinational enterprises" was articulated in large part internally to the ethno-nationalist (and anti-Semitic) opposition between "Hungarianhood" and foreign elements. Indeed, what made Csurka's essay so shocking was not least the claim that the Jews were the ones behind the "nomenklatura" – suggesting here a partial displacement of anti-communist populism (against the continuing power of the "nomenklatura") by anti-Semitic ethno-nationalism (against the "Jewry" that is allegedly the source of this power). It was also the specific notion of "Hungarianhood" that was invested with an underdog character (as the subject that "[w]e have to bring to its feet"), while the signifier "people" was largely referred back to "national" signifiers. In historical context, of course, this was nothing out of the ordinary: as with the ruptures of '48 and '56, the unredeemed subject to be mobilized was, first and foremost, "the nation" (nationalism) against foreign powers (nationalism and populism) – but this time, the very notion that foreign powers still held sway over the nation pointed to a dislocation in the "system change" and its founding promise of finally delivering national sovereignty. In this context, the populist notion of an equivalentially wide-ranging power bloc ranging from the entire "Hungarian financial sector" to foreign corporations functioned as a radicalizing supplement to Csurka's nationalism, both of which combined to subvert Antall's institutionalist claim that "the people" would now find proper representation through the new institutions with the end of one-party rule. This dislocatory attack on the inaugural promises of

the MDF-led government – on top of the more or less overt anti-Semitism – rendered Csurka's position within the party untenable; the MDF executive ultimately expelled Csurka and his followers from the party in early 1993, who then established the Hungarian Justice and Life Party (MIÉP) that same year.

The populist nationalisms of the Hungarian Justice and Life Party (1993–2002) and Fidesz (1997, 2002–04)

The hallmark of the MIÉP was a primarily ethno-nationalist discourse with a secondary element of populism. The new party took up a "national radical" identity and defined itself with slogans such as "Not left, not right, but Christian and Hungarian," situating itself outside the two main party blocs that were taking shape by the mid-1990s (MSZP and SZDSZ vs. Fidesz, FKGP, KDNP, MDF) and radicalizing, in the process, the articulation of "national" and "Christian" values that the "right" bloc had professed to ever since 1989/90. The MIÉP remained a marginal force in the 1994 elections, winning just 1.6% of the list vote, but entered parliament for the first (and only) time with 5.5% in the 1998 elections. In its 1998 election program, the party foregrounded the collective subject "Hungarianhood" (*magyarság*), declaring as its objective "the survival and growth of Hungarianhood" and the construction of a "nation-building state." The program set these objectives in contrariety to a "colonial system" blocking the realization of demands such as the implementation of a "social market economy" (a dislocated promise taken straight out of the MDF's agenda):

> Today there is a colonial system in Hungary, and this is the opposite of everything that belongs to the social market economy. The Hungarian state today stands in the service of the liberal-global, cosmopolitan money power [*pénzhatalom*], functions as its proxy. In order for the nation to last, it is necessary to deprive of power the financial-economic oligarchy, the colonial authority draining and exploiting the majority. (Magyar Igazság és Élet Pártja 1998)

This joint articulation of (ethno-)nationalism and populism pitted the collective subject "nation" or "Hungarianhood" (nationalism) as well as an exploited "majority" (populism) against a "liberal-global, cosmopolitan money power." The construction of this power bloc suggested that populism was, once again, articulated largely within the nationalist opposition of "national" vs. "foreign": the "Hungarian state" and the "financial-economic oligarchy" controlling it constituted, in turn, nothing more than a proxy for foreign colonial overlords, bound to a system of permanent "debt servitude" to foreign creditors. In this context, the overriding imperative would be to

> bring Hungarianhood out of this trap. In this circular system, every national asset decays and falls into foreign hands; the evidence for this is the criminally executed privatization, which has caused more damage to the nation than World War II. (Magyar Igazság és Élet Pártja 1998)

In this primarily nationalist discourse, therefore, the central opposition of "national" vs. "foreign" took on an additionally populist character to the extent that the "nation" was interpellated as an underdog in the face of monied "foreign" powers. In this context, the immediate task of a "nation-building state," the program argued, was to initiate debt relief negotiations with foreign creditors in order to "bring Hungarianhood out of this trap" (Magyar Igazság és Élet Pártja 1998).

The MIÉP's populist nationalism emerged at a time when the Hungarian right was in a state of flux from the mid- to late 1990s. The first MDF-led government had been hampered by infighting, with the FKGP ultimately departing the coalition in 1992 following disagreements over land re-privatization, as well as Antall's death while in office in December 1993. The MDF's subsequent electoral collapse and the landslide victory of the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP), the successor party of the MSZMP, in the 1994 parliamentary elections pointed to two parallel processes in the formation of the post-1989 Hungarian party system: 1) a division in the field of the post-1989 imaginary between parties laying claim to the unredeemed community of "Hungarianhood" (*magyarság*) and those interpellating "Hungary" (*Magyarország*) in opposition to this ethno-nationalism, culminating in the 2004 citizenship referendum; and 2) the beginning of a struggle for hegemony within the national-conservative right, which would ultimately be decided in favor of Fidesz's "civic Hungary" discourse that mobilized a wide-ranging equivalential chain of demands and partly also incorporated populist nationalism.

The MSZP, established as the successor party to the MSZMP at an October 1989 congress, rapidly adopted a liberal-democratic and economic liberal agenda in favor of market reforms (see also Grzymała-Busse 2002). In the 1994 election campaign, the MSZP dislocated Antall's claim to represent both the "country of 10 million" and the community of "15 million Hungarians," maintaining that the MDF-led government had failed to be "the government of freedom" and "the government of the nation" and had instead sown divisions within the nation:

> This government, contrary to its promise, did not become the government of freedom, as it continuously attacks the institutions of freedom, especially the press. It did not become the government of the nation, because instead of unity, it achieved the ominous division of the country. It did not become a European government, because its politics invokes backward ideas that became obsolete a half century ago on the better half of our continent, and opened the door for far-right endeavors. It did not

> become the government of economic change, [but] much rather that of missed opportunities. (Magyar Szocialista Párt 1994)

The MSZP thus re-articulated the founding promises of the "system change" as dislocated demands that had gone unfulfilled by the MDF-led government. In particular, the MSZP offered the institutionalist promise to "lead the country out of the crisis" and to deliver "the economic and social modernization of the country" that the previous government had allegedly failed to deliver, including "honest and effective privatization" (Magyar Szocialista Párt 1994). After winning a landslide with an absolute majority of seats, the MSZP nonetheless formed a coalition government with the SZDSZ and went on to implement a package of austerity and shock therapy measures known as the "Bokros package." In addition to this neo-liberal technocratic mode of enacting the "system change," the MSZP re-articulated the promise of "national unity" in non-ethnicized terms; the prominent reference to "Hungary" in its 1998 election campaign could be read as an attempt "to reclaim the nation as those living within the borders of Hungary, some 10 million Hungarians citizens [*sic*], as opposed to the cultural nation consisting of some 15 million ethnic Hungarians" (Palonen 2009, 324). A fundamental division thus emerged in the imaginary of the "system change": while all parties offered differential variations on demands for democracy or market reforms, they displayed a basic incommensurability on the question of the very boundaries of the national community.[3] In this regard, the MIÉP represented one extreme of the ethno-nationalist spectrum that radicalized Antall's inaugural interpellation of the community of "15 million Hungarians"; yet a characteristic feature of Fidesz, too, following its re-orientation as a party of the national-conservative right after 1994 was its attempt to incorporate an ethno-national imaginary of the unredeemed community of "15 million." Fidesz's 1998 election program, for instance, declared the following:

> The borders of the Hungarian state and the nation do not coincide. This places increased responsibility on Hungary. It is important that, in questions concerning the entirety of the nation, the opinion of the representative organs [and] minority communities of citizens of Hungarian nationality have influence on actions. (Fidesz 1998a)

The MDF's 1994 election defeat inaugurated a period of reshuffling within the broadly national-conservative right (see also Fowler 2004), during which Fidesz staked out a hegemonic positioning by mobilizing a wide-ranging equivalential chain of demands centered on the nodal point "civic Hungary." Fidesz's "nationalist and anti-liberal turn" (Enyedi 2015, 237) was characterized by the foregrounding of a "civic" (*polgári*) identity – including the party's re-branding in 1995 as "Fidesz – Hungarian Civic Party" – and the equivalential construction of this identity around a series of oppositions:

"national" vs. "cosmopolitan" (nationalism), "civic" vs. "left" (right-wing), "nation" vs. a "foreign"-like or "cosmopolitan elite" (nationalism and populism). The hegemony project of "civic Hungary" thus equivalentially incorporated the "national" signifiers of the established right as well as, in part, the more radical populist nationalism of Csurka and the MIÉP, generating an antagonistic frontier against the MSZP-SZDSZ camp and positioning Fidesz as a clear pole within what Orbán would later refer to as a "dual field of power." An early example of this strategy could be seen in the "Day of Civic Resistance" that Fidesz organized in June 1997 against the MSZP-SZDSZ government, with Orbán presenting an "Opposition Manifesto" on the 150th anniversary of Ferenc Deák's release of the Opposition Manifesto that turned out to be a key event in the prelude to the 1848 Revolution. Fidesz's Opposition Manifesto formulated a ten-point list of broadly formulated demands, including greater consultation of the opposition on issues such as EU and NATO accession as well as the "end to the accelerated, irresponsible selling off of national property" (Fidesz 1998b). Orbán used the occasion to give a speech at the Academy of Music in Budapest, in which he denounced the politics of the government in the following terms:

> At the end of this road, there is an "open society," weakened, bled, shaken in its morals, confused in its self-awareness, tormented by guilt, deprived of its self-confidence. […] An "open society" where there is no home, only habitat, there is no homeland, only a business site, and no nation lives, only population. Where progress equals self-renouncing incorporation and channeling into world processes, where progress does not serve the interests of the entire nation but simply satisfies the ambition of a narrow elite in power to elevate themselves into world citizens [or cosmopolitans; *világpolgárok*]. (cited in Debreczeni 2003, 323–24, 2009, 120–21; see also Enyedi 2015, 237)

Orbán also cited a direct quote from Deák's 1847 declaration – "The Hungarian government stands under foreign-minded [*idegenszerű*], not national, influence contrary to our constitutional laws" – and directed it against the MSZP-SZDSZ government, crystallizing an antagonistic frontier between the "nation" and a "foreign"-like government. This primarily nationalist discourse incorporated a populist dimension to the extent that it interpellated those opposed to "the nation" or "the national interests" not only in cultural terms as "foreign" or "cosmopolitan," but also as a "narrow elite." The signifier "civic Hungary" functioned as the nodal point that equivalentially linked the nationalist and populist oppositions into a project of delivering real modernization and prosperity (against the opposing project of "open society") – thus re-articulating the dislocated promises of the "system change," including the ethno-national dimension of "Hungarianhood." Fidesz went on to become both the largest party overall and the dominant force on the right in the 1998 parliamentary elections, forming a coalition government with the

FKGP and MDF. Fidesz's campaign discourse, centered on the demands "work" and "entrepreneurship," rested on incorporating into the "civic" discourse a rejection of the government's unpopular austerity policies *and* a selective radicalization of the dislocated promise of market reforms, calling for large-scale cuts in income tax and social security contributions and promising to unleash the "[e]ntrepreneurial spirit and entrepreneurial desire" that "[t]he policy of the government has undeniably neglected" (Fidesz 1998a). Populism, which had emerged in 1997 as an instituting moment (in combination with nationalism) defining the political terrain in terms of two antagonistic camps, was largely absent in the context of both the elections and the ensuing term in government, which was centered on the differential implementation of the various "civic" demands under the banner of projects such as the "Széchenyi Plan" for economic development.

The MSZP's comeback in the 2002 elections rested on yet another institutionalist promise of a more competently managed and less divisive version of national unity: under the slogan "Welfare System Change" (latching onto the imaginary of the "system change"), the MSZP called for a flood of new social spending that "stops the splitting into two of the society, reinforces national cohesion and secures our catching up to the ranks of the developed nations" (Magyar Szocialista Párt 2002). Despite an increased share of the vote and seats (with the FKGP and MIÉP both falling below the 5% threshold), the Fidesz-MDF electoral alliance narrowly lost to the MSZP-SZDSZ bloc in the second round. Under the premiership of Péter Medgyessy, the MSZP-SZDSZ government went on to enact a "100 Days Program" of large-scale wage and pension rises in its first 100 days in office, inducing the Fidesz-MDF opposition to largely vote in favor of its bills in parliament and enjoying high approval ratings even in spite of the revelations of Medgyessy's secret police past that emerged shortly after the elections. In this manner, the MSZP brought about a temporary hegemonic fixation around a social-democratic institutionalist construction of "national unity," which was capped by the government winning re-election in 2006 – the first post-1989 government in Hungary to do so – but dislocated shortly thereafter with the infamous "Őszöd speech" of Ferenc Gyurcsány, Medgyessy's successor as prime minister (see next section).

Fidesz's 2002 election defeat saw a partial radicalization of the party's nationalism as well as a re-emergence of populism within the nationalist discourse of "civic Hungary." Two weeks after the second-round loss, Orbán (2002) gave a speech at an open-air rally in Budapest in which he appealed to the integrity of the "civic Hungary" project, emphasizing that "[t]he most important thing now is unity" and reaffirming the ethnonational imaginary undergirding it: "civic Hungary declared that our future is not in the country of 10 million, but in the Hungarian nation of 15 million." He also reasserted the hegemonic claim of "civic Hungary" to constitute "the whole" of the nation: "[c]ivic Hungary is not the one smaller or bigger part of this country. Civic Hungary is the whole. Civic Hungary is

what the people as citizens constitute independently of governments" (Orbán 2002). This claim now took on an exclusive and totalizing sense, however, suggesting that only "our parties" could legitimately represent the "homeland" as opposed to the "foreign"-like forces in government; Orbán first constructed an equivalential link between past foreign occupations and now, declaring: "Homeland exists even if it comes under the influence of foreign powers, if the Tartar or the Turk rampages. […] Homeland exists even if the governing responsibility is not ours." It was after having said all this that he made his oft-quoted statement:

> It may be that our parties and our representatives are in opposition in the National Assembly, but we who are here on the square will not and also cannot be in opposition, because the homeland cannot be in opposition. (Orbán 2002)

Orbán concluded his speech by calling for the creation of "Civic Circles" as a means of organizing "the people as citizens" against an illegitimate government:

> I ask you to bring into existence in the next three months small groups consisting of several people, groups of friends, Civic Circles. […] Our strength is only a true strength if we are capable of creating and organizing the public sphere of civic Hungary. (Orbán 2002)

In this post-election context, populist nationalism thus re-emerged in Fidesz's discourse in radicalized (and more authoritarian) form, articulating an exclusive claim to represent the true "homeland" (nationalism) – of which the project of "civic Hungary" is the only possible expression – against a "foreign"-like power in government (nationalism and populism). The Civic Circles pointed to a strategy of permanently mobilizing the populist opposition between "the people as citizens" and the government, while articulating this divide in terms of primarily nationalist contents: as extensively documented by Greskovits (2017), the Civic Circles organized protest actions against various government policies and on "national," "Christian," "anti-communist," and "anti-liberal" identity issues in particular at the peak of their activity between 2002 and 2004. The Civic Circles also played a leading role in the December 2004 referendum campaign (initiated by a Hungarian diaspora organization) on granting citizenship to ethnic Hungarians abroad, which Fidesz strongly supported – a further attempt to occupy the ethno-national imaginary of the "system change" – against the opposition of Ferenc Gyurcsány's MSZP-SZDSZ government. The referendum campaign thus crystallized the "Hungarianhood" vs. "Hungary" divide in the post-1989 imaginary, with the MSZP campaigning for a "no" vote with provocative billboard images of Romanian-looking families ready to come into Hungary *en masse* to take away jobs and social services. The

referendum initiative ultimately won a narrow majority (51.6%) but failed due to insufficient turnout (37.5%), with a parallel initiative on overturning the law on the privatization of hospitals notably garnering a bigger majority (65%) on the same turnout.

The national-conservative social populism of Fidesz (2006–09)

The 2004 referendum failure was followed by a shift in Fidesz's strategy of demobilizing the Civic Circles and dropping the "civic Hungary" signifier in favor of "people" (*emberek*) and "plebeian" (Enyedi 2015; Korkut 2007; Palonen 2009). Populism thus re-emerged in Fidesz's discourse in a manner distinct from the earlier populist nationalism in which the opposition to "elites" had been articulated largely internally to the nationalism of "national" vs. "foreign." Ahead of the 2006 elections, Fidesz foregrounded a social-populist opposition pitting the "people" against the "luxury politics" of the government, arguing that the MSZP-SZDSZ coalition was about to implement yet another "Bokros package" in order to offset its unsustainable spending. This discourse took on a performative dimension of emphasizing proximity to and dialogue with the common people, with Orbán even changing his attire to a more "countryside" style in contrast to Gyurcsány's personal wealth and managerial vibe (Palonen 2009, 324–25). In his beginning-of-year address in January 2006, Orbán (2006) declared that Fidesz had conducted a "nationwide trip, meetings, open and straight conversations with people, from which we can get a real picture of the state of the country." On this basis, he argued: "Traveling across the country, I see that 2005 was also the year of disillusionment with luxury politics. The people [*emberek*] were clearly saying that the politics of the current power is luxury politics." He went on to denounce this "luxury politics" not only in terms of those holding "power" vs. ordinary "people," but also with reference to socio-economic privilege:

> While the result is a luxurious life and luxury profits for a privileged few, for the others it is uncertainty, hopelessness, and disappointment. [...] An unemployed person in Dombóvár said that luxury politics is dangerous because it creates those with privileges. (Orbán 2006)

Fidesz's social populism now thus interpellated the "people" (*emberek*) in contrariety to the "luxury politics" of ever greater privileges for the already "privileged few." This social populism, in turn, found joint articulation with national conservatism, as already suggested by the performativity of Orbán's countryside visits and attire; Fidesz chose as its 2006 election campaign slogan the classic conservative triad "Work – Home – Family" while also promising a "new politics" with "plebeian governance [that] is thrifty and stands on the side of the people," avoiding "luxury expenditures" and cutting "the costs of government" – such as by reducing the number of

MPs – as an alternative to the cuts in public services that the government allegedly had in store (Fidesz 2006). This social-populist turn was notably reminiscent of the discourse of Law and Justice (PiS) – likewise coupled with nationalist or national-conservative values and directed against entrenched structures of privilege – that had gained Europe-wide attention with PiS's 2005 election victories (see chapter 5); Orbán even referred to PiS as a model for Fidesz in a January 2006 interview (Korkut 2007, 682), suggesting a case of horizontal diffusion of discursive strategies already at this juncture (see also Dąbrowska, Buzogány, and Varga 2019).

Fidesz again narrowly lost the parliamentary elections in April 2006; its share of the vote (now in an electoral alliance with the KDNP) stagnated at 42%, while the MSZP and SZDSZ made slight gains to become the first government to win re-election in Hungary after 1989. Shortly after the elections, however, a massive dislocation followed in the form of the leaking (in September 2006) of Prime Minister Gyurcsány's expletive-laden speech to a closed-door meeting of MSZP MPs in the lakeside resort village of Balatonőszöd in May 2006. In what became subsequently known as "the Őszöd speech," Gyurcsány openly admitted that the party had been lying "morning, day, and night" about the country's finances to win re-election and that the government's once-heralded spending measures had been unsustainable all along. Perhaps the most widely cited part of the speech put it as follows:

> There isn't much choice. There isn't, because we fucked up. Not a little, [but] a lot. No country in Europe has committed such idiocy like we have. It's possible to explain. We have obviously been lying all the way the last one-and-a-half to two years. (A teljes balatonőszödi szöveg 2007)

Gyurcsány went on to "explain" this in the following terms:

> We are so much beyond the country's possibilities that we couldn't have imagined that a joint government of the Hungarian Socialist Party and the liberals could ever do such a thing. And in the meantime, by the way, we have done nothing the last four years. Nothing. (A teljes balatonőszödi szöveg 2007)

All this had massive dislocatory implications for the temporary partial fixation that the MSZP had attained with its social-democratic institutionalism since the 2002 elections; here was a prime minister openly admitting that the measures that the party had been selling as its main achievements for the last four years were actually based on "lying," amounted to "nothing," and now had to be remedied with massive fiscal contraction, contrary to the party's own promises and in line with Orbán's pre-election allegations. In what has been described as "a brutally self-critical pep talk" (Krekó and Mayer 2015, 202), Gyurcsány's speech – in the context of a closed-door meeting – can be read as a calculated attempt to

equivalentially rally the parliamentary party behind his austerity agenda by presenting a stark dichotomy between the "lying" of the past and the alternative of trying to "change this fucking country, because who else is going to change it? Are Viktor Orbán and his team going to change it?" (A teljes balatonőszödi szöveg 2007). Once it became public, however, the speech immediately prompted widespread outrage and calls for Gyurcsány's resignation; a wave of protests began on the day after the leak, including the storming of the Hungarian Television building by a far-right crowd following violent clashes with riot police on the first night of protests in Budapest. Tellingly, Gyurcsány defended himself after the leak in the following terms on his blog:

> Lying is the crime of the entire Hungarian political elite. Ours and theirs [the right's]. We couldn't change this before the elections either and we couldn't pull the campaign out of the snare of babbling and half-truths. (A teljes balatonőszödi szöveg 2007)

Gyurcsány thus tried to deflect the dislocatory shock of his speech by equivalentially articulating the sin of "lying" as one collectively encompassing "the entire Hungarian political elite," both left and right. This willingness to concede the dislocation by implicating the entire elite suggested an opening for a radical populist opposition – more radical than what Fidesz would be able to offer – to the entire class of "politicians," which would emerge soon enough in the discourse of Jobbik. Orbán, in turn, responded by rejecting this equivalential link: "Ferenc Gyurcsány wants to drag the entire political elite down into the mud with him. This is the attempt at an apology by a sick liar" (Orbán: a kormány még a helyén van, de már megbukott 2006). Orbán's attempt to differentially salvage part of the "political elite" was notably in line with an initially institutionalist response by Fidesz to the Őszöd speech; in the same radio interview, Orbán called for an "expert government" based on broad "agreement" between the parties, suggesting a non-antagonistic approach to mending the dislocation through the differential removal of the problematic element (Gyurcsány) and its replacement by a form of cross-party consensus (Orbán: a kormány még a helyén van, de már megbukott 2006). When it became clear that Gyurcsány was staying put, however, Fidesz went on the offensive and reverted to its social populism – including the performative enactment of an uncompromising rejection of the "lying prime minister" in the form of the Fidesz parliamentary group demonstratively leaving the chamber whenever Gyurcsány gave a speech.

In this context, Fidesz's social populism interpellated a "people" (*nép*) swindled by the government and suffering under austerity against the "lying prime minister" and the "aristocracy" in power continuing to enjoy its privileges. The party's recent turn toward appealing to the common "people" in contrariety to the "luxury politics" of the government made it

well placed to capitalize on the dislocatory effects of the Őszöd speech. The social-populist discourse now saw a further expansion of the equivalential chain by calling for a "new majority" to oppose the "new aristocracy," regardless of "left" and "right" differences. In his 2007 National Day (March 15) speech at an open-air rally in Budapest, Orbán presented a stark choice between "a new majority or a new aristocracy" and explicitly displaced the "left" vs. "right" frontier in the process, positing an organic crisis situation in which old certainties no longer held and a new popular subjectivity had to be mobilized:

> In a time of calamity, the moment comes as scheduled when every citizen of the homeland understands: the affairs of the country do not belong to the parties. It is the inalienable property of the people [*nép*]. [He/she] understands that democracy is where the people is. If the people makes its voice heard on the streets, then that is where it is. […] [He/she] understands: what is left or right is not at stake now. The chosen ideology, the divided history does not matter now. There will now be a new majority or a new aristocracy. Freedom and welfare, or despotism and decay. There is no other path, the new majority must defeat the new aristocracy protecting its privileges. (Orbán 2007b)

The "new majority" thus took on the function of an empty signifier holding together an equivalential chain that was suddenly more open-ended than it had ever been in Fidesz's discourse, even bringing together subject positions of both "left" and "right" dislocated by the broken promises of a massively discredited government that had allegedly revealed itself to be the defender of a small privileged "aristocracy." In a March 2007 speech at a party event, Orbán contrasted this "new majority" to the "old majority" that had found expression in the 2006 elections but broken up shortly thereafter by the treachery of those in power:

> This old majority nonetheless disintegrated, dissipated because those supported by the old majority swindled, deceived, misled the people [*emberek*] and, in the meantime, thrust Hungary into crisis, economic crisis. That is to say, they were incapable of fulfilling the most important political issue of justice, and neither did they come close to doing so; therefore, the old majority disintegrated, and in its place, a new majority is forming in Hungary […]. (Orbán 2007a)

In the context of economic hardship and the government's austerity measures, Fidesz's social populism was not least about mobilizing an equivalential chain of social justice demands, while linking the latter to the national-conservative values of "work" and "family" that it had been propagating all along. In a September 2007 speech on the "social crisis," Orbán expanded on the "people" vs. "aristocracy" frontier in the starkly socio-

economic terms of poor vs. rich, coupled with virtues such as "work," "rais [ing] children," and "tak[ing] care of each other":

> There has been enough of the impoverishment whereby millions of people cannot pay their bills at the end of the month. Enough of the government not taking into account the elderly, the sick, the students, and the needy. […] Enough of how those who work, raise children, take care of each other, try to survive with dignity get less and less, while the loafers, the lying millionaire swindlers, the tricksters enjoying the protection of the state get more and more. […] Enough of how people get by poorly, while those in power get more and more luxury, greater and greater wealth, more and more privilege. (Orbán 2007c)

Figure 4.1 illustrates the Fidesz discourse during this phase, with the "people" as an empty signifier linking an equivalential chain of demands against an opposing chain centered on the "new aristocracy."

Fidesz's social populism in this phase articulated an immanent critique of actually existing democracy: the simple argument being that democracy had been *de facto* suspended by a prime minister not only lying (by his own admission) to win re-election, but also carrying on in government with his austerity measures even in light of this fact and the wave of popular opposition that followed. In his 2007 National Day address (quoted above), Orbán had defined democracy in terms of "where the people is"; the government was acting undemocratically insofar as its austerity policies, on top of being based on "lying," stood in fundamental opposition to the "people's will" (*népakarat*). Orbán thus struck a different tone compared to May 2002, when he had claimed "the nation" as the exclusive terrain of "our parties" against a "foreign"-like government even after having lost the elections; this exclusive claim was now gone in favor of the appeal to a "people" as the subject of democracy standing above and beyond "the parties," in opposition to a small socio-economically privileged "aristocracy." It was in this social-populist, rather than populist-nationalist, vein that Orbán now articulated his claim to defend democracy against the government; in a June 2007 interview with the right-wing daily *Magyar Nemzet*, Orbán declared outright that "in Hungary today there is no democracy. Instead, a multiparty system without democracy is at work" (Az előre hozott választás a

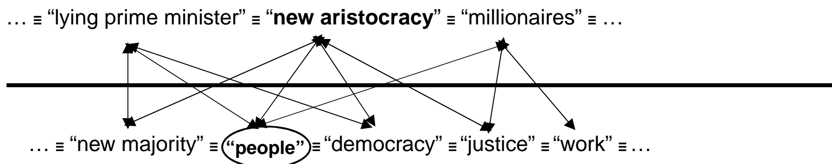

Figure 4.1 National-conservative social populism of Fidesz (2006–09).

legfőbb ügy 2007). Within this division of the field, Orbán (2007a) positioned Fidesz's defense of public services from government cuts as the defense of democracy itself; in the 2007 National Day speech, he announced a referendum initiative on reversing the government's introduction of hospital and doctor visit fees as well as university tuition as "the last constitutional instrument" for expressing the popular will:

> We have done what the democratic opposition can do. We have made clear: The people has the right to oust the government in a democracy too if it governs against the people's will [*népakarat*], if it endangers the existential interest of the people. Yes, it has the right! It has the right, on one condition: if it has already made use of every instrument for expressing the will of the people and the government fails to submit to the clear and unambiguous will of the people. […] After the referendum, the government either does what the people want or it will become oustable. (Orbán 2007b)

The referendum ultimately succeeded on all three counts with a large majority of the votes cast as well as a turnout of 50.5%, clearing the validity threshold of 25% support from all eligible voters – leading Gyurcsány to announce that the government would abide by the referendum results despite his insistence that it lacks the funds to cover the cancellation of the fees.

The latter half of the 2006–10 legislative term thus made visible the institutional ramifications of the breakdown in hegemonic stability that had begun in September 2006. Following the 2008 referendum, the SZDSZ left the coalition, leaving in place the first minority government (now dependent on external support from the SZDSZ) in post-1989 Hungary. In March 2009, Gyurcsány finally resigned as prime minister and MSZP chairman, with the non-partisan minister in Gyurcsány's outgoing cabinet, Gordon Bajnai, forming a mixed minority government of independents and MSZP politicians. The 2009 European Parliament election saw a crushing victory for Fidesz and a crushing defeat for the MSZP; opinion polls suggested that a Fidesz landslide in the next parliamentary elections was all but certain. As the April 2010 election date neared, Fidesz's social populism started to flip over into institutionalism. This could already be seen in Orbán's 2009 speech at the annual "Civic Picnic" in the summer resort village of Kötcse, in which he spoke openly of the possibility that Fidesz would occupy the "central field of political power" with its own conceptions of the national interest for the foreseeable future. In the speech, Orbán claimed that "there is the real possibility that the Hungarian politics of the next 25 years will not be determined by the field of dual power that, with constant value debates, generates division and petty and unnecessary social consequences." In its stead, he argued:

> Instead, there will emerge for a long time a large governing party, a central field of political power that will be capable of formulating the national concerns – and does this not in constant debate, but rather represents them in their naturalness. (Orbán 2009)

The notion of a "central field of political power capable of formulating the national concerns" pointed to an institutionalist construction *par excellence* of a non-antagonistic relation between a field of demands and a locus of power; yet the supposedly "natural" link between Fidesz and "the national concerns" without the need for "constant debate" suggested a specifically authoritarian institutionalism founded on an exclusive and totalizing claim to the nation. Ironically, Orbán had claimed in his June 2007 interview bemoaning the lack of democracy in Hungary that "[t]he essence of democratic politics is that debates are imperative" (Az előre hozott választás a legfőbb ügy 2007); the 2009 Kötcse speech provided a foretaste of how Fidesz's earlier populist defense of democracy would morph into authoritarian institutionalism in power, which would come into full view after the 2010 landslide (see next section). In the context of the 2010 election campaign, Fidesz maintained a (not visibly authoritarian) institutionalist strategy of exhorting the nation to reclaim its sovereignty in largely differential and non-antagonistic terms, hardly even mentioning its opponents and indeed refraining from releasing an election program or taking part in pre-election debates. Fidesz's campaign discourse, centered on the slogan "The time is here" (a reference to the first stanza of Sándor Petőfi's "National Song" of Hungary), explicitly latched onto the imaginary of the 1848 Revolution and (less explicitly) the 1989/90 "system change" with the promise of the government(-in-waiting) coming back over to the side of the nation. In his 2010 National Day (March 15) speech, Orbán spoke of the upcoming election as "our revolution" and the dawn of a "new era" of harmony between the nation and its government:

> The possibility is here. We, the Hungarians of the 21st century, can bring to completion with the election on April 11 the Hungarian Revolution, with which we can bring to an end the shameful politics of the last years and pave the way for a new era, in which the government gives back to the Hungarian nation its self-respect. (Orbán 2010)

This institutionalist discourse did feature a contrariety to "the shameful politics," but relegated this constitutive outside to a dying past; gone was the populist construction of an antagonistic frontier against a power bloc ("new aristocracy") that even deserved mention at this stage of the struggle. The elections resulted in the crushing landslide that Fidesz had hoped for, with an absolute majority (52.7%) of the list vote and a two-thirds majority of parliamentary seats thanks to the disproportional effects of the compromise electoral system in place since 1989. The elections represented a break in

post-1989 Hungarian party politics in multiple respects: apart from the unprecedented scale of Fidesz's victory, the MDF and SZDSZ saw their vote shares collapse and faded into electoral irrelevance, while two newer parties – Jobbik (with 16.7% of the vote, not far behind the decimated MSZP) and Politics Can Be Different (LMP; 7.5%) – entered parliament for the first time.

The "System of National Cooperation" (NER) as hegemonic formation (2010–present)

After the elections, the new Fidesz supermajority adopted a parliamentary resolution in May 2010 titled the "Declaration of National Cooperation," which interpreted the election result as a victory for "national unity" and as a mandate to institute a new system called the "System of National Cooperation" (NER), with the new parliament being a "constituent national assembly and system-founding parliament" (Országgyűlés 2010, 2, 6). The declaration argued that "after 46 years of occupation, dictatorship, and two chaotic decades of transition, Hungary has regained its right and capacity to self-determination" through a "successful revolution at the ballot box" (Országgyűlés 2010, 4). As Orbán had done during the election campaign, Fidesz now constructed its victory as the consummation of a historical struggle for national independence – the elusive, dislocated promise of '48, '56, and now '89 – even articulating an equivalence in this regard between the periods of Nazi occupation and Arrow Cross dictatorship (1944–45), Soviet occupation and Communist Party rule (1945/48–89), and the entire post-1989 period until 2010 (adding up to "46 years" and "two chaotic decades"). Fidesz thus re-articulated its institutionalist campaign discourse of promising a "new era" of harmony between the nation and its government in terms of an equivalential break between 2010 and the previous 66 years, thereby also dislocating the founding promise of the "system change" of 1989/90 to finally deliver national sovereignty. With a constitutional majority of two-thirds at its disposal, Fidesz proceeded to enact this promise in a manner that brought to the fore the authoritarian strain in its institutionalism. In the months following the elections, Fidesz unleashed in parliament a breathtaking wave of measures that disabled institutional checks, unilaterally occupied key control organs of the state, and rewrote the rules for appointment practices in favor of the ruling party. These measures included simplifying the appointment procedure for Constitutional Court judges to a two-thirds vote in parliament (eliminating the requirement for an agreement by the majority of parliamentary parties), increasing the number of judges to allow the current two-thirds majority to pack the Court with seven of the 15 members, and eliminating the Court's review powers over budgetary or tax matters, in addition to a complete turnover in favor of party appointees to the Election Commission and the establishment of a

Media Council ostensibly tasked with enforcing balanced coverage by news outlets (see Bánkuti, Halmai, and Scheppele 2012, 139–41 for an overview).

The crowning moment of this process was the adoption of a new constitution from scratch to replace the 1989 amendments to the communist-era constitution; the new document was essentially drafted by a taskforce of Fidesz MPs, submitted as a private member's bill to circumvent the consultative stage otherwise required of government bills, and then passed by two-thirds vote in April 2011 without much in the way of public debate. The authoritarian institutionalism that Orbán had articulated in his 2009 Kötcse speech – a single party occupying the "central field of power" and formulating the "national concerns" on its own without the need for "constant debate" – now thus found its performative enactment within state institutions. Notably, the new constitution enshrined in this unilateral, fast-tracked manner what had previously been a very much contested ethno-national construction of the post-1989 imaginary of the "system change." The document, which opened with "We, the members of the Hungarian nation" as the constituent subject of the new political order, constructed this "Hungarian nation" as an ethnic community of those endowed with "Hungarianness" (*magyarság*), regardless of the boundaries of the Hungarian state:

> Hungary, bearing in mind the togetherness of the single Hungarian nation, bears responsibility for the fate of the Hungarians living outside its borders; assists in the survival and development of their communities; supports their efforts directed toward preserving their Hungarianness, the assertion of their individual and collective rights, the formation of their community self-governments, their welfare in their native lands; and promotes their cooperation with each other and with Hungary. (Országgyűlés 2011)

The constitution had already been preceded by a new 2011 nationality law that enabled Hungarian speakers who held Hungarian citizenship or had ancestors who did so before 1920 or between 1941 and 1945 to apply for Hungarian citizenship, thus amounting to an extension of citizenship rights to the Hungarian minority communities of up to five million in the neighboring countries. In this methodical, administrative manner, what had previously been a major point of contention in post-1989 party politics – not least with the 2004 referendum – was now differentially enacted by two-thirds vote, among the myriad of other changes rushed through parliament in the aftermath of the 2010 elections.

What thus emerged was a hegemonic fixation of the elusive object of "national unity" that competing party blocs had fought over since the 1990s. The NER can be understood as a hegemonic formation in this vein insofar as it has institutionalized a set of practices for continuously reproducing the claim that the two-thirds Fidesz majority in parliament is identical to "the

nation"; it has rewritten the rules and redistributed resources to the point that parliamentary opposition is virtually irrelevant, while the ruling party has distinct advantages at its disposal for defending its two-thirds majority at each election – from the commandeering of both public and private media for openly partisan messaging to the (ab)use of the State Audit Office to discipline and punish opposition (as in the case of Jobbik for alleged campaign violations ahead of the 2018 elections). The NER thus relies on a combination of a differential logic of operating the institutions as it sees fit in the name of "the nation" on the one hand and an equivalential logic of re-introducing moments of antagonistic division on the other – which may also involve elements of populism in power (see next sub-section) – in which opponents are explicitly named, and indeed attacked, instead of being simply ignored and bypassed as the normal *modus operandi* of authoritarian institutionalism would have it. Authoritarian institutionalism, in other words, typically follows a distinctly non-antagonistic and non-populist logic while, at the same time, playing out within the instituting horizon of Fidesz's earlier (2006–09) social populism of "new majority" vs. "new aristocracy." On the ground constituted by these prior oppositions, Fidesz's hegemonic claim is that in the supposedly radical absence of democracy and order – an organic crisis situation in which police had to resort to firing rubber bullets at protesters in Budapest – the party, by organizing the "new majority" against the discredited prior government, is now restoring democracy and order as such by locking its own version of "national unity" as the only possible one into a new institutional-legal framework. In this manner, Fidesz's earlier populism generated an antagonistic division of the field from which authoritarian institutionalism could subsequently emerge as one (if not the only) possible outcome.[4]

A prime example of authoritarian institutionalism at work can be seen in Orbán's speech in July 2012 to an entrepreneurs' association in Budapest, in which he spoke of the economic challenges facing Hungary and Europe. Just like after 1990, he argued, there was now a need for far-reaching economic change; whether there was also a need for a change of political system, he left tantalizingly open: "let us hope that God helps us so that it will not be necessary to invent different political systems in place of democracy in the interest of economic survival." He went on to explain that the "unity" of society is of paramount importance – and unity, in turn, requires "power":

> The first condition for unity is power. If there is power, there is unity. If there is no power, but fragmentation, there is no unity. This is maybe not the case in every culture; there might be countries where it doesn't work this way, let's say, with the Scandinavians I can imagine. But with those of half-Asian origins like us, it is entirely certain that this is how it is. […] I think Hungary is moving and reacting to the crisis better than other countries of Europe because there is such a power capable of operating the constitutional institutions. (Orbán 2012)

Orbán thus not only articulated the value of "democracy" as a function of "economic survival" and the self-reproduction of the nation, but also foregrounded the notion of ethnic difference ("half-Asian origins") – the ethno-national dimension of the post-1989 imaginary that Fidesz had long taken up – in order to justify institutional practices centered on "power" and expediency. Orbán's articulation of the need for "power" in contrariety to "fragmentation" harks back to his earlier notion of a "central field of power" as opposed to a "dual field of power" with its unnecessary "division," amounting to a justification of the post-2010 mode of unilaterally "operating the constitutional institutions" as the ruling party sees fit. It is worth noting that the speech took place exactly a week after the European Commission closed an infringement procedure against the Hungarian government after ostensible adjustments by the latter to a reform that drastically reduced central bank independence – an area in which the authoritarian institutionalism of monopolizing state institutions could be justified precisely in terms of the economic survival of the "nation" – thus lending Orbán's remarks an added air of vindication.

Another aspect of Fidesz's institutionalism is not only the specifically authoritarian one of ignoring, sidelining, or denying opposition, but also the textbook institutionalist practice (democratic and authoritarian alike) of differentially co-opting opposition demands – especially (if not exclusively) from Jobbik (Enyedi 2015; Enyedi and Róna 2018; Krekó and Mayer 2015). As documented by Enyedi and Róna (2018, 263), several high-profile Fidesz policies in government, ranging from the Sunday shopping ban to the nationalization of private pension funds and references to the Holy Crown and Christian values in the new constitution, were essentially taken from Jobbik's program. Fidesz has thus sought to differentially co-opt elements of the initially more radical populist nationalism of Jobbik. In May 2015, for instance, Jobbik called for a referendum against a "quota system" for refugees at the EU level – a demand that Fidesz then co-opted with the 2016 referendum (the country's first since 2008) on "the obligatory resettlement of non-Hungarian citizens into Hungary" by the EU. In another notable example, the government withdrew Budapest's 2024 Olympic bid in February 2017 following a campaign to initiate a referendum on the issue – spearheaded by the fledgling Momentum Movement, which, as the name suggests, sought to use the Olympics issue to forge an equivalential chain of related grievances (such as corruption and neglect of public services). Here, Fidesz's strategy of preventing or co-opting opposition-initiated referenda is not only indicative of an institutionalist orientation toward preventing the formation of antagonistic frontiers against the government, but also an authoritarian institutionalism that seeks to monopolize (and close off for others) the democratic mechanisms for expressing such conflict – including the very

instrument of the referendum that Orbán had previously exercised in the name of "democratic opposition."

From "illiberal state" to "Stop Soros": the illiberal populist nationalism in power of Fidesz (2014–18)

In July 2014, three months after the 2014 parliamentary elections in which Fidesz was able to narrowly defend its two-thirds majority on a considerably reduced share of the vote (44.9%), Orbán held his annual keynote speech at the Tusványos summer festival of the Hungarian minority in Romania. The speech, which subsequently attracted international attention, inaugurated a more radical phase in Fidesz's discourse in which the institutionalism of the NER would be complemented more prominently by a joint articulation of illiberalism, nationalism, and populism directed against ever more threats to "national interests." In the speech, Orbán (2014) introduced the signifier "illiberal state" to define the government's agenda and defined it as a "new state organization originating in national interests" – in contrariety to "liberal democracy," which "was not capable of openly declaring and obliging – even with constitutional power – existing governments that they ought to serve national interests." In this joint articulation of anti-liberalism and nationalism, "national interests" (nationalism) thus took on the function of a nodal point equivalentially linked to the "illiberal state" in common contrariety to the "liberal state" or "liberal democracy" (anti-liberalism). Orbán further illustrated the concept of "illiberal state" with an equivalential chain of examples, such as the Hungarian state restricting the activity of "foreign"-funded activists, assuming control of the allocation of EU funds, and placing over half of the banking sector under "national ownership":

> And these paid political activists are, moreover, political activists paid by foreigners. […] It is very important, therefore, that if we want to reorganize our national state instead of the liberal state, then we have to make it clear that we are not facing civilians here, it is not civilians coming against us, but rather paid political activists who are attempting to promote foreign interests in Hungary. […]
>
> Now a debate has emerged between the [European] Union and Hungary because we changed this system and the government decided that whoever administers European Union funds in this new state conception, the illiberal state conception, has to be in the employment of the Hungarian state […] contrary to the logic of illiberal[5] [*sic*] state organization of the past 20 years. A new state organization originating in national interests is emerging. […]
>
> What can happen is – let me give a similarly refreshing example in closing – that the Hungarian government winning the elections

announces in advance that at least 50% of the Hungarian financial system should be in Hungarian hands. Not in state hands, but in Hungarian hands. Three months have passed since the election and this is how it will be. Considering that such a bank should have never been sold to foreigners, the Hungarian state buys it back, and with this the share of national ownership of the banking system exceeds 50%. (Orbán 2014)

In all three examples, the equivalential link between the government policy in question and the "illiberal state" was articulated in terms of a contrariety of "national" vs. "foreign," pointing to a strongly nationalist construction of the "illiberal state." Populism, in this context, emerged as a secondary feature insofar as the "foreign" constitutive outside was additionally constructed as a power bloc pitted against an underdog "nation" championed by the government. The notion of "foreigners" controlling the banking sector – and the demand for "national ownership" that the government is now supposedly fulfilling – pointed to a direct equivalential incorporation of MIÉP's previous and Jobbik's current construction (see next section) of a "colonial" system of foreign control of the financial sector, while the notion of domestic agents serving foreign powers suggested a combination of an illiberal hostility to civil society organizations, a nationalist opposition to foreign interests, and a secondary element of populism that constructed the foreign interests in question as powerful, monied ones. Illiberalism in this sense as an analytical category (as opposed to Orbán's use as a marker of self-identification) was a hallmark of Fidesz's post-2010 authoritarian institutionalism all along (especially in the dismantling of institutional checks), but now linked up with anti-liberalism, nationalism and populism under the banner of the "illiberal state." Figure 4.2 illustrates the construction of the "illiberal state" (which serves here as an empty signifier representing the government's agenda as a whole) in terms of these oppositions.

This illiberal populist nationalism underwent a pronounced radicalization in two subsequent phases of Fidesz's discourse: the "migrant crisis" (2015–16) and the "Stop Soros" campaign (2017–18) leading up to the 2018 parliamentary elections. Hungary was one of the countries on the so-called Balkan route – and the first EU country of entry for refugees coming in from

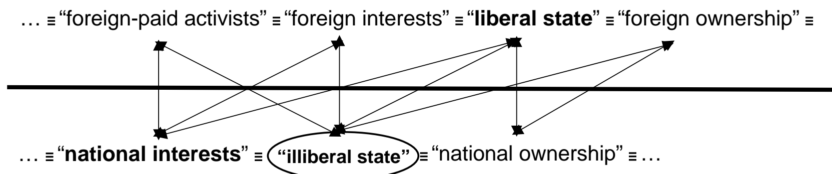

Figure 4.2 Illiberal populist nationalism in power of Fidesz (2006).

Serbia – at the height of refugee movements in the spring and summer of 2015. In this context, the performativity of the Fidesz government's policies took on Europe-wide implications: the government first allowed a bottleneck to develop at Budapest Keleti railway station, where refugees trying to move on to Austria and Germany were held up for visa checks under the pretense of enforcing EU border policies; this generated images of large numbers of stranded refugees in Budapest that Fidesz would relentlessly use to construct the threat of "immigration," even when few refugees were left on Hungarian territory. In June 2015, the government then announced the construction of a regularly patrolled four-meter fence along the border with Serbia, which came to be known as the "border closure" (*határzár*). These moves went in hand in hand with a nativist discourse of defending Hungary and Europe as a whole from "illegal immigrants," which then linked up with populist nationalism in opposition to "Brussels" as a foreign locus of power seeking to impose a refugee quota system on Hungary. This joint articulation of nationalism, nativism, and populism culminated with the 2016 referendum, whose very wording crystallized this discursive combination at work – "Do you want the European Union to be able to mandate the obligatory resettlement of non-Hungarian citizens into Hungary even without the approval of the National Assembly?" – by constructing "the European Union" as a foreign locus of power (nationalism and populism) trying to force "non-Hungarian citizens into Hungary" (nativism). The government conducted a ubiquitous billboard campaign for a "no" vote, with no major parties campaigning for a "yes" and most opposition parties except Jobbik calling for a boycott; the referendum, despite over 98% of valid votes cast going to the "no" side, ultimately fell short of the validity quorum of 25% of the electorate due to low turnout.

The "Stop Soros" campaign of 2017–18 built on this phase by specifically constructing the figure of George Soros – already featured as an antagonist of the nationalist right in Csurka's 1992 essay – as a threat to the nation's sovereignty in every way imaginable: from controlling opposition politicians and financing his own "Soros University" (the CEU in Budapest) to harboring a secret "Soros Plan" to relocate millions of African and Middle Eastern immigrants to Hungary via his "Soros Network" of activists. "Soros" thus took on the function of an empty signifier *par excellence*, standing for an equivalential chain of threats that linked familiar elements in Fidesz's discourse: Soros as a sponsor of civil society organizations (illiberalism) with his enormous financial might (populism) in the service of foreign interests (nationalism) and immigration (nativism). The government conducted a billboard campaign in the months leading up to the 2018 elections with crude depictions that linked these interrelated dimensions: Soros as a puppet-master controlling then-MSZP leader László Botka (while ex-Fidesz-turned-renegade oligarch Lajos Simicska controls Jobbik leader Gábor Vona), with Botka and Vona labeled "People of billionaires"; Soros with a fiendish grin announcing the "Soros Plan"; Soros standing shoulder-

to-shoulder with the lead candidates of all of the parliamentary opposition parties with the caption "Together they dismantle the border closure" – pointing in exemplary fashion to the empty signifier function allocated to Soros in Fidesz's discourse as the figure supposedly holding together, with his money, power (populism), sponsorship of immigration (nativism), and foreign control (nationalism), the entire spectrum of opposition parties from Jobbik to MSZP.

In the 2018 parliamentary elections, Fidesz ran an ostensibly single-issue campaign around the question whether Hungary will become an "immigrant country," with party billboards featuring the ubiquitous slogan "For us Hungary first." Yet the prime minister's 2018 National Day address, which Orbán used as a campaign speech ahead of the election, put in stark relief the discursive strategy of equivalentially linking the oppositions of "national" vs. "cosmopolitan" (nationalism), the "nation" vs. the "cosmopolitan elite" (nationalism and populism), but also NER-style "democracy" vs. "supranational" forces bent on destroying the "national" form (illiberalism and nationalism):

> On the one side we, the millions with national feeling, on the other side the cosmopolitan elite. On the one side we who believe in nation states, in the protection of borders, in the value of family and work, and facing us those who want open society, a world without borders and nations, new-style families, devalued work, and cheap labor […]. National and democratic forces are on the one side, supranational and anti-democratic forces on the other. This is the situation in Hungary 24 days before the election. (Orbán 2018b)

This division of the field provides a veritable panorama of the various iterations of Fidesz's discourse of the past 20 years: the populist nationalism pitting the "nation" against "cosmopolitan elites" and their project of "open society" (already present in Orbán's 1997 speech); a trace of national-conservative social populism defending "family and work" against powerful economic forces; and the latest additions to the party's discourse after 2014, namely a potent mix of illiberalism, nationalism, nativism, and populism that identifies ever more existential threats to the "nation" not only with "mass immigration" (nativism), but "mass immigration" as a project of "international speculators" centered on "the empire of George Soros" (nationalism and populism) (see also Enyedi 2020). Populism plays here the role of a radicalizing supplement that equivalentially expands the terrain for these oppositions by tracing everything back to a locus of power – Soros – that accommodates ever newer targets for the illiberalism, nationalism, and/or nativism.

The April 2018 elections produced a two-thirds parliamentary majority for Fidesz for a third straight time, this time on an increased share of the vote (49.3%). For the first time, a major protest mobilization took place against

the Fidesz victory, with hundreds of thousands estimated to have taken part in a Budapest demonstration that took place six days after the elections under the slogan "We are the majority!" The event, which was organized by civic activists independently of political parties, was suggestive of a moment of populist mobilization from below, claiming the name of the "majority" against a government deemed to have abused its powers and rigged the elections. The protest organizers even played a soundbite from Orbán's past on the display screen before the start of the speakers' program – specifically, the populism of "people" vs. "government" during Fidesz's social-populist phase: "The people has the right to oust the government in a democracy too if it governs against the people's will" (2007 National Day speech). Tellingly, Orbán subsequently responded to the protesters in a radio interview with a past quote of his own – "The homeland cannot be in opposition" – now given an authoritarian institutionalist twist to deny the possibility of populist opposition to his government in the name of "the people" or "the homeland":

> If you are a politician, you have to serve the country; even when you lose, even when you win, you have to serve, you have to stand where the people place you, but from there you have to serve. They always try to twist things around, but I continue to hold my opinion that the homeland cannot be in opposition. You can be in opposition, but the homeland never. (Orbán 2018a)

This slide of meaning in Orbán's 2002 quote encapsulates the authoritarian institutionalism of the NER: Orbán's message to the protesters here being *you are not allowed to be populist* like he himself was in 2007. The basic thrust of the Fidesz government's policies since the elections – including such drastic measures as stripping the Academy of Sciences of control over its research network and tripling the legal number of overtime hours that companies can require from employees – has followed the authoritarian institutionalist pattern of largely ignoring opposition and expanding ruling-party control into new areas in a methodical, administrative manner (in spite of the sizeable protest mobilizations against these measures), with the populist militancy of the "Stop Soros" campaign now receding into the background.

Jobbik: between anti-liberal populist nationalism and nationalist populism

An analysis of Jobbik at this point of the analysis is instructive for understanding how an initially more radical nationalist competitor to Fidesz has shifted its approach before and after 2010, including with various iterations of populism. Jobbik ("Movement for a Better Hungary")[6] was founded in 2003 by members of the Right-Wing Youth Community, many of whom had also taken part in the Fidesz-initiated Civic Circles and staged a bridge

blockade in Budapest after the 2002 elections to demand a recount (which Fidesz refused to support). This episode already foreshadowed Jobbik's strategy in the coming years of radicalizing Fidesz's discursive repertoire, including the ethno-nationalism that Orbán's party had tried so hard to incorporate from its right-wing competitors since the mid-1990s. Jobbik's founding declaration opened with the following claim:

> Today, in 2003, true system change has yet to take place. Politics – considering its roots – continues to be unipolar, the legislative process is permeated with backdoor deals, the parties do not undertake to consistently serve Hungarian interests. The framework of state and administrative functioning has been transformed, but the network that governed under communism has kept its power. (Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom 2003)

The claim was an oddly familiar one: much like Csurka had in his 1992 essay, the new party constructed a power bloc ("network") that had remained in place even with the "system change" and that specifically stood in opposition to "Hungarian interests." A joint articulation of nationalism and populism thus took shape, pitting national values against an anti-national elite; this also became clearer through the equivalential link between this elite to "globalism" and the "ultra-liberal" project of "open society":

> The present political crew has yielded to the globalism striving for world domination, which is securing enormous material resources for the shaking up of our traditional values, for the implementation of an ultra-liberal, so-called open society. (Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom 2003)

All this was suggestive of a more strident version of Orbán's 1997 speech; indeed, a key similarity to Fidesz's populist nationalism around the same period (1997, 2002–04) was that populism came inscribed within a nationalist (and anti-liberal) logic of attributing to the political elite a fundamentally anti-national (and "ultra-liberal") orientation. Beyond this, however, Jobbik's founding declaration articulated a more far-reaching equivalential chain of ills, such as the "fatal dismemberment of our national independence," the widening "distance between the standard of living of the rich and the poor," the "situation of the Gypsies," or the "selling off of national wealth" (Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom 2003). Apart from the fact that Jobbik's (anti-Roma) ethno-nationalism was a considerably more radical one than Fidesz's – even arguing that the threat of "globalism" has made it "more and more pressing that we truly constitute one nation with the Hungarianhood [*magyarság*] of the cut-off territories" (Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom 2003) – Jobbik's discourse was thus also characterized from the beginning by an economic leftism articulated in nationalist terms (Bíró-Nagy and Róna 2013; Varga 2014). All this, in turn,

was complemented by an element of populism (in conjunction with nationalism and anti-liberalism) that equivalentially constructed the "current political crew" (including Fidesz) as part of the same anti-national, "ultra-liberal" power bloc.

Jobbik remained a marginal force through the 2006 elections, which it contested as part of the Third Way alliance with the MIÉP and elements of the decimated FKGP; the alliance won 2.2% of the list vote, falling well short of the 5% threshold. After the elections, however, Jobbik gained national prominence in the context of 1) the post-Őszöd speech protests and the violent clashes with police in Budapest, in which it actively participated, and 2) its establishment of an (unarmed) paramilitary group called the Hungarian Guard (later banned by a 2009 court ruling), which attracted immediate controversy and widespread media attention. Jobbik's move to form the Hungarian Guard, under the leadership of new party chairman Gábor Vona, can be read as a crystallization of the party's nationalism and populism, which took aim at a government allegedly robbing the nation of its dignity on the one hand and the ethnicized notion of "Gypsy crime" (*cigánybűnözés*) on the other. As documented by Varga (2014), Vona used the occasion of the swearing-in ceremony of the first recruits as well as subsequent Guard rallies to rail in particular against a government that has "left the elderly without peace, the adults without security, the young without future, the children without childhood," leaving a "nation without Hungarians" and even turning Hungary into "Europe's last nation" (cited in Varga 2014, 796; translation in original). Jobbik's discourse thus continued to feature a populist nationalism that accused the government of a specifically anti-national agenda. On top of this came the regular Guard marches in the countryside against "Gypsy crime," a notion popularized by Jobbik especially in the wake of the "Olaszliszka lynching" of October 2006, in which a crowd of Roma villagers in Olaszliszka (near Miskolc) lynched a non-Roma Hungarian teacher who appeared to (but actually did not) run over a Roma girl by accident. In January 2007, Jobbik staged a press conference on "Gypsy crime" in front of the headquarters of the National Gypsy Council (OCÖ), accusing OCÖ chairman Orbán Kolompár of a politics "against Hungarianhood [*magyarság*] and leading to civil war" (Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom 2007b), and then set up a website dedicated to discussing and reporting on "Gypsy crime" (www.ciganybunozes.com; now offline).

Beginning in 2006, therefore, Jobbik's populist nationalism was dominated by opposition to the dual constitutive outside of an anti-national government (nationalism and populism) and "Gypsy crime" (ethnonationalism). Jobbik's Bethlen Gábor program of 2007 was a further indication of this strategy, foregrounding the demand for a "state for the nation" and a "state for the people" (*emberek*). The "state for the nation" was articulated in terms of a defense of "national interests" in contrariety to the likes of "harmful effects of globalization," "debt servitude," "corruption at the state level," "liberalization taking place in the energy sector" (Jobbik

Magyarországért Mozgalom 2007a) – thus pointing to an economic nationalism incorporating left-wing economic demands. The "state for the people" linked various demands such as the nationalization of the "private pension system" and "support for Hungarian micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises" in contrariety to "multi-national companies" and "multinational capital," while calling for a true "democracy" in contrariety to "neo-liberal pseudo-democracy":

> Instead of neo-liberal pseudo-democracy – which, under the guise of free competition, divides society into a narrow, very wealthy stratum and a wide, very poor one – we need a value-based democracy, in which the state stands up for basic values, for the safeguarding of the conditions for just and healthy life. (Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom 2007a)

Here, populism once again played a secondary role (e.g. in the opposition between the "very poor" masses and "very wealthy" few), with the various nationalist ("national" vs. "multinational") and anti-(neo)liberal oppositions largely accounting for the construction of the demand for a "state for the people." Another prominent demand in the 13-page document was for the "instituting of a Constitution based on the Holy Crown in place of the current constitution," arguing that Hungary has existed in a state of "legal continuity" since the "1944 German occupation" (Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom 2007a). This demand, in addition to isolated economic ones such as the nationalization of pension funds, would be directly incorporated into Fidesz's post-2010 ruling agenda, pointing to a clear strategy of differential co-optation of demands by Fidesz *vis-à-vis* its rising competitor on the radical right.

The nationalist populism of Jobbik (2010, 2014, 2017–18)

It was in the context of the 2010 election campaign, in which Fidesz had already shifted gears from social populism to institutionalism, that populism in Jobbik's discourse came to the fore in the form of an equivalentially more wide-ranging opposition to "politicians," "politician crime" (to go along with "Gypsy crime"), and the "political elite" in the name of "the people" (*nép*). In this manner, a populism of constructing a central opposition between a popular subject and a power bloc became the main feature of Jobbik's discourse for arguably the first time (see also Bíró-Nagy and Róna 2013, 17–19). In his preface to the party's election program, Jobbik chairman and prime ministerial candidate Vona expressed the hope that

> this program will reinforce those who already believed in us, win over those who did not dare to listen to the Jobbik [better or right-wing][7] wisdom, and finally unsettle and beat back those who do not consider Hungary to be their homeland [and] Hungarianhood [*magyarság*] to be

> their nation. (Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom 2010, 7)

While thus maintaining the central references to an ethnically defined "nation," Vona went on to summarize the program in terms of the following equivalential chain of demands:

> Here, anyone can read in black and white what Jobbik wants: the uncompromising liquidation of politician crime, an economic policy creating decent jobs, an active and intervening state helping domestic manufacturers and entrepreneurs, agriculture based on family holdings, strong public safety built on a reformed police and a rebuilt gendarmerie [...]. In a word, the winning back of national self-determination. (Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom 2010, 7)

While the economic nationalism and law-and-order demands were familiar, the foregrounding of the populist opposition to "politician crime" suggested an attempt by Jobbik to expand its equivalential chain (and "win over" new subject positions as it stated) in the election context. Once again, this equivalential chain was articulated in terms of "national self-determination" and in contrariety to those who reject "Hungary" and "Hungarianhood," pointing to a joint articulation of nationalism and populism; yet the equivalential expansion of the constitutive outside meant that the power bloc was constructed not only in terms of its anti-national character and that the populist construction of "politician crime" thus went beyond the nationalist opposition of national vs. anti-national. The program went on to prominently articulate the demand for "liquidation of politician crime," diagnosing a situation in which

> [t]he past decades have utterly discredited the politician profession. The word "politician" has turned into a synonym for a rich person, not without reason. Politicians, while their task is to pass legislation, violate the laws one by one, then secure their impunity either by mutual cover-up of affairs, through the complicit use of media, or by hiding behind immunity rights. (Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom 2010, 64)

Jobbik thus constructed the power bloc "politicians" in the populist terms of self-enrichment and abuse of power, while equivalentially linking the different "parties" as ultimately in league with each other's corruption and united in the "mafia-like" pursuit of common "party interests":

> While the parties carry on serious debates at first sight in the halls of parliament, their economic background is as good as tied together, and they have managed public funds for big investment projects in a mafia-like manner according to each other's party interests. (Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom 2010, 64)

Jobbik's high-profile billboard campaign brought the populist opposition of "people" vs. "politicians" to the fore; in addition to the widely featured slogans "Radical change!" and "In the name of the people" (*nép*), one Jobbik billboard that gained immediate notoriety showed black-and-white prison bars with the caption: "People's judgment [*népítélet*]: 20 years [in prison] for the [past] 20 years!" In addition to this populism directed against "politicians," Jobbik maintained an ethno-nationalist discourse calling for the "liquidation of Gypsy crime," insisting that "Gypsy crime exists, indeed is rampant, in Hungary" and needs to be rooted out through a combination of law-and-order reinforcements and changes to the welfare and education systems (Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom 2010, 40). Jobbik's nationalist populism at this juncture could, in short, be summarized in terms of the dual constitutive outside "politicians" (populism) and "Gypsy crime" (nationalism). The central role of populism, however, can be seen in how "politicians" functions as an empty signifier blocking the realization of all the demands on the protagonist side (unlike "Gypsy crime," which is not articulated in contrariety to, say, "decent jobs"), as illustrated in Figure 4.3.

The Fidesz landslide in the 2010 elections, which saw Jobbik enter parliament with 16.7% of the vote, produced a radically new situation not only for the entire context of post-1989 party competition, but also for Jobbik. On the one hand, Fidesz's authoritarian institutionalism entailed a substantial differential incorporation of Jobbik demands – including the very idea of a constitution proclaiming a break with the 1944–2010 period and invoking Christian values as well as the Holy Crown as state symbol – which made Jobbik a virtually co-constituent force behind the System of National Cooperation (see also Enyedi and Róna 2018; Krekó and Mayer 2015). On the other hand, Fidesz's partial co-optation of Jobbik's more radical nationalist demands raised a strategic dilemma for Jobbik's self-positioning *vis-à-vis* the new ruling party. After initially supporting Fidesz's constitution initiative, Jobbik changed its stance and voted against the constitution in parliament, citing opposition to "multinational capital" after Fidesz refused to support Jobbik's proposals for a constitutional ban on foreign purchases of Hungarian land and natural resources (Varga 2014, 803). This reflected a strategy of emphasizing radical economic nationalism in the first few years

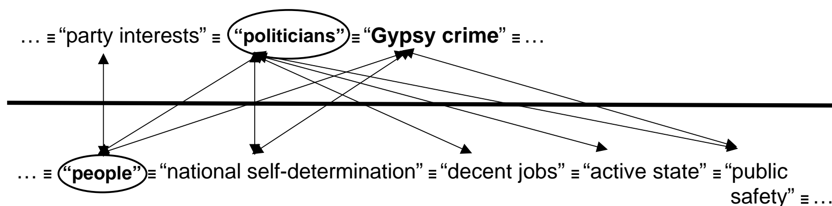

Figure 4.3 Nationalist populism of Jobbik (2010).

of a government that, despite Fidesz's social populism in opposition, featured a rather eclectic mix of welfare retrenchment and targeted social protectionism in sectors such as banking, energy, and pensions (see also Bohle and Greskovits 2019).

In 2013, however, a shift occurred in Jobbik's discourse with Vona's "people's party" (*néppárt*) strategy. The opening shot of this new phase was what was widely referred to as a "cuteness campaign" by Jobbik on social media and street billboards, showing pictures of Vona with domestic animals or portraits of an ordinary-looking family with the caption "We, Jobbik people [*jobbikosok*]" in an attempt to re-associate Jobbik's image away from uniformed paramilitaries to ordinary, cheerful people (Bíró-Nagy and Boros 2016, 244–46). This strategy carried over into the 2014 election campaign in the form of a shift from "negative" to "positive" messaging, portraying Jobbik as a competent government-in-waiting rather than a radical opposition bent on meting out heavy-handed punishments (Bíró-Nagy and Boros 2016, 245–46); the prison motif, for example, disappeared from the billboard repertoire, while the slogan "Livelihood, order, accountability!" featured prominently. Somewhat paradoxically, therefore, the "people's party" strategy meant a softening of the party's strident populist opposition to "politicians" and "politician crime"; in its new self-presentation as a parliamentary party with governing ambitions, Jobbik now dropped the sweeping rejection of "politicians" as such and emphasized instead its opposition to a perceived continuity between MSZP and Fidesz rule. Vona formulated this in his preface to Jobbik's 2014 election program as follows:

> With this present electoral program, we therefore want to offer *an electable, powerful, and government-capable alternative to those who have had enough of Fidesz and MSZP government alike*, who feel that the last 24 years are one false path, who feel that they have been successively deceived, humiliated, and robbed. Because let's say clearly out loud: apart from some minor measures that can be deemed positive, both parties of government have stolen, cheated, lied. (Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom 2014, 7; emphasis in original)

Jobbik's populism, therefore, was now sustained by the power bloc "Fidesz" ≡ "MSZP," instead of "politicians" as such, as its constitutive outside. Notably, the same equivalential logic behind the earlier construction of "politicians" now applied to "Fidesz" ≡ "MSZP": namely, that these parties, despite opposing each other on the surface, were firmly in league with each other's corruption and that Jobbik offered the "people" a unique alternative for getting rid of them all in one stroke:

> *We want to get rid of not only the last four years, but the last 24*. Completely. We want to free our homeland of the Fidesz and MSZP

> governments, because the two of them are, despite their apparent antagonism, the condition for the other. As long as the one is there, the other is there, too. If the country has had enough of one of them, if it wants true change, then it has to free itself from both of them. We, Jobbik people [*jobbikosok*], therefore want to open a new chapter for Hungary and the Hungarian people [*emberek*]. [...] *The time is here for people to finally vote not for the lesser evil, but for Jobbik* [the better one]. (Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom 2014, 7; emphasis in original)

In the context of the "people's party" strategy, therefore, Jobbik presented a less radical version of nationalist populism than its 2010 one insofar as it constructed the constitutive outside in less sweeping terms; one indication of this was that "politician crime" and "Gypsy crime" – the two signifiers equivalentially linking the problem of criminality with an entire class of politicians and an entire ethnic group, respectively – came up just once and three times in the 2014 program, respectively, compared to eight and nine times in the 2010 one. The performative side to this relative de-radicalization was the more "positive" messaging and imagery of the poster campaign (noted above). At the same time, however, Jobbik continued to articulate its nationalist populism in terms of a far-reaching equivalential chain of demands. Apart from the "stealing, cheating, lying" that it attributed to the Fidesz-MSZP power bloc, Jobbik's 2014 program foregrounded its "Seven chieftains plan"[8] as a response to the "colonial script" (*gyarmatelvű forgatókönyv*) that both Fidesz and the MSZP had allegedly ruled the country with, referring to this as "the true fault line of Hungarian domestic politics":

> there are not three scripts for economic recovery – Fidesz, Socialist, and Jobbik – but just two: the one hallmarked by the parties of the past 24 years and Jobbik's. The conception of the first group, which includes Fidesz and equally the MSZP, can be called *colonial*, while Jobbik's is the *anti-colonial script*. The essence of the colonial script is that it accepts the economically – and, following from this, politically and culturally – subjugated situation of our homeland and our nation. (Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom 2014, 9; emphasis in original)

Jobbik's joint articulation of nationalism and populism thus interpellated an underdog or "subjugated" nation in contrariety to the power bloc "Fidesz" ≡ "MSZP," while equivalentially articulating this underdog status in terms of three aspects in particular: the "vulnerability of Hungary in the [European] Union" as a low-wage economy lacking "nationally owned natural resources"; the "indebtedness of Hungary," crying out for a "renegotiation of the debt"; and the "endangerment of Hungarian land ownership and water resources" (Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom 2014, 9). In contrariety to these problems, Jobbik's program presented a plan for

economic development with large-scale state investments in job creation as well as national "self-determination" in key sectors such as agriculture, energy, finance, and information technology. Jobbik thus extended its emphasis on economic nationalist opposition to the Fidesz government since 2010 into a nationalist populism directed against a Fidesz-MSZP power bloc and the latter's alleged politics of national economic servitude as well as the "stealing, cheating, lying." Figure 4.4 summarizes this discourse, with the "people" as an empty signifier blocked by the entirety of the opposing side, with the notion of a "colonial script" taking on a nodal point function by blocking multiple demands from the protagonist side (e.g. the various demands for "national self-determination").

In this context, the Fidesz government's "illiberal state" agenda following the 2014 elections can be read as a further extension of a strategy of differential co-optation of Jobbik demands – such as when Orbán articulated majority "national ownership" of the banking sector as one dimension of his "illiberal state." With the onset of the "migrant crisis," however, Jobbik found a terrain on which it could radicalize its opposition to Fidesz and sought to hegemonize accordingly the demand for stopping "migration," with Vona calling for a referendum against an EU-level "quota system" for refugees as early as May 2015 (Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom 2015). When Fidesz announced a referendum on the issue in February 2016, Jobbik resisted this attempt at differential incorporation by calling for a constitutional amendment instead, with Vona even arguing that "the time for the referendum has passed" (Thüringer 2016). When the referendum came, however, Jobbik campaigned (as did Fidesz) for a "no" vote and articulated this position in ethno-nationalist and reductionist terms, with Vona declaring at a press conference: "We have the historic possibility and capability to decide whether we would like to live in a multicultural society […] or preserve our cultural, social, societal roots" (A Jobbik elnöke a nemmel szavazásra buzdít 2016). Jobbik's populism, in other words, again receded to the background in favor of an emphasis on nationalism and nativism in the context of the "migrant crisis."

Ahead of the 2018 parliamentary elections, however, populism once again returned to the fore in Jobbik's discourse. In July 2017, Jobbik launched a billboard campaign with the slogan "The people [*nép*] cannot be banned, but the government can be removed!" In December 2017, Jobbik staged a

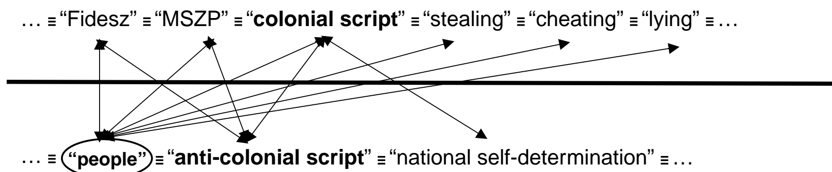

Figure 4.4 Nationalist populism of Jobbik (2014).

protest rally in front of Fidesz headquarters in Budapest with this slogan in the background of the speaker's podium. While the protest came about in response to the (Fidesz-controlled) State Audit Office's decision to levy a 600-million forint fine on Jobbik due to alleged campaign violations, Vona used his speech to articulate a nationalist and populist defense of "freedom" as the "iron law" of "the Hungarian people" in contrariety to past foreign occupations and now the current government:

> But we will not be slaves to anyone. Neither were we to totalitarianism, nor were we to the Turks, nor were we to the Germans, nor were we to the Russians, and we will not be slaves to Viktor Orbán. (Orbán Viktor a múlt, mi vagyunk a jövő' - így zajlott a tüntetés a Fidesz székháza előtt 2017)

While oddly reminiscent of Orbán's 2002 speech – articulating an equivalence between the current government and past foreign occupiers – Vona's articulation of opposition to the government was a rather different one: he went on to construct an equivalential chain of ills such as "corruption," "emigration," "humiliating wages" and then explained the government's inability to solve these problems as follows: "Because it is interested in nothing else, only power and football. That's why" (Orbán Viktor a múlt, mi vagyunk a jövő' - így zajlott a tüntetés a Fidesz székháza előtt 2017). Thus, a populist opposition of "people" vs. "government" in terms of the latter's abuse and accumulation of power came to the fore – with Vona even accusing Orbán of trying to re-establish "dictatorship" – in constructing the equivalential link between past occupiers and the current government.

Jobbik's 2018 election campaign featured a nationalist populism of "people" vs. "government" or "Fidesz government"; the power bloc on the other side of the antagonistic frontier thus became narrowed down still further from the "politicians" and "Fidesz" ≡ "MSZP" from the past two elections, respectively. Vona wrote in his preface to Jobbik's election program that the party represented a "government-changing force" that wanted "government [to be] not about domination, but about service" (Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom 2018, 6) – once again articulating a populist opposition to the outgoing government's abuse and accumulation of power. Jobbik's campaign billboards now featured the slogan "Government change now!" as well as the self-designation "people's party." In addition, Jobbik's billboards generally featured three different motifs, which in turn point to alternating moments of populism and institutionalism: 1) a "you" vs. "they" opposition, commonly seen in the countryside, with one side of the billboard reading "You work" and the other side showing members of the Fidesz government with the caption "They steal" – pointing to a populist opposition between honest "people" and a corrupt "government"; 2) a "we"-"you" juxtaposition, commonly seen in Budapest and the cities, with one side of the billboard reading "We triumph" (*Mi győzünk*) and the other side showing

"You win" (*Ti nyertek*) – sometimes followed by a specific demand such as "modern education" – suggesting an institutionalist logic *par excellence* of a party positioning itself as a government-in-waiting fulfilling demands for "the people" without an antagonistic divide between "people" and "government"; and 3) a (more rare) "we"-"you"-"they" sequence showing Jobbik politicians ripping open a montage of Fidesz politicians, with the caption "We will get rid of them with you!" – thus articulating the otherwise differential relation between "we" and "you" equivalentially in populist terms via common contrariety to the "they" in government. Figure 4.5 illustrates the populist ("you" vs. "they") iteration of this discourse, with the "people" now articulated in terms of a narrower opposition to the "Fidesz government" and its tendencies toward "dictatorship" as well as a nationalist opposition to the dual threat of "emigration" and "immigration."

Vona's "people's party" strategy from 2013 onwards, therefore, entailed a successive de-radicalization of Jobbik's populism in the sense of a narrowing down of the opposing power bloc, coupled with an increasing performative emphasis on being a government-in-waiting – all the way up to an institutionalist logic of "we"-"you" prominently coexisting with a populist one of "you" vs. "they" in the 2018 campaign. At the same time, populism has emerged as the main feature of Jobbik's discourse mainly in the context of parliamentary election campaigns – in which the promise of sweeping away the old power bloc has come to the fore – with notable periods of increased emphasis on economic nationalism or ethno-nationalist nativism in between. It is worth noting that while the ethno-nationalist construction of "Gypsy crime" has been gradually de-emphasized since 2010, Jobbik's anti-"migration" nativism intensified in 2015–16, indicating that the successive de-radicalization of the party's populism does not necessarily hold (at least not in linear fashion) for its nationalism or nativism. While maintaining consistent opposition to "immigration," Jobbik's 2018 campaign sought to displace Fidesz's anti-"immigration" discourse by foregrounding "emigration" as an even bigger existential threat to the nation, with Vona repeatedly declaring that the elections will actually be about whether Hungary becomes an "emigrant country." Jobbik's ultimately disappointing result in the 2018 elections, with just over 19% of the vote, prompted Vona's immediate resignation on election night, followed by a party split when vice-chairman László Toroczkai of the more radical ethno-nationalist wing left with his

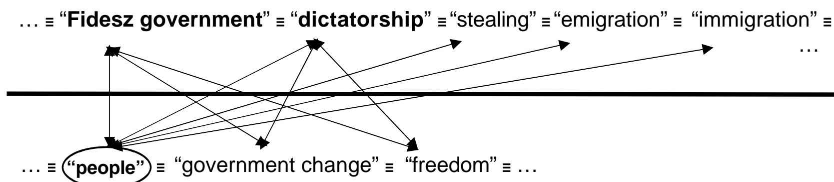

Figure 4.5 Nationalist populism of Jobbik (2017–18).

supporters to form the Our Homeland Movement after losing the ensuing leadership election. The post-Vona era has arguably seen a continued emphasis on a narrower opposition to Fidesz, even at the cost of open collaboration with other opposition parties; while supporting Fidesz's newest set of constitutional amendments (including the criminalization of organizations supporting "illegal immigration") after the 2018 elections, Jobbik subsequently took greater steps toward cooperation with the liberal opposition, including support for an unprecedented number of common candidates in the 2019 local elections. It remains to be seen, in this context, to what extent and in what direction a re-emergence of Jobbik's populism makes itself felt.

The left-wing populism of the Dialogue for Hungary – Hungarian Socialist Party alliance (2018)

The designation "liberal opposition" for the non-Fidesz and non-Jobbik segment of parliament is a largely apt one insofar as the post-2010 period has seen the discourses of the MSZP, LMP, and newer parties such as Gyurcsány's Democratic Coalition (DK), Bajnai's Together, or the Momentum Movement generally cluster around a shared set of core signifiers such as "rule-of-law state" (*jogállam*), "freedom," and "justice" in opposition to the likes of "corruption," "mafia state," "tyranny," and various dysfunctions in the public sector. Among these broadly social-liberal or social-democratic opposition discourses, the clearest case of a populist interpellation of a popular underdog can be seen in the discourse of the Dialogue-MSZP alliance led by Gergely Karácsony in the 2018 parliamentary elections. The small party "Dialogue for Hungary" (PM) had been founded in 2013 by a group of LMP MPs who supported a broad-based opposition alliance; in contrast to LMP's strategy of standing separately, PM joined the Unity list with the MSZP, DK, Together, and the Hungarian Liberal Party (MLP) that won 25.6% of the vote in the 2014 elections. Ahead of the 2018 elections, PM's ex-MP and Budapest XIV district mayor Karácsony stepped in as the prime ministerial candidate of a PM-MSZP alliance after the MSZP's László Botka resigned in frustration at the lack of support within his party for a broader opposition alliance. In this hastily arranged and improvised setting, the MSZP released its own election program – centered on the demand for "justice" and a "democratic, European Hungary" – while Karácsony presented a separate ten-point program for a future government one month before the elections.

Karácsony's program, titled "Social democracy in ten points," raised various demands for increasing funding for and improving public services in particular, while articulating some of these demands in populist terms such as the following: "We will give EU funds to the people [*emberek*] instead of the Fidesz elite"; "we will introduce an oligarch tax"; "we [will] put up a referendum, in which the people's will [*népakarat*] can annul the Fidesz

constitution and thus do away with the party soldiers placed at the head of independent institutions." In this manner, a left-wing populist discourse emerged pitting the "people" against the various designations for a Fidesz power bloc ("Fidesz elite," "Fidesz government," "Fidesz constitution"). The name of the "people" took on an empty signifier function standing for the unredeemed whole and linking demands not only for redistributing public funds, but also for rolling back Fidesz's sweeping institutional changes since 2010 – thus articulating in populist terms a demand common to the entire liberal opposition (and typically articulated in the liberal terms of defending the "rule of law"). Karácsony's left-wing populism thus emphasized the two interrelated dimensions of self-enrichment and overweening exercise of power in declaring opposition to a Fidesz power bloc. In a campaign broadcast for the Dialogue-MSZP alliance, Karácsony performatively expanded on this "people" vs. power frontier by positioning himself as a frugal commoner in contrariety to the self-enriching and domineering "Fidesz people":

> I have traveled a long road from a small Nyírség village to become a mayor in Budapest. I have remained who I was. I go to work by bike and will not move to the Castle even as prime minister. I would like a country where this is natural. (Párbeszéd Magyarországért 2018)

A country, in other words,

> [w]here those who became billionaires in government are the ones who have to apologize. A lot has to change in Hungary. It cannot be that only Fidesz people [*fideszesek*] get rich, and the hatred has to come to an end. Leaders are needed who will not dominate but serve. (Párbeszéd Magyarországért 2018)

In campaign speeches and interviews, including a lengthy sit-down with the major independent online newspaper *Index.hu* a week before the elections, Karácsony also reiterated the notion that "the people [*emberek*] shouldn't serve power, but power should serve the people" (Dull and Tamás 2018). Figure 4.6 illustrates this discourse at work, with the "people" equivalentially linked to promises such as "service" and "change" in common contrariety to a Fidesz power bloc on the other side of the antagonistic frontier.

Following the same interview with *Index.hu*, however, Karácsony also attracted widespread ridicule and bemusement with claims such as "I will get on my bike and ride over to my new workplace, the prime minister's office" on the morning after the election, or the following response when asked whether he could imagine a coalition government with Jobbik:

> I have difficulty imagining it. If the voters so decide, however, then a national crisis-management government is necessary, which neither I

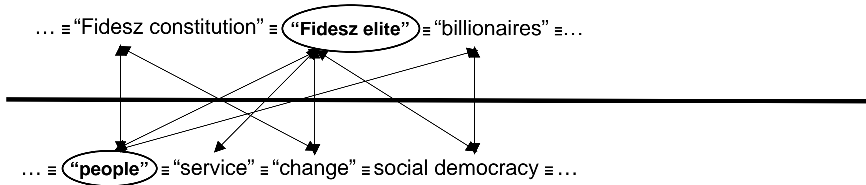

Figure 4.6 Left-wing populism of PM-MSZP (2018).

> nor Gábor Vona can lead. […] Only as a possibility in principle, as the conditions for it aren't there. But this is better than if the system remains in place. (Dull and Tamás 2018)

Both of these responses pointed to an overarching problem: like Jobbik with its "we"-"you" and "you" vs. "they" juxtapositions, Karácsony tried to pivot from populism to institutionalism with the claim to be able to form a stable and working government, while also insisting that he would not actually need Jobbik in order to do so (reiterating his far-fetched hope that "the left-wing parties" will have a majority of seats on their own). This claim, however, ignored the discursively well-established reality of a deeply fragmented and weak opposition lacking a common counter-hegemonic project – indeed, this being the very reason for his hastily announced appointment as prime ministerial candidate in the first place. While Karácsony presented a left-wing version of populist themes used by Jobbik in the same campaign – the notion of a self-enriching and domineering Fidesz power bloc was present in both discourses – the two formations were clearly neither willing to articulate an equivalential readiness to govern together (in common contrariety to Fidesz) nor did they construct each other as part of the opposing power bloc (*à la* competing populisms). The ambivalent relation between PM-MSZP's left-wing populism and Jobbik's nationalist populism – articulating neither an equivalence nor a contrariety to each other, lingering instead in an underdetermined differential limbo – encapsulated the limitations of both sides' painstakingly enacted performative claim to be ready to govern as well as the success of the NER in keeping the opposition differentially fragmented without the emergence of a coherent anti-NER counter-hegemonic bloc. The PM-MSZP alliance ultimately won just over 11% in the elections – only slightly above the 10% threshold for two-party alliances and well below the MSZP's previous nadir of 19.3% in 2010 – marking a disappointing end to the first major populist experiment on the left in Hungarian party politics.

Conclusion and summary

This chapter presented an analysis of the different forms of populism in the Hungarian party system since 1989, covering party discourses in which populism emerges as a secondary feature as well as (in greater detail) those discourses that can be analyzed as primarily populist. The discussion sought to shed light on hegemonic processes of instituting social order by first examining '48, '56, and finally '89 as moments of imagined break and national awakening whose founding promises are prominently taken up in subsequent (partly also populist) discourses. The "system change" of 1989/90, in particular, was inaugurated by József Antall's institutionalist articulation of a government returning to the side of "the people," but also the promise of ethno-national redemption for the community of "15 million Hungarians" in addition to the "country of 10 million." The populist nationalisms of the MIÉP, Fidesz, and Jobbik subsequently emerged from the terrain of this ethno-national imaginary, pitting an unredeemed "homeland" or "Hungarianhood" (*magyarság*) against a "cosmopolitan" or "foreign"-like power bloc. The MSZP, on the other hand, sought to dislocate the nationalist articulation of "national unity" from the early 1990s onwards with its institutionalist promise of a more competently and less divisively managed "system change"; with its agenda of "Welfare System Change" and its unprecedented re-election in 2006, the MSZP managed to bring about a temporary hegemonic fixation that, however, suffered a massive dislocation with Ferenc Gyurcsány's "Őszöd speech" and the ensuing social unrest. In this context, Fidesz intensified the national-conservative social populism that it had taken up ahead of the 2006 elections, interpellating a "people" and a "new majority" against a "new aristocracy" in power allegedly enjoying ever greater privileges.

Fidesz's claim to institute a new order called the "System of National Cooperation" (NER) following the 2010 landslide points to a hegemonic reordering around the party's authoritarian institutionalist claim to exclusively represent the nation and enact once and for all the dislocated promise of ethno-national redemption. The NER combines this authoritarian institutionalism of sidelining, bypassing, and co-opting opposition with phases of illiberal, nationalist, nativist, and populist militancy, especially with Orbán's "illiberal state" speech of 2014 as well as during the "migrant crisis" (2015–16) and the "Stop Soros" campaign (2017–18). In this context, Jobbik, which has featured a primarily nationalist discourse with elements of populism since its founding in 2003, has foregrounded its populism in the context of parliamentary election campaigns; in the process, it has also successively de-radicalized its populism by narrowing down the equivalential scope of the opposing power bloc, from the entire class of "politicians" in 2010 to "Fidesz" and "MSZP" in 2014 to the "Fidesz government" in 2018. The 2018 elections also featured the first notable occurrence of left-wing populism in the form of Gergely Karácsony's

campaign for the Dialogue-MSZP alliance; yet the ambivalent and underdetermined relation between this left-wing populism and Jobbik's nationalist populism – both of which declared opposition to a self-enriching, domineering Fidesz power bloc – points in exemplary fashion to the acute lack of a joint counter-hegemonic project of the opposition to Fidesz rule and the latter's success in limiting the formation of chains of equivalences against it.

Table 4.1 summarizes the different types of populist discourse in terms of their constructions of the popular subject. The table keys in on those party discourses that are primarily populist (e.g. nationalist populism rather than populist nationalism for Jobbik), while also including permutations involving

Table 4.1 Summary of populist discourses in Hungary

Party	*Type of discourse (time frame)*	*Construction of popular subject*
Fidesz	Populist nationalism (1997, 2002–04)	"civic Hungary" ≡ "homeland" ≡ "people as citizens" ≡ "national interests" ***vs.*** "open society" ≡ "cosmopolitan elite" ≡ "foreign"-like "government"
Fidesz	National-conservative social populism (2006–09)	"new majority" ≡ "people" (*nép*) ≡ "democracy" ≡ "justice" ≡ "work" ***vs.*** "lying prime minister" ≡ "new aristocracy" ≡ "millionaires"
Fidesz	Illiberal populist nationalism in power (2014–18)	"national interests" ≡ "illiberal state" ≡ "national ownership" ≡ "democracy" ≡ "work" ≡ "family" ***vs.*** "foreign-paid activists" ≡ "foreign interests" ≡ "liberal state" ≡ "foreign ownership" ≡ "Brussels" ≡ "Soros" ≡ "immigration" ≡ "open society" ≡ "cosmopolitan elite"
Jobbik	Nationalist populism (2010)	"people" (*nép*) ≡ "Hungarianhood" ≡ "national self-determination" ≡ "decent jobs" ≡ "active state" ≡ "public safety" ***vs.*** "party interests" ≡ "politicians" ≡ "Gypsy crime" ≡ "foreign capital"
Jobbik	Nationalist populism (2014)	"people" (*emberek*) ≡ "Hungarianhood" ≡ "national self-determination" ≡ "anti-colonial script" ***vs.*** "Fidesz" ≡ "MSZP" ≡ "stealing" ≡ "cheating" ≡ "lying" ≡ "colonial script"
Jobbik	Nationalist populism (2017–18)	"people" (*nép*) ≡ "Hungarianhood" ≡ "government change" ≡ "freedom" ***vs.*** "Fidesz government" ≡ "dictatorship" ≡ "stealing" ≡ "emigration" ≡ "immigration"
PM-MSZP	Left-wing populism (2018)	"people" (*emberek*) ≡ "service" ≡ "change" ≡ "social democracy" ***vs.*** "Fidesz constitution" ≡ "Fidesz elite" ≡ "billionaires"

populism as a secondary element in the case of Fidesz for purposes of juxtaposition and illustration. Table 4.2 summarizes the source material used for the analysis of each populist discourse. As with the other chapters, the analysis seeks to take into account differences in the performativity of discursive practices, which are particularly pronounced in the Hungarian case. Fidesz, following its mid-1990s nationalist turn, has regularly featured speeches by leader Viktor Orbán at party events of various forms, including open-air rallies and, increasingly, national holiday commemorations that Orbán has used for programmatic purposes to the present day. The analysis of Fidesz up to 2010 thus features a combination of programmatic documents, media interviews, and a selection of speeches, with the 1997 Academy of Music speech, the May 2002 post-election rally speech, the 2007 National Day speech, and

Table 4.2 Summary of source material used

Party	*Source (year)*
Fidesz	"Day of Civic Resistance" speech by Viktor Orbán (1997)
	Parliamentary election program (1998)
	Post-election rally speech by Viktor Orbán (2002)
	Beginning-of-year speech by Viktor Orbán (2006)
	Parliamentary election program (2006)
	Radio interview with Viktor Orbán (2006)
	National Day (March 15) speech by Viktor Orbán (2007)
	Newspaper interview with Viktor Orbán (2007)
	Party event speeches by Viktor Orbán (2007, 2007, 2009)
	National Day (March 15) speech by Viktor Orbán (2010)
	Speech to entrepreneurs' association by Viktor Orbán (2012)
	Speech at annual Tusványos summer festival by Viktor Orbán (2014)
	Pre-election ("Stop Soros") campaign billboards (2017, 2018)
	Pre-election National Day (March 15) speech by Viktor Orbán (2018)
	Post-election radio interview with Viktor Orbán (2018)
Jobbik	Founding declaration (2003)
	Press conference action in front of National Gypsy Council HQ (2007)
	Party program (2007)
	Parliamentary election program (2010)
	Parliamentary election campaign billboards (2010)
	Billboard campaign (2013)
	Parliamentary election program (2014)
	Parliamentary election campaign billboards (2014)
	Press conference by Gábor Vona (2016)
	Protest rally speech in front of Fidesz HQ by Gábor Vona (2017)
	Billboard campaign (2017)
	Parliamentary election program (2018)
	Parliamentary election campaign billboards (2018)
PM-MSZP	Parliamentary election program of Gergely Karácsony (2018)
	Parliamentary election campaign broadcast (2018)
	Pre-election interview with Gergely Karácsony (2018)

the 2009 Kötcse speech constituting particularly important agenda-setting moments that have also been widely cited in the secondary literature. Beginning in 2010, a clear shift in performativity can be seen, with Fidesz refraining from producing election programs, taking part in cross-party debates, or even granting interviews to independent media, while Orbán's periodic speeches on national holidays and at the annual Tusványos festival of the Hungarian minority in Romania have become important settings for announcing the programmatic orientations of the ruling party. Jobbik, for its part, has issued carefully prepared programs for each election in addition to conducting periodic billboard campaigns – both during and outside of election periods – which the party has relied on as a communication strategy given the unwillingness of mass media outlets for many years to grant interviews to Jobbik politicians. This, too, has been taken into consideration accordingly in the selection of source material. In the case of Dialogue-MSZP, the analysis triangulates between Karácsony's ten-point program, campaign broadcast, and a high-profile interview ahead of the 2018 elections.

Notes

1 Kossuth's politics, too, was characterized by a tension between national particularism and universalist appeals, as evidenced by his often unyielding stance toward non-titular nationalities' right to self-determination.
2 The 15th point was soon withdrawn, however, following Soviet pressure.
3 Palonen (2009, 331) refers to this situation in 1990s–2000s Hungary as one of "bipolar hegemony" whereby "two camps [...] sustain themselves through their opposition to one another"; in the reading presented here, however, the Hungarian case presents a notable contrast to the Czech one given the absence of a hegemonic formation capable of stabilizing antagonisms into differences. In addition, the analysis here does not share Palonen's assessment of "competing populisms"; the MSZP was characterized by a distinctly institutionalist logic, whereas Fidesz's discourse was primarily nationalist with a secondary element of populism.
4 In other words, Fidesz's social-populist discourse of 2006–09 set the stage for, but certainly did not predestine, an authoritarian future. It is also worth noting that when Orbán did previously formulate an exclusive and totalizing claim to "the nation" (following the 2002 elections), the authoritarianism here consisted in the specific combination of nationalism ("homeland" as represented by "our parties" vs. "foreign"-like forces) and populism (the "people as citizens" defending the homeland vs. a "foreign"-like government).
5 What is meant here, of course, is "liberal"; this appears to be a slip of the tongue, which can be verified with recordings of the speech.
6 The party name is a play on words: "*jobbik*" can mean the "better" or "right-wing" (one); "*Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom*" translates to "Movement for a Better Hungary" or "Movement for a Right Hungary."
7 Again, a play on words (see note 6).
8 A historical reference to the leaders of the seven tribes of Hungarians at the time of the Hungarian settlement of the Carpathian Basin in the 9th century.

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5 Populism in Poland

Introduction

Populism in Poland emerges from the context of a deeply divided imaginary of post-1989 transition: throughout the 1990s, the meaning of the imagined break of ’89 is broadly contested between party discourses claiming the legacy of “Solidarity” on the one hand and those declaring opposition to the “liberal” processes of post-1989 transformation on the other. In this context (and in differing ways), the populist discourses of the Union of Labor (UP) and the Self-Defense of the Republic of Poland (SRP) inscribed anti-liberalism in a populist opposition between “ordinary people” and an equivalentially wide-ranging power bloc of “elites” and “liberals” – including parties that themselves claimed to be against the dominant “liberalism” (SLD, PSL). While the UP constructed the constitutive outside “elites” and “liberals” in strictly economic terms and in conjunction with a “left” vs. “right” logic that eventually displaced its populism, the SRP combined a nationalist appeal to “the Nation” or “the Homeland” in contrariety to “foreign capital” with a social-populist opposition to “political-financial elites” and “affairists” allegedly reaping the benefits of the privatization process. The populism of Law and Justice (PiS), founded in 2001, likewise took on joint articulation with anti-liberalism and nationalism, constructing a power bloc of the “communist nomenklatura,” hidden “networks” (*układy*), and newly emerged “interest groups” that had allegedly joined forces in order to maintain their privileges. While anti-liberalism was initially a more limited element of this discourse, PiS’s anti-liberalism and populism radicalized after the 2005 elections with the notion that “liberal” traitors from “the Solidarity camp” had conspired with the “networks” and “interest groups” from the beginning and that this “liberal”-“*układ*” alliance had to be rooted out from the state with all means available to the PiS-led government. This construction of an unholy alliance of “Solidarity” traitors and power groups held together by “liberalism” signaled a break in the post-1989 imaginary that had previously pitted post-“Solidarity” discourses against anti-“liberalism” ones. This discourse took a social-populist turn starting in 2007, articulating a “solidaristic” vs. “liberal” divide in terms of the common good of all against entrenched structures of privilege (and, in the 2014 program, the “Tusk system”).

In this context, populism also emerges in the form of the ultimately short-lived challenges of Palikot's Movement (RP) and Kukiz'15 in the 2011 and 2015 election campaigns, respectively. It is PiS's turn away from populism starting 2015, however (except for a brief re-emergence in the 2019 campaign), that signals a hegemonic partial fixation of the terms of party competition around PiS's project of welfare-state expansion.

This chapter first presents a brief historical background of populism in Poland before 1989 with targeted snapshots of how the "people" emerged as a signifier in mass politics, from the nationalist discourses of Endecja (pre-war) and Sanacja (interwar) to Władysław Gomułka's interpellation of the "working people" as a founding moment of the post-1956 regime. It is from this discursive terrain, in turn, that the Solidarity movement's articulation of the "workers" as the dislocated subject of "democratization" would emerge. From here, the analysis works its way to the emergence of the divided post-1989 imaginary inaugurated by the 1989 election victory of Solidarity as an imagined break, with subsequent party discourses tending to cluster around claims to the legacy of "Solidarity" or a rejection of "liberalism" as the supposed driving force behind post-1989 processes. Embedded into this account, in turn, is a detailed analysis of the populist discourses: from the UP and the SRP, which combine anti-liberalism with populism in differing ways, to PiS, which inaugurates a break in the post-1989 imaginary in turning its anti-liberal nationalist populism against part of "the Solidarity camp" that it itself emerged from, and finally the more ephemeral liberal populism and nationalist populism of RP and Kukiz'15, respectively.

Historical background: the saga of "the people" from Endecja and Sanacja to Gomułka

In Poland, as in the other V4 countries, the notion of a "people" came to the fore in the late 19th century in close conjunction with the emergence of a national imaginary. Within the territory of Congress Poland, the main force of organized Polish nationalism at the turn of the century was the National-Democratic Party ("Endecja" for short), which emerged in 1897 from the National League that Zygmunt Balicki and Roman Dmowski had founded in 1893 as a "hierarchical, conspiratorial" (Porter 1992, 639) reformation of the émigré nationalist group Polish League. The defining characteristic of the Endecja, as the National Democrats came to be known, was a nationalist discourse centered on the dominant signifier "nation" (or people-as-nation; *naród*), in which the notion of a people-as-underdog emerged as a secondary feature. Porter (1992), in his analysis of how Endecja leaders constructed the category of "nation," points out that "the nation" in this discourse took on the status of a timeless, transcendental entity; what made a Pole a Pole was not ethnicity or language, but the acceptance of Polish "consciousness" and the moral value of the nation over all else. While anti-Semitism and anti-German sentiment likewise characterized the Endecja discourse and

Dmowki's thought in particular – with "the nation" thus also being constructed via ethnicized contrarieties against the Germans and the Jews – Endecja nationalism exhibited surprisingly little reductionism when it came to defining a core differential essence of "the nation." Given that national belonging was about a certain spiritual investment, membership in the nation was not limited *a priori* to those who fulfilled an essentialized differential trait (e.g. ethnicity) in the present – "it mattered little what a person thought today, since he might accept his Polishness tomorrow" (Porter 1992, 647) – which also made Endecja nationalism compatible with expansive territorial claims to areas (from the Baltic to the Black Sea) populated by millions of people who did not speak Polish or considered themselves to be Poles. In *Thoughts of a Modern Pole*, Dmowski (2007, 27–28) argued that

> I am a Pole […] not only because I speak Polish, because other speakers of the same language are spiritually closer to me and more understandable for me […] but also because, besides the sphere of personal, individual life, I know the collective life of the nation, of which I am part, […] the national affairs and interests of Poland as a whole, the highest interests for which it is a duty to dedicate what I am otherwise free to dedicate for personal affairs.

As will be seen, this moralized conception of nation – minus the territorial expansionism and open anti-Semitism – as an entity that its members are obligated to place at the center of their consciousness would find resonances in the nationalist populism of Law and Justice (PiS) over a century later.

In this context, the "people"-as-underdog (*lud*) emerged in the Endecja discourse as an equivalential category that displaced class conflicts in the name of the whole of the nation. In what Porter (1992, 640) refers to as the "romantic populism" of Endecja ideologue Jan Ludwik Popławski, the "political consciousness and independence of the people" was constructed as an inseparable part of the wider movement toward national awakening. In this vein, the program of the National-Democratic Party defined the category of "the people" in the following terms:

> By the people [*lud*], we mean all those strata of society that have up to now, as a result of cultural incapacitation, been banished from conscious participation in national life and deprived of control over the betterment of their material and spiritual being, deprived of the capacity for autonomous defense of their interests. We do not consider that any of the popular classes should be given hegemony over the others, but, on the contrary, we desire that all strata develop autonomously, in harmony with the spirit of the times, so that each one brings to national life the drive and aspiration that are the natural creation of its spiritual system and conditions of being. (cited in Popławski 1900)

In commenting on this specific passage of the party program, Popławski (1900) emphasized the equivalential construction of "the people" as a category encompassing – and standing above and beyond – particular class identities:

> In other words, the name "people" [*lud*], in our understanding, includes the entirety of working strata in the widest sense of this term, and therefore not only peasants, small owners, and rural laborers, but also factory wage-laborers and manual workers and representatives of all occupations, not excluding so-called intellectual occupations, by which individual work exclusively or predominantly provides the means for a living.

The "people" was thus constructed both as an equivalentially wide-ranging underdog subject, excluded from and deprived of self-determination, and as an irreducibly national subject – excluded specifically from "conscious participation in national life" and the movement toward collective national consciousness that represented, for Endecja, the telos of politics. Porter (2000, 151) argues that this dual interprellation of "*lud*" (as people-as-underdog and as people-as-nation) subsequently gave way to a primarily nationalist construction as "a subordinate stratum [...] that deserved praise and support only insofar as it embodied the nation" – exemplified by Dmowski's claim at Popławski's 1908 funeral that his deceased friend had understood that "to raise up the *lud* was in the national interest" (cited in Porter 2000, 151; translation in original).

The discourse of the Endecja was thus diametrically opposed to that of the Polish Socialist Party (PPS), which not only boycotted Polish elections to the Russian Duma and made attempts at armed struggle – in contrast to the Endecja's strategy of electoral participation and rejection of violent uprisings – but also foregrounded class over national identity and declared itself to be "the political organization of the Polish working class, fighting for its liberation from the yoke of capitalism [...] and the gaining of power for the proletariat" (Polska Partia Socjalistyczna 1900). It was the former PPS member, Józef Piłsudski, who led the Polish Legions to fight against Russian forces in World War I after leaving the PPS and subsequently emerged as a key rival to Dmowski's Endecja in the process of establishing an independent Polish state. While Dmowski lobbied for the independence cause abroad with his Polish National Council, it was Piłsudski who arrived to a triumphant return in Warsaw in the last days of the war in a sealed German train and was appointed Chief of State by the Regency Council (which had already declared Poland's independence in October), taking on the symbolic function of "the demiurge of modern Poland" intimately associated with November 11, 1918 as the imagined break inaugurating national independence (Biskupski 2012, 32). On November 16, Piłsudski (2008, 12) issued a notification "to the governments and nations, warring and neutral," to the following effect:

> The Polish State arises from the will of the entire nation and is based on democratic foundations. The government of Poland replaces the rule of force that loomed over the fate of Poland for 140 years – through a system built on order and justice.

If Piłsudski articulated this instituting moment of Polish independence in terms of the equivalential chain "democracy" ≡ "will of the nation" ≡ "order and justice" in common contrariety to "the rule of force," a very different kind of equivalential construction emerged eight years later with his May 1926 coup. Having stepped down as Chief of State in 1922 and retired from politics, Piłsudski now returned to take power in a military *coup d'état*; in an interview on the day of the coup, Piłsudski (1937, 336) claimed to defend the "moral interests of the state and the moral interests of the armed forces":

> I am going into battle, just as before, against the main evil of the state: the rule of ragtag parties over Poland, the forgetting of intangibles, and the remembering of only money and gain.

Piłsudski thus justified his seizure of power in the partly populist terms of opposing "the rule of ragtag parties" and their selfish interests – while not, however, appealing to a popular underdog against this rule, emphasizing instead a moral mission of the military without reference to the people – and promised to restore order and bring about a moral cleansing or "sanation" (*sanacja*) of politics. The earlier articulation of "order and justice" was now decoupled from the equivalential link with "democracy"; the former war hero proceeded to establish an authoritarian system of rule giving him sweeping powers, including direct control of the military, and drawing extensively on the use of state propaganda and repression against political opponents. While the May coup was backed by a bloc of left-wing opposition parties in particular – including the PPS, the Peasant Party, and the Communist Party – Piłsudski, in line with a "*sanacja*" doctrine opposed to the power of political parties as such, soon distanced himself from these parties. What became the main institutional vehicle supporting Piłsudski's rule was the aptly named Nonpartisan Bloc for Cooperation with the Government (BBWR), which was conceived as the link between Piłsudski and the will of the entire nation – including minorities, thus in line with Piłsudski's project of re-articulating a civic, multi-ethnic national identity transcending sectional (e.g. agrarian, ethnic, religious) differences and embodied in himself as leader. In this manner, the May 1926 coup inaugurated an authoritarian institutionalism – "a politics above politics" that claimed to do away with the dirty, conflictual nature of partisan politics in the name of the unity of the nation and its leader (Biskupski 2012, 51). This regime continued to function after Piłsudski's death in 1935, which was followed by a brief period of rule by "the colonels" from Piłsudski's inner circle until the Nazi invasion and occupation.

After World War II, as in the other "people's democracies," the Polish People's Republic (PRL) was inaugurated with prominent references to "the people," such as the "popular referendum" of 1946 on abolishing the Senate, instituting land reform, and establishing the Oder-Neisse border in the west. The 1947 parliamentary elections – which, like the 1946 referendum, took place in a context of open state repression and produced an overwhelming majority for the provisional authorities – were followed by the merger of the Polish Workers' Party and the reconstituted postwar PPS into the United Polish Workers' Party (PZPR), which became the dominant party within the ruling bloc, the Front of National Unity (FJN). This was soon followed by a purge of figures in the party leadership accused of "rightist-nationalist deviations," including First Secretary Władysław Gomułka; the latter, however, returned to power as first secretary in the wake of the 1956 workers' protests in Poznań and promised a clean break from the years of hard repression and economic mismanagement (Ost 1990, 41–43). Speaking at a rally in front of several hundred thousand people in Warsaw on October 24, 1956, Gomułka articulated this promise in the following terms:

> In the course of the past years, a lot of evil, wrongs, and painful disappointments have accumulated in Polish life. The ideas of socialism, penetrated by the spirit of freedom of the individual and respect for the rights of citizens, gave way in practice to profound deformations. The hard labor of the working class and the entire nation did not yield the expected fruits. I profoundly believe that these years have passed irretrievably into the past. […]
>
> Only by consistently treading the path of democratization and tearing away the roots of all evil of the past period will we arrive at building the best model of socialism corresponding to the needs of our nation. A deciding role on this path must be played, above all, by the expansion of workers' democracy, the increase in direct participation of the workplace in the management of businesses, the increase in the participation of working masses of the cities and the countryside in the running of the popular state. (Gomułka 1956)

Gomułka's speech can be read as a founding moment of the post-1956 regime with its inaugural promise of "democratization" as a break with the "wrongs" of the past. While the "Gomułka thaw" that this speech inaugurated – including such measures as de-collectivization, toleration of autonomous workplace councils, and loosening of censorship – would be largely rolled back (with the exception of de-collectivization) within the next few years (Ekiert and Kubik 1999, 30–31; Ost 1990, 45–46), Gomułka's articulation of "democratization" in terms of the rights and participation of "working people" established a discursive terrain from which subsequent oppositional discourses would emerge.

In this vein, the emergence of the Independent Trade Union "Solidarity" in the wake of the August 1980 strike wave can be situated in the dislocations in the post-1956 regime's founding promise of a socialism that, above all, incorporates and empowers the workers. The "21 postulates" released by the Interfactory Strike Committee (MKS) in Gdańsk in August 1980 were characterized by a differential articulation of demands mostly related to workers' and civil rights already provided for by official legislation – such as "guaranteeing of the right to strike," "the freedom of speech, print, and publication guaranteed by the PRL constitution" – as well as improvements in wages, pensions, working hours, and paid leave (NSZZ Solidarność 1980). The articulation was a primarily differential one insofar as it lacked the equivalential designation of a constitutive outside blocking the collective realization of these demands and, indeed, refrained from calls for a change in political system or leadership. It was, however, the first of the MKS's 21 demands – the demand for the "acceptance of trade unions independent from the party and employers" – that carried subversive implications in calling into question the ruling party's exclusive claim to represent the workers. While the so-called August Agreements between strike representatives and the government in 1980 led to an unprecedented formal recognition of this demand by the authorities, the latter subsequently worked to hinder the formation of independent unions in practice through various measures such as the differential incorporation of wage demands and proposals for reorganizing or repackaging the existing framework of (non-independent) unions (Ost 1990, 79–97). This *de facto* blockage of the demand for independent unions and the later outlawing of the newly created Solidarity union with the introduction of martial law in 1981 meant that the demand for the very existence of Solidarity as the first independent union could turn into something like an empty signifier – a proxy demand for opposition to one-party rule as such (see also Laclau 2005, 81). It was in this context that what Ost (1990) refers to the initial "anti-politics" of Solidarity – i.e. the conscious disinterest in a transformation of the state in favor of building up autonomous structures in civil society – gave way to a project of building up a mass nationwide union capable of negotiating institutional reforms with the authorities. The imposition of martial law, while interrupting this project, also pointed to an organic crisis situation in which the leading role of the party could only be reproduced by brute military force: indeed, "the Party was hardly mentioned at all" in official propaganda in the early phase of martial law, the lifting of which only confirmed the end, rather than a restoration, of "the Party's monopoly of public life" (Ost 1990, 151, 179). The PZPR leadership subsequently took proactive steps toward economic reforms starting in 1986–87, while Solidarity representatives gradually took on the speaker position of addressing demands to the ruling party in one-on-one negotiations – beginning with Lech Wałęsa's unprecedented TV debate with a Politburo representative in 1988 and culminating with Round Table negotiations that, against the continuing backdrop of strikes and protests, led to

an agreement on the official re-legalization of Solidarity and partly free parliamentary elections in 1989, albeit with only 35% of the seats in the Sejm (and all seats in the newly created Senate) fully up for election.

The process of transition from one-party rule was thus characterized by a strongly institutionalist logic of gradual differential co-optation of reform demands onto (only partly free) institutional channels. While openly acknowledging that "these are not fully democratic elections," the Solidarity Citizens' Committee declared in its 1989 election program that "[w]e want to change this system, getting there on a path of evolutionary changes, using parliamentary methods" (Komitet obywatelski "Solidarność" 1995, 54). While Solidarity ultimately achieved a stunning near-clean sweep of the seats that it contested in both chambers, the PZPR and its satellites maintained a majority in the Sejm; it took post-election negotiations for the PZPR and President Wojciech Jaruzelski to accept Solidarity's Tadeusz Mazowiecki as prime minister. In his inaugural parliamentary speech in August 1989, Mazowiecki articulated a break with the old order in the deeply institutionalist terms of restoring "normality" and the "principle of partnership" over the "principle of struggle":

> It is necessary to restore mechanisms of normal political life in Poland. The transition is difficult but does not have to bring about shocks. On the contrary: it will be a path to normality. The principle of partnership must replace the principle of struggle that sooner or later leads to the elimination of the enemy. Otherwise, we will not transition from a totalitarian system to a democratic one. (Sejm Rzeczpospolitej Polskiej 1989, 83)

Mazowiecki equivalentially linked this "democratic" transition (in contrariety to "totalitarianism") to the two main dimensions of a "return to a market economy" and the "implementation of governments of law, the recognition of rights of each individual in accordance with international treaties, agreements, and conventions" (Sejm Rzeczpospolitej Polskiej 1989, 84–85). Having said all this, Mazowiecki famously declared a "thick line" on the past:

> The government that I am forming does not carry responsibility for the liabilities that it inherits. It has, however, influence on the circumstances in which we are to act. We split off the past with a thick line. We will only answer for what we have undertaken in order to bring Poland out of the current state of collapse. (Sejm Rzeczpospolitej Polskiej 1989, 86)

Mazowiecki's notion of a "thick line" was an overdetermined one: on the one hand, it pre-emptively justified the policy of shock therapy (the "Balcerowicz Plan") that soon followed by shifting the blame for any painful economic effects of transition onto the "state of collapse" inherited from the

old system; on the other hand, the renunciation of responsibility for the past could be interpreted as a whitewashing gesture signaling that the government would be content to close the book rather than grappling with the injustices of the past. Moreover, Mazowiecki's articulation of a break with the old order ostensibly took up the two main aspects of the earlier protest discourse of the MKS and Solidarity – namely, the demand for civil rights and the alleviation of economic hardship – but conspicuously lacked any kind of reference to the "workers" as the collective subject of this protest discourse, pointing in turn to what Ost (2005) has analyzed as a general abandonment of class politics by the Solidarity leadership. In this vein, the imagined break of 1989, as articulated by Mazowiecki and the first Solidarity government, inaugurated a discursive terrain susceptible to at least two dislocations that would manifest themselves in the subsequent emergence of populist discourses: the perceived lack of a clean break with communism and the betrayal of the workers.

Post-"Solidarity" vs. anti-"liberalism": the divided imaginary of post-1989 transition

Party politics in Poland after 1989 played out in a context of a deeply divided imaginary of post-1989 transition, arguably lacking the hegemonic stability of the "post-November" formation seen in the Czech Republic. While all major parties shared a broad commitment to market reforms, deep rifts emerged both within Solidarity after the 1989 elections as well as between the various post-Solidarity groupings on the one hand and parties opposing what they referred to as the "liberal" project of transformation on the other. After the formation of Mazowiecki's Solidarity-led cabinet, divisions emerged between what might be termed the neo-liberal institutionalism of the government, which presented shock therapy as a painful necessity and largely ignored the "workers" as the dislocated subject of this transformation process, and the anti-communist nationalism of Wałęsa, who shared a broad commitment to market reforms but also tried to mobilize labor discontent in the name of the "Polish nation" against "foreign" and "communist" forces supposedly undermining the transformation process (Ost 2005, 65–68).[1] Following Wałęsa's landslide victory in the 1990 presidential elections and ahead of the 1991 parliamentary elections, Wałęsa's supporters formed the Civic Center Alliance (POC), headed by presidential chief of staff Jarosław Kaczyński, while the Mazowiecki-led liberal wing rallied around the Democratic Union (UD). The two parties presented differential constructions of a post-1989 transition inaugurated by the victory of Solidarity: the UD emphasized far-reaching economic reforms in a wide range of areas and support for "entrepreneurial people" (Unia Demokratyczna 2001, 237–38); the POC placed an emphasis on a "[s]trong position for trade unions" and the "workers" represented by them, while also calling for a wide-ranging "[d]ecommunization" of the state to root out

"apparatchiks from the former PZPR" (Porozumienie Obywatelskiego Centrum 2001, 153). The POC's election program called for the "completion of the Polish revolution begun by 'Solidarity' in August 1980" and declared:

> The Republic that we want to build will not be a further sequence of the PRL – it will break with the forced compromises of the round table and the politics of the "thick line," it will free itself from the ballast of communist constraints, from the chaos, corruption, and the increasingly universal feeling of helplessness. (Porozumienie Obywatelskiego Centrum 2001, 147)

The POC's anti-communism of promising to root out "communist constraints," however, notably stopped short of a populist construction of a popular subject pitted against a wide-ranging power bloc of entrenched "apparatchiks" straddling the party spectrum – something that would emerge later in the discourse of Law and Justice (PiS), the successor party to the Kaczyńskis' Center Alliance (PC) that spearheaded the POC. While the two main post-Solidarity formations thus appealed to different collective subjects and articulated different demands, they broadly situated themselves within a common horizon of bringing to completion the imagined break of 1989 brought about by the victory of Solidarity.

Opposed to this ensemble of competing iterations of post-"Solidarity" politics, another cluster of parties on the economic center-left articulated various oppositions to "liberalism" as a fundamentally wrong doctrine driving the economic reforms. The Democratic Left Alliance (SLD), which emerged as the successor formation to the PZPR and quickly re-branded itself as a professionally run party of the moderate center-left (see also Grzymała-Busse 2002), stood in the 1991 parliamentary elections under the slogan "It cannot go on like this," presenting a damning diagnosis of economic crisis in "the two years since the political forces originating from 'Solidarity' took over responsibility for the future of Poland" (Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej 2001, 242). The SLD placed the blame for economic hardship squarely with

> the choice of the wrong conception of economic policy, based on the doctrine of liberalism. Poland is paying an enormous price for the illusion of those in government, who assumed that the "invisible hand of the market" and monetarist policy will secure economic equilibrium and development. We are bearing the consequences of the adoption by the ruling Solidarity camp and the two successive International Monetary Fund diktat governments issuing from it. (Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej 2001, 243)

While the SLD ultimately proposed just another differential variation on a path to a market economy – advocating a "social market economy" with an "active role of the state" – it fundamentally questioned the horizon of

transition in the form inaugurated by "the Solidarity camp," constructing "liberalism" as the root of the ills presided over by the various post-Solidarity forces. The Polish People's Party (PSL), for its part, defined its ideology as a "neo-agrarianism" appealing to the "peasants" as "the oldest and basic social stratum from which the Nation arose and grew" (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe 2001, 148); in its statement of principles, the party declared that it "opposes the absolutization of principles of political and economic liberalism" and blamed "liberal ideologues" for taking the "disastrous" path of shock therapy (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe 2001, 148, 155). Opposition to "liberalism" thus turned into a nodal point that could equivalentially link the SLD and PSL against a common constitutive outside; indeed, the two formations would form a coalition government after the 1993 (and again after the 2001) parliamentary elections.

In the context of this post-"Solidarity" vs. anti-"liberalism" divide structuring the discursive terrain of party competition, the grouping Labor Solidarity constituted one attempt from the left to interpellate "workers" and "working milieus" as the dislocated subject of the Solidarity leadership's move away from class politics, while remaining within the horizon of the imagined break inaugurated by Solidarity and the "great steps in the direction of freedom and democracy" taken since 1989 (Solidarność Pracy 2001, 101). In its 1991 election program, Labor Solidarity declared that "[t]he obligation of the political and union elites of 'Solidarity' is to oppose the currently strong tendencies toward the renewed incapacitation – economic and political – of the working milieus" (Solidarność Pracy 2001, 102). At the same time, however, it acknowledged that "liberal milieus can play a positive role" in pursuing the common goal of the "modernization of the Polish economy" – under the condition of "a realistic recognition of the subjectivity of the working milieus, their right to shape the future of Poland in accordance with their own needs and expectations" (Solidarność Pracy 2001, 102). The discourse of Labor Solidarity thus remained within a discursive horizon in which the "liberal" and "working milieus" as well as the "political and union elites" responsible for representing the latter stood in largely differential and non-antagonistic relations to one other, clinging to the promise of a conflict-free transition process with different constituencies working together (Mazowiecki's "principle of partnership"). This construction, however, would undergo a major shift with the anti-liberal left-wing populism of the Union of Labor (UP), the successor formation of Labor Solidarity.

The anti-liberal left-wing populism of the Union of Labor (1993, 1997–2000)

The Union of Labor (UP) was founded in June 1992 as a merger of Labor Solidarity and three other social-democratic groupings; Ryszard Bugaj, who had been a leading figure and economist on the left wing of the Solidarity

union as well as a founding member of Labor Solidarity, became the party's first chairman. The formation of the UP signaled an attempt to articulate a "left" identity equivalentially straddling and displacing "post-Solidarity" and "post-communist" differences; one speaker at the founding congress put it thus: "In place of a post-Solidarity and post-PZPR left, let us finally create in Poland a civilized left" (Lewica cywilizowana 1992). The founding declaration of the party called for the "construction of a democratic and left alternative to that of right-wing liberal orientation dominant in political life" as the "only real chance for the weaker economic groups in society in Poland" (Unia Pracy 1992). While the identity of Labor Solidarity had been firmly situated on a "post-Solidarity" terrain and constructed a largely differential and non-antagonistic relation between the "liberal" and "working milieus" as well as the "political and union elites of 'Solidarity,'" the discourse of the UP now featured an anti-liberal left-wing populism pitting "ordinary people" or the "majority" against an economic and political "elite" and the politics of "liberalism" supposedly implemented by the "elite" to advance its own interests. The 1993 parliamentary election program of the UP opened with a rather bleaker diagnosis than that of Labor Solidarity two years earlier:

> Communism has fallen, but many things are going wrong in Poland. Ordinary people have more reasons for worry and discontent than for satisfaction. […] Polish society expected that the victory of Solidarity in 1989 would bring the realization of the values that were fought for in the years 1980-81 and then during the martial law period. This has not happened. The majority of the new political elites chose a different path. We cannot, however, give up. The interests of the majority must be respected. (Unia Pracy 2001, 351)

The UP thus took up the imagined break inaugurated by Solidarity and now turned it against the politics of "the new political elites," constructing the latter in direct contrariety to the dislocated promises of "the victory of Solidarity." The UP proceeded to articulate this antagonistic divide in terms of an equivalential chain of ills presided over by the "elites" to the detriment of "ordinary people":

> the material situation of the average citizen has dramatically worsened. Social security has fallen, unemployment is very high, many firms are threatened with bankruptcy, and the state coffers empty. […] Crime, corruption, the arrogance of the new authorities has risen sharply. (Unia Pracy 2001, 351)

This equivalential chain of all the things that are "going wrong in Poland" had a name – or two names, to be precise: the "elites" who have brought about these conditions and "liberalism" as the worldview at the root of these

problems. The UP declared opposition to a "politics […] determined by neo-liberal dogmatism (which has replaced communist dogmatism) and particularistic interests" (Unia Pracy 2001, 352). The "elites," in short, were implementing "liberal" (or "neo-liberal") policies – detrimental to the "majority" of people – in order to "give themselves ownership" and further their own selfish interests. The "elites" and "liberalism" thus emerged as nodal points of an opposing equivalential chain facing the "ordinary people" as an empty signifier designating the collective subject suffering from all the ills of post-1989 transition. It is worth noting that the UP articulated this opposition to "liberalism" in strictly economic terms, while featuring a host of other demands that could easily be characterized as socially liberal (but not designated as such) – such as "opposition to the discrimination of women in public and union life" (Unia Pracy 2001, 369), support for abortion rights, and opposition to the Concordat with the Catholic Church. As will be seen in later sections, the signifier "liberalism" would be constructed in rather different ways in subsequent iterations of anti-liberal populism by other parties.

The UP discourse can be characterized as an anti-liberal left-wing populism not only pitting the "ordinary people" against both the "elites" (populism) and "liberalism" (anti-liberalism), but also equivalentially linking these oppositions to left-wing policy contents (e.g. large-scale public spending on job creation, labor shares in privatized enterprises, worker representation on company boards) as well as an explicit identification with the "left" in contrariety to the "right." Indeed, the program clarified in its rejection of neo-liberal economic policies that the "[r]esponsibility for these mistakes does not belong to the entire Solidarity camp, but its right-wing groupings – in particular, the liberals and the Christian-democratic right as well as the president [Wałęsa], who promoted these groupings and backed their politics" (Unia Pracy 2001, 352). If the UP's critique of "liberalism" thus followed a "left" vs. "right" logic in addition to a populist one of "ordinary people" vs. "elite," its self-designation as a "new left" also featured a populist logic of opposing old structures within the left tied to "communist power":

> The people of the left face a choice that will decide its future. They can vote for the consolidating milieus of the old network [*układ*] of communist power. They can also support a new left that grew out of the old democratic opposition but is free from combative arrogance and open to all milieus. (Unia Pracy 2001, 376)

The populism of "ordinary people" vs. "elites" thus extended equivalentially onto an intra-left populism of pitting a "new left" unencumbered by old power structures against an "old network of communist power" within the left – long before the signifier "*układ*" would be taken up and constructed in a very different manner in the anti-liberal nationalist populism of Law and

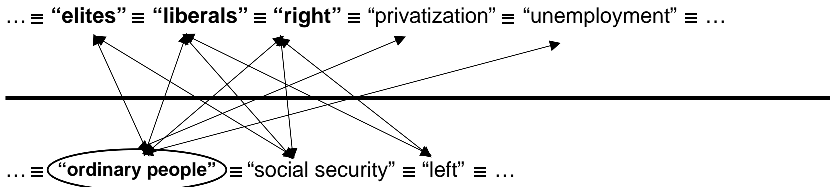

Figure 5.1 Anti-liberal left-wing populism of UP (1993).

Justice. Figure 5.1 summarizes the UP discourse, with the empty signifier "ordinary people" linking an equivalential chain of demands against an opposing one centered on "elites," "liberals," and the "right."

In the 1993 parliamentary elections, the UP won 7.3% of the vote and came in fourth behind the SLD, PSL, and UD; it subsequently entered negotiations on a coalition government with the SLD and PSL, even though the latter two parties already had a majority on their own in both chambers. The negotiations failed following disagreements over privatization policies as well as the question whether key ministries would be appointed by the president or the prime minister; Tomasz Nałęcz, one of the negotiators for UP, was quoted in the media as follows: "It was not possible to enter a cabinet submissive to Belweder [the presidential palace] and implementing a liberal economic policy" (Rząd bez Unii Pracy 1993). Both left-wing anti-liberalism and, to some extent, populism (directed against the presidency) thus came to the fore in articulating an incommensurability between the party's identity and the ruling agenda of the SLD and PSL. In the end, however, the UP agreed to provide the SLD-PSL government with confidence-and-supply backing, while the UP's Marek Pol decided to join the cabinet as a representative for the PSL (while remaining a UP member) in order to maintain the UP's non-government status.[2] (Pol eventually left the cabinet in 1995 following a cabinet reshuffle that saw the SLD take over the premiership from the PSL's Waldemar Pawlak in the wake of Aleksandr Kwaśniewski's presidential election victory.) The UP's support for the SLD-PSL government followed a differential logic of inducing policy concessions such as public-sector wage rises, Labor Code reform, and free shares for the employees of privatized firms – isolated "labor-friendly" feathers in the cap of a government largely continuing the economic liberalization agenda of its predecessors (Ost 2005, 79–81).

During this period of external support for the SLD-PSL coalition (1993–97), populism markedly receded in the UP discourse in favor of a predominantly institutionalist approach to advancing specific policy demands without so much as constructing an antagonistic division in society. Even when the UP voted against the government's budget in March 1994, it did not articulate this rejection in populist terms; in his speech during the budget

debate in parliament, party chairman Bugaj criticized the budget proposal as too "risky" and formulated his critique of privatization in terms of the "enormous risk for enterprises" as well as the "unequal treatment of enterprises belonging to different sectors" – a far cry from the populism of "ordinary people" vs. "elites." While Bugaj also criticized the notionally "left-wing" government for "undertaking above all a risk that is characteristic of right-liberal governments," this contrariety of "left" vs. "right" was now articulated in rather different terms ("risk") than the previous anti-liberal populist opposition to "elites" and "liberalism" (Sejm Rzeczpospolitej Polskiej 1994). The party program adopted in January 1995 conspicuously lacked the frontier constructions seen in the 1993 election campaign, referring to "elites" only in conjunction with political parties as carriers of "responsibility for the formation and preparation of political elites and for the construction of programs for the modernization and development of the country" (Unia Pracy 1995) – a largely differential and non-antagonistic construction far removed from the populist construction of "elites" in contrariety to "ordinary people." The program called for a "social market economy" oriented toward demand-side growth and unemployment reduction policies – quite similarly to the earlier programs of the SLD and PSL – while articulating an isolated contrariety against "the liberals" in terms of economic worldview: "As opposed to the liberals, we do not exclude any spheres – including the economy – from state management" (with the addendum that the "authority function of state institutions has to be limited to an essential minimum") (Unia Pracy 1995).

In the context of the 1997 parliamentary elections, however, the anti-liberal left-wing populism returned to the fore in the UP discourse. The party's election program called for "reforms in the interests of ordinary people" in contrariety to both the "interests of narrow privileged groups" (populism) on the one hand and the "liberal" character of the implemented reforms (anti-liberalism) on the other, maintaining that the "extreme liberal system" advanced by previous governments stands in diametric opposition to the "[i]nterests of the majority of society" (Unia Pracy 2004, 22). In this vein, the UP program even articulated an equivalence between "the Solidarity right" and the outgoing SLD-led government on the "liberal" side of the antagonistic frontier:

> Changes in the economy and social life are being carried out following the same liberal schema. First the Solidarity right implemented them, now the post-communist SLD is forcing them through. (Unia Pracy 2004, 21)

One of the UP's flagship demands in the election campaign was a fundamental change in privatization policy to create a "real system of popularization [*upowszechnienie*] of property through labor shares in privatized enterprises" (Unia Pracy 2004, 23) – a demand that had been differentially incorporated in part by the SLD-PSL government's policy of free shares for

employees. The UP now articulated this demand in populist terms, maintaining that privatization has occurred "above all in the interest of a nomenklatura giving itself ownership" and "allow[ed] privileged groups to take over enormous national property for nothing" (Unia Pracy 2004, 23). The demand for reforming privatization in its current ("liberal") form thus crystallized the anti-liberal and populist opposition between the interests of "ordinary people" vs. "narrow elites" and "liberals." In a similar vein, UP MP Tomasz Nałęcz (1997) wrote in a pre-election column for *Gazeta Wyborcza* that the party opposes the "chaotic sell-off of national property, conducted above all in the interest of narrow economic and political elites" and supports privatization only under the condition of a "truly wide giving of ownership [*uwłaszczenie*]."

In the 1997 elections, the UP ultimately fell narrowly short of the 5% threshold with 4.7% of the vote, losing parliamentary representation; the elections were won by the Solidarity Electoral Action (AWS), which had formed as a wide-ranging equivalential unification of the Christian-democratic, conservative, and liberal right with the backing of the Solidarity union and now proceeded to form a coalition with the Balcerowicz-led Freedom Union (UW). In this context, with the UP reduced to the status of an extra-parliamentary opposition to a right-wing government, the party maintained its anti-liberal left-wing populist discourse pitting "ordinary people" or the "majority" against "elites" and "liberalism." The party's programmatic declaration, adopted in March 1999, opened with the following diagnosis of the current situation:

> The liberals running the economy are distributing the fruits of transition unfairly. Wealth has become the privilege of narrow elites, and the majority of Poles have been pushed aside to the role of poorly paid second-class citizens. On this wealth, the fundamental and greedy right is trying to make a societal open-air museum out of Poland. […] We cannot and do not want to agree to this! (Unia Pracy 1999)

Once again, therefore, a popular underdog ("majority") was constructed in contrariety to the self-enriching "elites" (populism) and "liberals" (anti-liberalism); this anti-liberal populist frontier extended onto the notion of a "betrayed revolution" whereby

> the elites of Solidarity entrusted the construction of the new order to the dogmatic practitioners of the market totally indifferent to the social message of the Polish August. […] The authors of extreme liberal "shock therapy," implemented in many sectors of industry and agriculture, portrayed its effects for workers as an unavoidable but temporary price for the changes. […] But when it all came to life, it turned out that only a few benefit from its effects as a result. (Unia Pracy 1999)

The UP thus reaffirmed its claim to the legacy of "Solidarity" and the popular struggles of 1980–89 in opposition to the current economic policies of the "elites" and "liberals." Apart from this populist programmatic discourse, populism also remained in the foreground of the party's day-to-day politics in the 1997–2000 period. In a January 2000 press release, for instance, UP denounced an ongoing "process of political elites and their protégés giving themselves ownership off of state property," presenting an equivalential chain of examples for "pathological occurrences" such as the "payout of large sums of public money to dismissed presidents of Polish Radio," "high remunerations and guaranteed severance pay in state institutions in city and voivodeship administrations, in public insurance, for the directors of some hospitals, presidents – often deficient ones – of State Treasury companies and many others," and the choice of a director of the Institute of National Memory politically "useful" to the government on "public money" (Unia Pracy 2000a). Here, a recurring theme in the UP's populism – namely, elites "giving themselves ownership" (*uwłaszczając się*) – made its re-appearance, albeit not so much in reference to privatization, but rather the abuse of public office and public funds for partisan gain in the context of a "thoroughly partisan state" (Unia Pracy 2000a).

In the context of the UP being in extra-parliamentary opposition, however, a clear tension developed within the UP discourse between the populist frontier of "ordinary people" vs. "elite" and that of "left" vs. "right." In the 1999 programmatic declaration, the party had recurrently referred to itself as a "new left" in contrariety to the "new threats" of "governments of the right [that] are deepening the gap between the wealthy elite and society." In the context of a center-right government after 1997, therefore, the "left" vs. "right" frontier went hand in hand with the "people" vs. "elite" one in the UP discourse; in the 1999 program, the former was articulated in terms of the latter insofar as "the governments of the right" (and the "liberals") were constructed as working precisely for "the wealthy elite." On the level of electoral alliances and especially the question of rapprochement with the SLD, however, the question of prioritizing the "left" vs. "right" frontier became a key strategic point of contention within the party. Ahead of the 1998 party congress, Bugaj, who had resigned as chairman following the 1997 elections, wrote an open letter to congress delegates urging against any moves to align the party with the SLD, arguing that the "independent existence of the party is threatened" by the prospect of "vassalization." The congress ultimately passed a resolution affirming that "the Union of Labor can realize its social-democratic program only as an independent party" and that "[a]ny agreements and political alliances concluded cannot lead to the formal or *de facto* undermining of the independent existence of the UP as a distinct political party" as well as its "ideational identity" (Unia Pracy 1998). As the 2001 parliamentary elections neared, however, the UP discourse underwent a clear shift toward a "left" vs. "right" logic equivalentially incorporating the SLD against the incumbent right, at the expense of

populism. In his speech to the February 2000 party congress, UP chairman Marek Pol emphasized that the main priority for the party is putting an end to "the governments of the right and neo-liberals"; after praising his own initiative of organizing a "Round Table of the Left" to bring together left-of-center parties with "common political goals," Pol stressed the need for an equivalential unification of "centrist and left-wing groupings" in common demarcation from the ruling right:

> we will not be fighting the battle against the right by ourselves. All the centrist and left-wing groupings will be fighting it with us, the largest of which is the SLD. Groupings that, like us, have had enough of the current governments, that want a more just and tolerant Poland. (Unia Pracy 2000b)

In December 2000, a formal agreement was reached between the SLD and UP on a joint list for the 2001 parliamentary elections. The agreement articulated an equivalence between the two parties in common contrariety to the "governments of the right":

> After three years of governments of the right, Poland needs hope. […] The Democratic Left Alliance and the Union of Labor conclude an electoral coalition in order to enable and extend an alternative to the governments of the right. (Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej and Unia Pracy 2001, 10–11)

Absent in the language of the agreement, however – as well as the 2001 election program of SLD-UP – were references to "elites" or even "liberalism" as the ideology of the "governments of the right"; in effect, the UP sacrificed its populism (and its anti-liberalism) in favor of a largely institutionalist social-democratic discourse centered on promises to modernize and professionalize the state as well as reduce unemployment via public spending on job creation. In a longer-term perspective, the SLD-UP alliance ultimately marked the end of the UP as an independent electoral entity, as the party would contest all subsequent elections to date on other parties' lists and fail to enter parliament every time. The 2001–05 period of SLD-UP government (in coalition with the PSL until 2003) also generated major dislocations that would have rendered a hypothetical revival of the UP's anti-liberal left-wing populism hardly tenable: numerous high-profile scandals occurred, including the Rywin affair of 2002, in which an individual claiming to have links to a "group holding power" tried to solicit a bribe from the *Gazeta Wyborcza* editor-in-chief, leading to a high-profile parliamentary investigation; the government also pursued an economic agenda that was effectively liberal – and was indeed designated as such in the populist challenger discourse of the Self-Defense of the Republic of Poland (SRP), which is the subject of the next section.

The anti-liberal nationalist and social populism of the Self-Defense of the Republic of Poland (2001–05)

Just as the UP's populism was receding in favor of a "left" vs. "right" logic, another anti-liberal populist challenge – albeit coming from a nationalist direction – gained heightened prominence as the Self-Defense of the Republic of Poland (SRP, or "Samoobrona" for short) entered parliament for the first time with over 10% of the vote in the 2001 elections. The SRP emerged from a farmers' protest movement demanding the cancellation of farmers' debts and guaranteed minimum prices for farmers' products during the first years of shock therapy; the Agricultural Trade Union "Self-Defense" was officially registered in January 1992, followed by a political party in June under the leadership of Andrzej Lepper, an independent farmer who had played a leading role in the protests (Krok-Paszkowska 2003, 111–12). The party contested its first parliamentary elections in 1993, receiving 2.8% of the vote; in its election program, the SRP acknowledged a dual identity as an agrarian social movement and as a party fighting for Polish "national identity and sovereignty":

> Samoobrona has become the name not only of a social movement initiated by a popular-patriotic current of rural milieus and tied to agriculture. Samoobrona is a slogan calling forth all of Polish society to mobilize in a struggle for the preservation of our national identity and sovereignty, a struggle for the future of the country, a struggle against treachery, political falsehood, lies and demoralization, the cynicism of sellout politicians who cheated the nation. (Samoobrona Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej 2001a, 452)

The SRP's discourse at this juncture can be characterized as agrarian nationalism with a secondary element of populism, insofar as the power bloc of "politicians" and "ruling groups [...] [r]epresenting foreign interests" (Samoobrona Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej 2001a, 452) was articulated internally to a nationalist opposition between "national" interests and "foreign" ones that the ruling forces in Poland are merely "representing." The primacy of this "national" vs. "foreign" opposition could be seen in statements such as the following:

> The current rulers of Poland claim that there is no alternative to the anti-national, anti-social, anti-Polish path that they have put our country on at the behest of foreign authorities. (Samoobrona Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej 2001a, 452)

The SRP's construction of a "national" subject in this early phase was constitutively split – as acknowledged by the party's own opening statement – between a "rural" and agrarian identity on the one hand and a broader one

equivalentially held together by "the struggle for our national identity and sovereignty" on the other. The key challenge for the party was that of performatively extending this equivalential chain onto other subject positions beyond the farmers; the 1993 program saw a rather limited extension with the claim that "[a]part from farmers, workers and the intelligentsia are rallying today under the banner of Samoobrona" (Samoobrona Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej 2001a, 452). In the 1997 elections, in which the SRP sank to electoral irrelevance with just 0.1% of the vote, the party ran a more low-profile campaign mainly interpellating the "farmers" and "the countryside" in a narrower sense, as exemplified by campaign leaflets like the following:

> Farmers! Times are quickly changing, electoral declarations are being forgotten [...] [T]he reality is: the continuing collapse of agriculture and the lack of prospects for its development. [...] We need to have our own ally that opens up a third way that will be a reflection of the strivings of the countryside. (Samoobrona Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej 1997)

The 2001 elections, in which the SRP entered parliament for the first time with over 10% of the vote, marked a turning point in terms of the breadth of the party's appeal (see also Krok-Paszkowska 2003, 120–22). The SRP's election campaign now took up a social populism centered on the promise of a "social minimum guaranteeing a decent life" in contrariety to corrupt powerholders who have to be expropriated accordingly in order to sustain increased social spending and the realization of social rights. An SRP campaign leaflet demanded in this vein the "confiscation of property for affairists [*aferzystów*] and life imprisonment," an investigation into privatizations ("for how much and where is the money?"), and the seizure of "profits from Swiss banks that political criminals took out of Poland in their suitcases" (Samoobrona Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej 2001b). In addition, the SRP constructed a wide-ranging equivalential chain of corrupt established parties – the "they" pitted against you, "dear voter!" – that have been around for all these years and mismanaged the country. Asking the rhetorical question "THEY HAVE ALREADY BEEN HERE AND WHAT HAVE THEY DONE," the leaflet argued:

> They could have changed the fate of Poland and the Poles. They didn't do it. They only make promises in election campaigns. They (SLD, AWS, UW, and friends from the [PO]) are implementing the same program of Polish dependence on the west, selling off of national ownership, and liquidation of jobs. (Samoobrona Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej 2001b)

Thus, a joint articulation of nationalism and social populism took shape in which a power bloc of the same old powerholders was pitted against the social rights of "all" (populism and social welfarism) and linked equivalentially once

again to dependence on foreign interests and foreign capital (nationalism) – but not only to the latter, but also to issues such as jobs, wages, and abuse of power by politicians. Populism thus became came to the fore as a structuring feature of the SRP discourse to the extent that the construction of the opposing bloc became articulated in terms of underdog vs. power rather than being reducible to a nationalist opposition of "national" vs. "foreign."

With the formation of the SLD-UP-PSL government, the SRP's social populism took on an explicitly anti-liberal and more stridently nationalist thrust. The "Socio-Economic Program of Samoobrona," adopted at the May 2003 party congress, constructed an opposition between the "Nation" or "Homeland" and the "political-financial liberal usurper elites" that have ruled since 1989 and sold the country out to foreign interests. The program began with a narrative of "Polish society" holding high hopes of positive change at the time of the 1989 Round Table talks, only to be then

> [c]heated and betrayed by the new usurper power elites, who, having discarded the lofty slogans proudly paraded on banners not long ago, have sold us out into foreign economic slavery in the name of their own treacherous interests. (Samoobrona Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej 2006, 293)

The construction of "power elites" as "liberal" and serving "foreign" forces and interests, pitted against the "Homeland," pointed to a joint articulation of anti-liberalism, nationalism, and populism:

> Fourteen years have already passed since the gradual expropriation of Poland by political-financial liberal usurper elites who are implementing a program of destruction, pilfering, and devastation of our Homeland. We cannot allow the further dependency of our country on foreign economic and political forces. (Samoobrona Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej 2006, 300)

The continuing centrality of populism in this discourse could be seen in the manner in which the notion of "political-financial liberal usurper elites" held together an equivalentially wide-ranging "people" vs. "elites" opposition not simply reducible to the nationalism of national vs. foreign. In the 2005 parliamentary election campaign, the SRP distributed Lepper's "Electoral Declaration" on the streets, which opened with the following diagnosis:

> The Third Republic has become a country in which foreign capital governs and the Pole becomes a mercilessly exploited tenant. The Poland of 2005 is a mother for the 3% of the wealthy and oligarchs, and a stepmother for ordinary people. […] Poland has become paradise for affairists and the authors of criminal privatizations. It has become damnation for the poor and unemployed. (Samoobrona Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej 2005a)

"Ordinary people" (reminiscent of the UP's earlier populism) thus emerged as an empty signifier in contrariety to "elites" that could equivalentially accommodate not only the contrarieties of "national" vs. "foreign" (nationalism) or "national" vs. "liberal" (anti-liberal nationalism), but also "the poor and unemployed" vs. "the wealthy and oligarchs," "affairists," and "criminal" privatizers (social populism). An SRP campaign leaflet presented a similarly wide-ranging populist frontier of "ordinary people" vs. "elites":

> The predatory capitalism forced upon the Poles is crushing ordinary people by promoting elites "holding power," who have exclusively secured a mountain of property and privileges. […] The country is becoming more and more a state governed by an alliance of power elites and capital. (Samoobrona Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej 2005b)

The leaflet also referred to a "gap between power and society" in its own right, accentuating the populist logic of underdog vs. power ("The gap between power and society is deepening"). This populism equivalentially extended onto an opposition to "foreign capital" and "mafia organizations" within the state:

> The ruling elites giving themselves ownership from the beginning of the market transformations have taken over control of the Polish economy following the orders of foreign capital, which treats our country like a field of export expansion and a surplus market. Mafia organizations are destroying state structures like a cancer. (Samoobrona Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej 2005b)

The taking up of signifiers such as "ordinary people" and "elites giving themselves ownership," as well as the "elites 'holding power'" (with scare quotes in the original) as a clear reference to the Rywin affair, pointed to an attempt to incorporate the UP's earlier populism and turn it against the power bloc of established parties – including the outgoing SLD-UP government itself, accusing the latter of corruption and the continuation of "liberal" economic policy. Lepper's "Electoral Declaration" put it as follows:

> Poland must do away with the political elites that have governed the country for the 16 years of the Third Republic. They have inflicted massive injustices on Poland and the Poles. Enough of the lies and hypocrisy. Let's remember these parties: […]. (Samoobrona Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej 2005a)

This was followed by a laundry list of parties ranging from the UD and PC to the AWS, PiS, and PO as well as the SLD and PSL. Another campaign

leaflet attacked "SLD-UP, PSL" in both anti-liberal and populist terms – with another thinly veiled reference to the Rywin affair:

> SLD-UP, PSL, preaching social slogans, formed after the 2001 elections a government continuing the extreme liberal program in the interest of people holding power. (Samoobrona Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej 2005b)

Figure 5.2 illustrates the SRP discourse, in which "ordinary people" functions as an empty signifier linking the anti-liberal, nationalist, and populist oppositions against an opposing power bloc on the other side of the antagonistic frontier.

In the 2005 parliamentary elections, the SRP won its highest share of the vote yet with 11.4%; following a brief period of PiS minority government, the SRP, along with the League of Polish Families (LPR), joined a PiS-led coalition cabinet with Jarosław Kaczyński as premier in May 2006. In this context, the SRP articulated the equivalential link to its coalition partners in anti-liberal – but not so much populist – terms. In September 2006, the SRP issued a report describing its implementation of its 2003 "Socio-Economic Program" in the first four months of the coalition; in his opening statement, Lepper referred to the government as "a historic chance for Poland and Poles – the chance to return the liberals to the junkroom of history, rebuild the Polish state, and restore decency to Poles" (Samoobrona Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej 2011, 332). In his closing statement, he wrote:

> We are ready to work for our Homeland. The political maturity and competence of our teams give the lie to the slanderous statements of liberals who cheated society for years claiming that nothing more can be done in terms of the scope of the struggle for a decent life for all of us. The initial successes up to now clearly contradict these opinions and are for us an additional encouraging motivation to clean up Poland after 16 years of governments of the liberals from SLD-PSL-AWS-UW. (Samoobrona Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej 2011, 343)

From its position as a party of government, the SRP now featured anti-liberalism without populism, equivalentially articulating the coalition government's identity in contrariety to a bloc of "liberals" while no longer

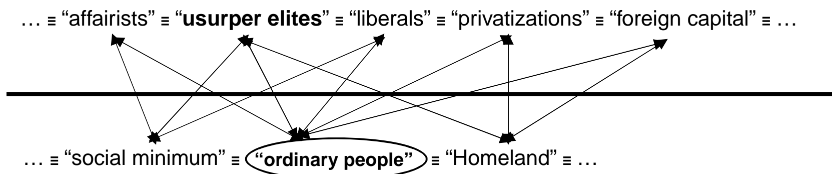

Figure 5.2 Anti-liberal nationalist and social populism of SRP (2001–05).

interpellating the latter as "elites" – in notable contrast to the continuation of anti-liberal nationalist populism in power in the case of PiS, which will be analyzed in the next section. The coalition ultimately collapsed in 2007 after Jarosław Kaczyński dismissed the SRP ministers in the wake of accusations against Lepper (now Minister of Agriculture and Deputy Prime Minister) of influence peddling through the Central Anti-Corruption Bureau. This move, which led to early elections, allowed PiS to reproduce its populist anti-corruption discourse against the alleged corruption of its own coalition partner and carry it over into the 2007 election campaign (see next section). The SRP, by contrast, ran a strongly anti-liberal – and, again, not so much populist – election campaign, presenting stark warnings against the "return of the liberals" in a campaign leaflet (Samoobrona Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej 2007). The same leaflet began by blaming PiS for ending the coalition: "PiS broke up the coalition! J. Kaczyński liquidated further cooperation. He used the Polish state for political intrigues." The more serious accusation, however, was that its former coalition partner had been "taken over by liberals" and thus become part and parcel of the liberal bloc that the SRP's anti-liberal nationalism declared opposition to:

> PiS betrayed the ideals of Solidaristic Poland for its own ambitions. PiS became taken over by liberals who decide on the shape of social and economic policy while leaving the security (within the framework of NATO) and special services (within the framework of interior policy) portfolios to the Kaczyński brothers.

The SRP's nationalism of opposing "international capital" linked up with this anti-liberalism, which resorted to a dehumanizing language of comparing liberals to "cockroaches" and accused the entire spectrum of parties of promoting them:

> The liberals, with the support of international capital, are pushing in through cracks like cockroaches into the Polish home. LiD,[3] PSL, PO, and PiS are opening the doors for them, racing to kowtow to them, and asking for Poland to be taken in the deal, and themselves under this custody. (Samoobrona Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej 2007)

The SRP's vote share collapsed to 1.5% in the 2007 elections, ending its parliamentary representation and marking the beginning of its electoral irrelevance (Lepper himself would commit suicide in 2011). The SRP's post-2005 abandonment of populism, coupled with the dislocation that the corruption allegations against Lepper produced *vis-à-vis* the SRP's earlier populism directed against a corrupt "elite," meant that PiS was able to hegemonize the link between anti-liberal nationalism and populism by the time of the 2007 elections – a development that will now be traced in the following section.

"Solidaristic Poland" vs. "Liberal Poland": a break in the post-1989 imaginary

The anti-liberal nationalist populism of Law and Justice (2001–07)

The populism of Law and Justice (PiS), while taking up the by now familiar themes of anti-liberalism and nationalism, ultimately produced a break in the imaginary of post-1989 transition that had been divided along post-"Solidarity" vs. anti-"liberalism" lines. While the discourse of PiS, like those of the UP and SRP, displaced the frontier construction onto one pitting a popular subject against a power bloc of "elites," PiS's populism appealed to the legacy of Solidarity while also introducing, in the aftermath of the 2005 elections, the notion of a conspiracy between "liberal" elements of the Solidarity camp and old communist elites – thus signaling a fundamental reshuffling of the terms in which political conflict after '89 is imagined and articulated. The predecessor party of PiS was the Center Alliance (PC), the political project of the Kaczyński brothers that entered parliament as part of the Center Civic Alliance (POC) in the 1991 elections before falling short of the 5% threshold as an independent force in the 1993 elections and then joining the Solidarity Electoral Action (AWS) for the 1997 elections. The POC, as previously noted, featured an anti-communist, but not so much populist, discourse; the AWS, as a heterogeneous equivalential unification of "the right," likewise appealed to anti-communism, albeit in terms of a "left" vs. "right" frontier against the SLD and PSL. In its election program, the AWS promised to "finally break with the communist past," arguing that "[t]he post-communists abandoned basic reforms leading to modernity" and "did not give ownership to society through privatization and re-privatization," with the result that "structures of nomenklatura oligarchy were reinforced" and instead of a true market economy, a "capitalism for their own" established itself (Akcja Wyborcza Solidarność 2004, 102). The AWS thus declared opposition to this camp of "post-communists" in terms of the latter's alleged neglect of economic reforms in particular, while also calling for a "state built on patriotic and Christian values" and the "construction of a Right Poland of strong families and solidaristic generations." In adhering to this (post-"Solidarity") "right" vs. ("post-communist") "left" logic, the AWS effectively conceded both the cultural and economic "left" identity to the SLD in order to mobilize a united electoral bloc of the Christian-democratic, conservative, and liberal "right" for the first time since 1989.

In early 2001, politicians from both the AWS and the UW – including Donald Tusk, who had lost the UW leadership election in 2000 – left their respective formations to form the Civic Platform (PO), while the PC faction within the AWS founded Law and Justice (PiS) under the leadership of Lech Kaczyński, who had resigned from his position as Justice Minister in the (now minority) AWS government. These developments ahead of the 2001

parliamentary elections signaled a breakup of the first and last major attempt to unite the post-"Solidarity" right (see also Szczerbiak 2004). PiS's founding declaration of June 2001 opened with the following diagnosis:

> In 1989, Poland began the process of rebuilding an independent state, democracy, and a free market. We are free, have a sovereign state. The dreams of generations of Poles have been fulfilled, yet beyond that, the shape of our democracy does not satisfy us. Our economic life has been overgrown with pathologies and affairs, and too many citizens of our country dread the loss of work and criminals [...]. Criminality, corruption, arrogance, and often also the helplessness of state and local authorities accompany the lives of many Poles. Many paths that should be open to all have become accessible only for the few and the privileged. (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość 2001a)

PiS thus constructed an equivalential chain of ills pitting "the few and privileged" who benefit from a corruption-ridden system against the wider "citizens." In order to remedy these ills, PiS called for a "cleansing" and "repairing of politics" that has to "begin from the top":

> The repairing of politics must begin from the top. In the name of law and justice, we need a cleansing action in the world of politics of dishonest people connected with networks [*układy*] of dependence on economic spheres and the world of organized criminality. (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość 2001a)

A populist discourse thus took shape that constructed a power bloc of "networks" of corruption and privilege in contrariety to the mass of "citizens" left powerless and insecure in the face of the myriad of "pathologies" dominating economic and political life. The programmatic declaration went on to articulate a few specific demands, such as the creation of an "Anti-Corruption Office" as an "elite formation with police and oversight powers that will serve to cleanse" a host of state institutions "of corrupt functionaries" (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość 2001a). This would remain a flagship demand of PiS – consistently articulated in the populist terms of cleansing corrupt powerholders from the state – up to and including the party's first term in government (2005–07).

In the September 2001 parliamentary elections, which PiS contested as part of an electoral alliance with the Right Alliance (PP), a joint articulation of anti-liberalism, nationalism, and populism took shape that would remain the hallmark of PiS's discourse for over a decade. PiS's election program opened with a diagnosis of "serious crisis" characterized by "deep illnesses of our State, enormous criminality and corruption, deep pathologies of economic life" (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość 2001b, 1). In this situation, the

party argued, a widening gap emerged between those who benefited from the new reality and the excluded "millions" who did not:

> Millions of Poles who did not benefit from the positive effects of reforms, but bore their heavy costs, continued to have hope that the time will come for them too. The hopes turned out to be in vain, and the Nation became more and more clearly divided between those who somehow get by and millions of those who found themselves on the margins of life. (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość 2001b, 1)

In the name of this popular underdog left behind by the politics of transition, PiS called for a "[s]anation of Poland [that] must begin with the cleansing of elites," while insisting that "[t]he cleansing of elites is not a slogan, but a set of concrete undertakings" – including "heightened criteria" and background checks for candidates on PiS lists and state functionaries alike, the creation of an Anti-Corruption Office, and the restructuring of institutions such as the police, judiciary, prosecutors' offices, and local government to root out the "various illegal networks" (*układy*) and "party networks" that are responsible for the "inertia of our state" (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość 2001b, 4, 6). All these measures, PiS argued, would serve to "return the State to the Nation [and] turn them into its well-functioning instrument" (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość 2001b, 4). In contrariety to the power bloc of "elites" and "networks," PiS thus interpellated "the Nation" as the collective subject – an empty signifier defined not by *a priori* ethnic or nativist exclusions,[4] but in collective opposition to all the ailments and "particularisms" preventing the realization of its wholeness:

> Everyone who wants the good of the Poles, who wants to do away with particularisms and serve the entire society, and not only the one or the other part of it, must remember that the Nation must be at the center of their thinking, of their action. The Polish Nation is the community of all those who, either by birth or by choice, have taken on "that great and difficult inheritance whose name is Poland" (John Paul II). (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość 2001b, 3)

A joint articulation of nationalism and populism thus emerged whereby the "Nation" as the central value and organizing principle of politics (nationalism) – and especially the "millions" deprived of the fruits of post-1989 transition – were pitted against a power bloc of "elites" and "networks" within the state (populism). PiS's nationalism arguably synthesized key elements of both Dmowski's Endecja and Piłsudski's Sanacja doctrines (see also Loew 2005): namely, an understanding of "Nation" not primarily in terms of ethnic or linguistic difference, but rather as a moral commitment at the center of each of its members' consciousness (Endecja), linked to a

promise to "cleanse" politics and the state of pathological particularistic interests getting in the way of the nation's wholeness (Sanacja).

This joint articulation of nationalism and populism was further complemented by anti-liberalism, which would emerge more strongly in the 2005 elections and their aftermath. In the 2001 program, PiS extended its equivalential chain of "pathologies" into the spheres of education and culture, pointing to a "school crisis" as well as a "regression or even decay of cultural infrastructure […] to a degree that can be called civilizational collapse" and articulating in this context a contrariety to "liberalism": "The active policy that we will conduct must break with this inertia. A primitive version of liberalism and vulgar political pragmatism cannot determine the future of our Nation" (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość 2001b, 22–23). PiS thus articulated an opposition to "liberalism" (anti-liberalism) as a force responsible for the cultural decline of the "Nation" (nationalism), while implicitly demarcating itself from the PO, its liberal competitor likewise issuing from the post-Solidarity right. In a June 2001 interview, Jarosław Kaczyński referred to the PO as "the child of Freedom Union," which in turn "reduced politics to pure pragmatism" and "[t]urned away from traditional values"; in addition, he maintained that the PO, like the UW before it, is "the representative of those groups that were successful in the 90s" (Wielowieyska and Załuska 2001). Kaczyński thus articulated the earlier rejection of "primitive liberalism" and "vulgar primitivism" in the nationalist (or national-conservative) terms of a defense of "traditional values" and partly also in terms of the populist divide between those who benefited from post-1989 transition and those who were left out. Figure 5.3 summarizes this discourse, in which "Nation" emerges as an empty signifier linking oppositions to all of the pathologies on the opposing side, including "liberalism" via a relatively limited contrariety to "traditional values" as well as the "Nation."

The 2001 elections signaled a changing of the guard(s) on the right, with the rump AWS and the UW falling short of the 8% and 5% thresholds for alliances and parties, respectively, while the PO (with 12.7% of the vote), PiS (9.5%), and the clerical-nationalist League of Polish Families (LPR; 7.9%), all three of which had been founded that year, entered parliament. In the face of a scandal-ridden SLD-led government that followed, PiS entered the

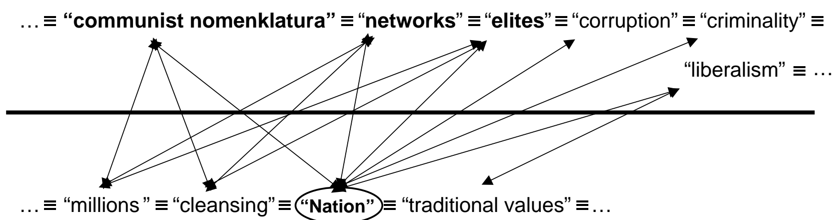

Figure 5.3 Anti-liberal nationalist populism of PiS (2001).

2005 presidential and parliamentary election campaigns with a continuation of its anti-liberal nationalist populism, yet paradoxically also with the expectation that it would form a coalition government with its "liberal" competitor, the PO. To begin with, PiS's parliamentary election program once again presented a damning verdict of a "crisis" situation that

> has its roots in the choice of a mistaken path of transformation after the system change of 1989 as well as the political decisions of the elites at the time who, instead of breaking with the PRL legacy burdening the Polish state, opted for a politics of continuation. The beneficiaries of the construction of capitalism under such conditions were old people of the previous order undeservedly privileged at the beginning. (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość 2005, 7)

Once again, PiS's populism constructed a divide between entrenched networks of power with access to privileges and those excluded from the latter. In addition, PiS presented a narrative of unredeemed transition, whereby the events of 1989 had not, in fact, brought about a genuine break and "the old state apparatus as well as informal networks [*układy*] and interest groups" had remained in place the whole time (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość 2005, 7). The target of PiS's critique here remained a specifically post-communist system of pathologies, with the combination of old structures and post-1989 reforms producing the result that "[i]nstead of common capitalism we got political post-communist capitalism" (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość 2005, 7). The power bloc that formed the constitutive outside of PiS's populism, therefore, comprised an equivalential chain of old elites that had remained in place and new ones that had emerged to quickly secure their privileges at the outset of transition: on the one hand, "informal networks [*układy*] and interest groups often grown on the influence of secret associated PZPR special services and their contacts in the criminal world"; on the other hand, "bank and import lobbies not caring for the construction of a strong, well-functioning, and honest state" (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość 2005, 7). PiS's discourse once again featured a joint articulation of this populism with a nationalism foregrounding "the Nation" as the reference point of social life, constructing the aforementioned "crisis" situation as an existential threat to the very "foundations of our national existence"; in order to both break the power of the "*układy*" and "give the Nation the chance for prosperity and decent life on the scale of a great European state," PiS called for a "Fourth Republic" that breaks with the flawed post-1989 order and provides for "justice for all" (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość 2005, 7).

On the other hand, the anti-liberalism continuing to accompany this mix of nationalism and populism now became more narrowed down to opposition to the PO's "liberal" tax policies – in particular, the demand for a 15% flat rate of income, corporate, and value added tax. PiS's program declared

that "the introduction of a flat tax proposed by the liberal formation would be unjust" and would "raise the effective tax rate for the poorest people and lower it for the wealthiest people" (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość 2005, 58). PiS also ran multiple campaign broadcasts directed specifically against the flat tax, including one showing items from a household refrigerator disappearing and another featuring a low-income mother of multiple children explaining how she would benefit from lower taxes under PiS's policy compared to the PO's. While this anti-liberalism was articulated in terms of the contrariety of "poorest" vs. "wealthiest," it notably stopped short of articulating an equivalence between the "liberals" and the power bloc of "networks and interest groups." During the election campaign, PiS parliamentary candidate Jacek Kurski made one attempt at articulating such an equivalence when he constructed an equivalential link between Donald Tusk's political past and the world of corruption – while, at the same time, acknowledging an equivalence between PiS and the PO on the question of government formation:

> There once was a party called the party of affairists [*aferałów*], the Liberal-Democratic Congress. It was responsible for many privatization and corruption affairs, and its leader was Donald Tusk. But the PO is our strategic partner, it follows from the logic of the opinion polls that we will govern together. (Kurowska 2005)

Tellingly enough, Kurski received a rebuke from Lech Kaczyński, who declared in a subsequent interview that "Kurski will be called sharply to order" and dismissed the notion that PiS, as a party, was trying to find ways to discredit the PO:

> Someone is spreading rumors that we are digging up affairs in order to compromise the PO, but this is not true. The [Civic] Platform is our future coalition partner, at least I hope so. (Kurowska 2005)

Kaczyński thus effectively admitted that Kurski's remarks had amounted to a dislocation in PiS's balancing act of maintaining an equivalential link to the PO as its preferred coalition partner while limiting PiS's rejection of the PO's "liberalism" to the sphere of tax policy (and precisely not extending this contrariety onto an equivalential link between the PO and the "*układy*").

PiS's 2005 campaign discourse was thus characterized by this paradox of an anti-liberal nationalist populism whose anti-liberal dimension somehow had to be kept in check (and prevented, in particular, from linking up with populism). In the last days of the election campaign, however, with opinion polls suggesting that PiS was catching up to or even overtaking the PO as frontrunner, PiS's campaign messaging emphasized the notion that the elections would be a choice between "social" or "solidaristic Poland" and

"liberal Poland" (Szczerbiak 2007). This also spilled over into the presidential elections held just weeks later, including a campaign visit by Lech Kaczyński to the Gdańsk Shipyard in which he explained to reporters that he had come to explain to Solidarity union representatives that PiS is fighting for a "solidaristic Republic" born out of "disagreement with the liberal revolution" (Szczepuła 2005). With PiS coming in first with 27% of the vote (ahead of 24.1% for the PO) in the parliamentary elections and winning the presidency after Kaczyński's defeat of Tusk in the second round, coalition talks between the two parties failed, leading PiS to initially form a minority government and then a coalition with the SPR and LPR in May 2006. At this juncture, PiS's anti-liberalism radicalized and finally linked up with its populism to articulate a rejection of the PO as belonging firmly to the side of the "*układ*," as confirmed by its "betrayal" of a coalition with PiS. Jarosław Kaczyński put it as follows in a May 2006 interview:

> We were going to build the Fourth Republic with the Civic Platform. Even if its leaders took this goal seriously, they betrayed on the battlefield. The [Civic] Platform today is virtually the SLD. It defends the network [*układ*] of interests that has ruled in Poland for many years. (Karnowski and Zaremba 2006)

What thus emerged was a joint articulation of anti-liberalism and populism in power that identified the main ("liberal") parliamentary opposition with the hidden, illegitimate powers-that-be (see also Huterer 2007; Stanley 2016). In a remarkable speech in parliament in March 2006, Jarosław Kaczyński laid out the construction of this antagonistic frontier in detail, not only pitting the "*układ*" against the (more righteous) "mass of people" (populism), but also identifying "liberalism" as the common ground between the "*układ*" and the PO (anti-liberalism):

> There was a powerful network [*układ*] of the communist nomenklatura and all kinds of privileges tied to it, among them economic privileges to an enormous extent […]. And then there was an enormous mass of people deprived of these privileges. I, perhaps as a polemic against Donald Tusk, will allow myself to say that this second group was better than the first. […]
>
> There was also […] a powerful pool of social pathology, criminal pathology, pathology tied to corruption […]. And a strong power had to fight this – it should have done so, because it did not. […] And why did the Solidarity camp not construct this power? […] [O]ne of the very important [reasons] was that a level of cooperation was quickly formed between post-communist forces and the forces, or a part of the forces to be precise, emerging from the Solidarity camp. This level was specifically the intake of liberalism. This level was lumpenliberalism. […] A

cooperation began at this level that, as it turns out – and this could be observed in the course of Donald Tusk's intervention – lasts up to the present day. (Sejm Rzeczpospolitej Polskiej 2006, 26–27)

Kaczyński thus expanded the constitutive outside of PiS's populism by articulating an equivalence between the "*układ*" and a part of "the Solidarity camp" that had allegedly prevented the latter as whole, even when it was in government, from rooting out the "post-communist forces" that had established themselves in power. In this manner, Kaczyński accounted for the dislocated promises of the PC and AWS of which he had been a protagonist for 16 years – namely, the apparent failure of these formations to bring about a true break with communism – by shifting the blame onto a treacherous "liberal" segment within "the Solidarity camp." He went on to give examples for this "lumpenliberal" worldview supposedly shared by "post-communist forces" and the traitors of "the Solidarity camp" alike: the tendency to "justify excesses as a way of building a capitalist economy" or the notion that "freedom is sex shops" and that "the main threat to freedom in Poland is the Church" (Sejm Rzeczpospolitej Polskiej 2006, 27). "Liberalism" (or "lumpenliberalism") thus took on the function of a nodal point on the opposing side of the antagonistic frontier equivalentially linking the "*układ*" to the traitors of "the Solidarity camp"; the displacement in PiS's discourse following the election and government formation consisted in this new certainty that the PO and "liberalism" firmly belonged to the side of the "*układ*," both of which now had to be fought with all the means available to the government. Figure 5.4 illustrates the PiS discourse at this juncture, with a clear shift visible in the nodal point function assigned to "liberalism" on the other side of the antagonistic frontier as the element holding together the power bloc of the "communist nomenklatura" and the "networks" against the "mass of people," the "Solidarity camp," PiS's project of "cleansing," and ultimately also the "Nation."

All this signaled nothing less than a break in the post-1989 imaginary itself, displacing the post-"Solidarity" vs. anti-"liberalism" divide by turning the name of "the Solidarity camp" against "liberal" ex-colleagues from the AWS or UW – an intensification of the "solidaristic" vs. "liberal" messaging that had come to the fore in the last days of the election campaign.

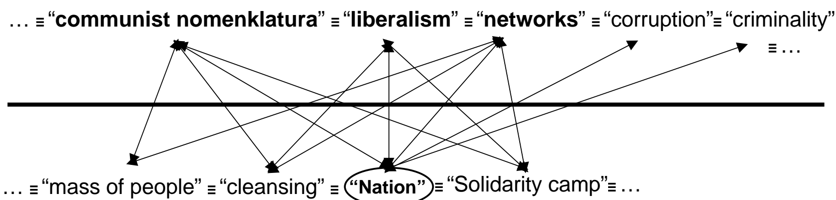

Figure 5.4 Anti-liberal nationalist populism in power of PiS (2005–07).

The authoritarian implications of PiS's discourse arose from a joint articulation of anti-liberalism and populism in power that denied the legitimacy of the main parliamentary opposition due to its alleged links with hidden powers within the state ("*układ*"). PiS's first term in government (2005–07) was characterized by a permanent mobilization of the antagonistic frontier against this unholy alliance via the government's moves to occupy the state through a combination of monopolizing appointment mechanisms for formally independent institutions (especially the judiciary) and weakening the latter's control functions. In this context, PiS routinely referred to resistance to these measures from the Constitutional Tribunal (TK), opposition parties, and civil society as elements of the "*układ*" fighting back or at least as illegitimate sources of power impeding popular sovereignty (Stanley 2016). In one notable example, Lech Kaczyński – speaking from his position as president – responded to Lech Wałęsa's and Aleksandr Kwaśniewski's (i.e. his two predecessors') joint appeal to defend democracy against the government's reforms in a June 2007 interview: "This is not about criticism of the government, but rather an embarrassing defense of the Third Republic and its biggest pathologies" (Kania, Dzierżanowski, and Pawelczyk 2007). He also accused the TK of acting like

> a completely arbitrary "overbearing power" [*nadwładza*]. The Constitutional Tribunal is clearly widening its competencies and standing in the defense of the corporate interests of certain groups that we, by contrast, want to undermine. (Kania, Dzierżanowski, and Pawelczyk 2007)

In this context, anti-liberalism, in particular, became a unifying theme linking the identities of all three parties in the PiS-SRP-LPR coalition, while PiS set itself apart from its two smaller coalition partners in additionally articulating the government's agenda in populist terms against entrenched powers within the state. As analyzed previously, the SRP had likewise been characterized by a joint articulation of anti-liberalism, nationalism, and populism but largely abandoned populism after joining the government, while articulating its participation in the government in anti-liberal terms (Lepper: "the chance to return the liberals to the junkroom of history"). The LPR's hallmark had been a clerical-nationalist discourse interpellating a "catholic Nation" (centered on the signifier "Pole-catholic") against threats to national identity and sovereignty (especially EU membership and the proposed European Constitution); LPR leader Roman Giertych used his position as Education Minister to campaign against the likes of "liberal pedagogy" and "homosexual propaganda" (Zero tolerancji dla przemocy w szkole 2006). PiS, by contrast, was arguably unique in combining its anti-liberalism with a populist construction of networks of power within the state that had to be rooted out. The premature collapse of the coalition resulted precisely from a dislocation in this militant populist discourse when Lepper was confronted with high-profile corruption allegations, including possible

influence peddling through the Central Anti-Corruption Bureau (CBA); Kaczyński proceeded to dismiss him in July 2007, triggering the SRP's departure from the government and, following unsuccessful talks on reviving the three-party coalition, leading to early parliamentary elections.

In the 2007 election campaign, PiS continued its populist-in-power discourse against the "*układ*," declaring that "[w]e are winning the fight against corruption" (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość 2007, 4) – including a stark campaign video presenting a contrast between scenes of shady business deals occurring "not long ago in Poland" and frustrated attempts at corruption "now," followed by the rhetorical question: "Will they return? YOU decide." In carrying over its populism through its period in government and into the 2007 election campaign, PiS hegemonized the link between anti-liberalism, nationalism, and populism that the SRP had abandoned, turning it into a unique selling point and even reproducing it at the expense of its coalition partners, as evidenced by the dismissal of Lepper and the willingness to end the coalition as the price for maintaining consistency in the "fight against corruption." While the SRP leaned heavily on its anti-liberalism in the 2007 election campaign, as previously noted, PiS emphasized the consistency of its populist crusade "against corruption," pointing to the implementation of its long-standing demand for the creation of the CBA and indirectly justifying the move of dismissing Lepper in response to the latter's alleged misuse of this institution:

> The CBA fights against corruption independently of political options, views, or the wealth of the wallet. It does not serve to protect the interests of politicians, but to protect people whose dignity is violated by corrupt officials. (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość 2007, 4)

PiS ended up making considerable gains in the elections, yet its 32.1% of the vote left it well behind the surging PO (41.5%), which formed the government for the first time in coalition with the PSL, while PiS's outgoing coalition partners saw their shares of the vote collapse and faded into electoral irrelevance. Notably, the PO's election campaign had responded to PiS's anti-liberal populism with an institutionalist discourse promising economic growth ("Poland deserves an economic miracle" being the title of the election program) and vehemently rejecting the "division into liberal and solidaristic Poland, rich Poles and Poles condemned to destitution, 'the educated' and 'the dark people,' Third and Fourth Republic" (Platforma Obywatelska 2007, 6). The PO thus rejected PiS's antagonistic frontier constructions while maintaining "liberal" positions such as the demand for a flat tax that PiS had attacked in the 2005 campaign, but then dropping it (and other tax cuts pledges) as part of the coalition with the PSL, thus watering down its economic liberalism in government. As it would turn out, this shifting context signaled the end of one phase of PiS's populism (2001–07) and the beginning of another (2007–14).

The anti-liberal nationalist and social populism of Law and Justice (2007–14, 2019)

After the PO's election victory and the end of PiS's first term in government, a notable shift occurred in PiS's discourse: the notion of the "*układ*" receded from the agenda, while a re-articulation of the opposition between "solidaristic" and "liberal" Poland in the social-populist terms of the common good of all vs. economic and political privilege came to the fore. Lech Kaczyński, once again using his speaker position as president and speaking at the 25th anniversary commemoration of the August Agreements in the Gdańsk Shipyard in August 2009, argued that the "liberal Republic" that emerged from the events of 1989 was a "Republic for the rich" – in contrariety to the "solidaristic Republic" that he had advocated in the 2005 presidential campaign:

> It is true that a part of the people with whom we went together at the time quickly changed their convictions so that they became proponents of a liberal Republic. I call this the Republic for the rich.

Kaczyński then claimed to speak for those left behind by this Republic:

> It is very well and good that millions of our compatriots have enjoyed success. Let us be glad about it. But we also have to remember those who haven't enjoyed such success and yet work hard, do hard work for their bread and often have to fear for their work. (Wygwizdano Wałęsę i Borusewicza 2009)

This socio-economically articulated divide between the "liberal" Poland of "the rich" and the "solidaristic" Poland of those struggling get by became the dominant feature of PiS's discourse. In the 2011 parliamentary election campaign, PiS's program took up a "liberal Poland" vs. "solidaristic Poland" frontier in the following terms:

> The conception of liberal Poland criticized by us is a post-communist form of social Darwinism, masked by slogans about the freedom of the individual and the neutrality of the state. According to this conception, the status of the individual depends on his strength, defined by property status, cunning, acquaintance and influence network […]. The opposing conception is the vision of solidaristic Poland – one in which the guiding principle is everyone's care for the common good as well as the care of the community for the worth and just conditions for the functioning of each of its members. (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość 2011, 14–15)

The anti-liberalism that had long been present in PiS's discourse now took on an explicitly social-populist construction around the name of "solidaristic

Poland" appealing to "the common good" and the rights of all, in contrariety to "liberal Poland" as an entrenched system of privileges enshrining the rule of the strong over the weak ("social Darwinism"). The program went on to define this "liberal Poland" in terms of an equivalential link between old communist elites and new interest groups who shared an interest in securing their ill-gotten privileges – very similarly to the previous notion of "*układ*," but now given a new designation ("liberal Poland"):

> This aforementioned peculiar vision of liberal Poland turned out to be attractive for those social groups whose interests determined the direction of changes after 1989. The first were people issuing from the communist nomenklatura and the special services of the PRL, who were interested in the maintenance, and even the reinforcement, of their privileged position in forms adapted to the new conditions. [...] The second group were those representatives of milieus active in the 80s outside the PZPR who were co-opted into the circle of beneficiaries of the transformation. (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość 2011, 15)

The logic of PiS's populism thus remained quite similar in its equivalential narrative of post-1989 power relations, but now deployed a different designation – "liberal Poland" – that crystallized both the rejection of "liberalism" as a worldview (anti-liberalism) and the increased emphasis on opposition to a ("liberal") system privileging the strong over the weak (social populism). After PiS lost the 2011 elections – with the PO-PSL government becoming the first after 1989 to win re-election – PiS's discourse developed further in this direction with the party program adopted in July 2014, which brought to the fore the notion of a "Tusk system" as a power bloc that is supposedly entrenching the dominance of liberalism into a one-party monopolization of the state. The new program put forth this argument by pointing to "a new situation" characterized not only by "the expansion of liberal ideology, which in practice took the form of something like social Darwinism masked by slogans of individual freedom" (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość 2014, 15), but also the establishment of a "Tusk system" characterized by

> the takeover by one party of all key institutions. In this manner, that party established a major distributive mechanism and itself became the sole controller of privileges, promotions, and all bonuses. (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość 2014, 18)

The program went on to define "the fundamental principle" of the "Tusk system" as the "treating of power as the supreme goal," its ideological basis as a "lame version of liberalism that was launched in Poland after 1989," and its "two basic prerequisites" as the "incorporation of the interests of strong pressure groups" as well as an "image politics" that amounts to, "in

essence, a massive system of manipulation serving to promote the person of the prime minister and his milieu" (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość 2014, 18–19). This joint articulation of anti-liberalism and social populism took up familiar elements of PiS's earlier populism, while continuing the discursive shift that had taken place after 2007: opposition to liberalism was no longer articulated via equivalential link to the conspiracist notion of the "*układ*," but in contrariety (in social-populist terms) to a ("liberal") system of economic and political privilege, now increasingly centered on the monopolistic power of one party and one individual. In a sense, PiS's discourse had evolved, effectively offering an additional (and not contradictory) narrative to that of the "*układ*"-"liberal" conspiracy: namely, that continuous one-party rule (by the liberals) was damaging both democracy and social cohesion and that PiS provided the alternative for restoring both. Figure 5.5 illustrates this new discourse, with "solidaristic Poland" serving as an empty signifier of an equivalential chain of social demands facing an opposing chain centered on "liberal Poland."

This shift in PiS's discourse notably resembled Fidesz's social-populist turn in 2006 (see chapter 4), suggesting a case of horizontal diffusion (Dąbrowska, Buzogány, and Varga 2019); indeed, it was in his concession speech on parliamentary election night in 2011 that Jarosław Kaczyński vowed that "there will come a day when we succeed in having Budapest in Warsaw" (Przyjdzie dzień, że w Warszawie będzie Budapeszt 2011). The difference between the two parties' discourses was arguably one of accent and intensity: in the absence of economic recession, PiS's social populism did not pit mass impoverishment against ever-greater luxury, while emphasizing as a key dimension of "solidaristic Poland" the "moral value" of the state in unifying society and restoring social cohesion (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość 2014, 11, 19). PiS's 2011 program had already declared that "[a]t the center of the dispute between the conception of liberal Poland and the conception of solidaristic Poland is the question of the moral quality of the state": the state, in the "solidaristic Poland" conception, has a moral mission to root out the "evil legacy of communism" plaguing the post-1989 order as well as "serve the common good" in the "tradition of love for the Homeland" (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość 2011, 16). This moralized dimension, which had been present in PiS's earlier populism ("cleansing of elites") and anti-liberalism ("traditional values"), now found reaffirmation in anti-liberal

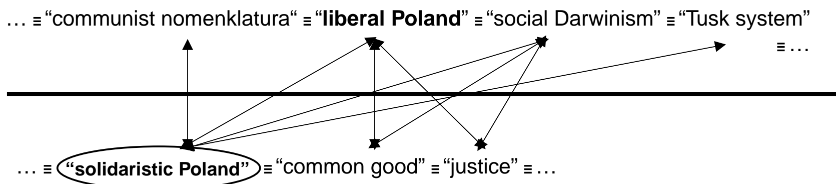

Figure 5.5 Anti-liberal nationalist and social populism of PiS (2007–14).

social-populist terms (in contrariety to "liberal Poland"), while equivalentially linking up with a nationalism that defined "[b]elonging to the Polish nation as a value" that the state, in turn, must defend against "the large part of the elites of the Third Republic" that are allegedly characterized by a "distanced relationship to the nation" (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość 2014, 9, 16).

This moralized coupling of anti-liberalism, nationalism, and social populism set the stage for the party's discourse from 2015 onwards, which has been centered on the promise of "good change" linked to an agenda of welfare-state expansion, including the flagship policy of "500 Plus" – a universal family allowance of 500 zloty per month for every second child onwards. For the 2015 presidential and parliamentary elections, this discourse was accompanied by a notable shift in performativity – "PiS's most important campaign decision" (Markowski 2016, 1312) – of replacing Jarosław Kaczyński as candidate for president and prime minister with the more youthful and less divisive Andrzej Duda and Beata Szydło, respectively. In this context, populism conspicuously receded from PiS's 2015 campaigns, with both candidates largely refraining from a rhetoric of antagonistic division and performatively enacting an image of competence, freshness, and inclusiveness. Duda insisted that he would be a "president of dialogue," while Szydło, in a PiS campaign broadcast, promised a 100-day action program under a PiS government, including the "500 Plus" program for families and a minimum wage of 12 zloty per hour:

> Poles today are not waiting for the next empty promises, but for concrete things. That is why we have prepared a package of bills for the first 100 days of the government. […] We have been meeting you for a long time and know what you expect from those who govern. (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość 2015)

Szydło thus articulated PiS's agenda in the very much institutionalist terms of a government(-in-waiting) serving "the citizens" and meeting their expectations – with no trace here of the earlier populist construction of hostile powers within the state that have to be rooted out. It was arguably this abandonment of populism and of antagonistic division more generally – which the PO had been accusing PiS of for the last eight years – that enabled PiS to partially fix the terms of party competition around its welfare agenda, allowing it to battle the PO on the latter's own terrain of economic competence rather than in terms of a populist crusade that PiS's opponents could simply dismiss as conspiracist fantasy. In this context, the joint articulation of anti-liberalism, nationalism, and populism in the previous phase (2007–14) recedes to the background as an instituting horizon that lends foundational meaning to the agenda of welfare-state expansion. In the 2014 program, for instance, PiS had articulated the demand for "investment in the family" (without yet specifying the 500-per-month scheme) in the specifically nationalist terms of averting "demographic collapse" and "civilizational collapse caused by the depopulation of our country" (Prawo i

Sprawiedliwość 2014, 107). The subsequent differential expansion of family support measures such as "500 Plus" (extended to the first child in 2019), "Good Start" (schoolchild allowances), and "Living Plus" (subsidized housing construction for families) thus plays out on a discursive terrain of "the Nation" whose self-reproduction must be secured and whose irreducible moral value PiS has continuously emphasized for the past 15 years.

After winning both the presidency and an absolute majority in both parliamentary chambers (on just 37.6% of the vote) in 2015, PiS's agenda in government took on another dimension that came largely unannounced *vis-à-vis* the party's pre-election statements: namely, the heightened illiberal attacks on institutional checks such as the judiciary as well as the appropriation of public media for openly partisan messaging. Here, too, PiS's discursive strategy has been the moralized defense of "good change," but without the populist construction of an opposing power bloc – reflecting the post-2007 shift away from a permanent crusade against an ever-present "*układ*" and toward targeted opposition to a "Tusk system" that the change of government is now proceeding to dismantle. The narrative has not been one of an insurgent popular crusade against the powers-that-be, but rather a methodical, normalizing one that refers to the Constitutional Tribunal as a "political organ" like any other that is simply changing hands with the change of government. The earlier populist construction of the "Tusk system" as a one-party monopolization of the state defined a terrain on which PiS can now present itself as no worse than the previous government – exemplified by Kaczyński's repeated reference to opponents of the government as a "total opposition," re-deploying the same signifier that then-vice premier Grzegorz Schetyna of the PO had used against PiS. While PiS's authoritarianism thus draws on the instituting moments of a previously populist discourse, therefore, it itself follows a largely non-populist logic, in notable contrast to 2005–07 – relying instead on the nationalist and social-welfarist dimension of "good change" to enact a universalist claim to work for the good of the entire nation (whose opponents are, in turn, placing themselves outside the national imaginary) as well as the occasional moralized (but hardly populist) denunciation of the "worst sort of Poles" or "LGBT and gender ideology" (articulated in the nationalist terms of "national" vs. "foreign" orientation). As Kaczyński claimed in a December 2015 television interview that generated immediate controversy:

> In Poland there is this fatal tradition of national betrayal. [...] It is, so to speak, in the genes of some people, of this worst sort of Poles, and this worst sort is exceptionally active at the moment because it feels threatened. (Telewizja Republika 2015)

The interplay between a nationalist and social-welfarist defense of authoritarianism can be seen in Kaczyński's speech at a February 2019 party convention marking the start of PiS's 2019 election campaigns. Here,

Kaczyński articulated a divide between "Poland for all or Poland for some," whose most important aspects are "the issue of freedom and the issue of equality": PiS has fought for both, he argued, by upholding traditional values of "Polish culture" (nationalism), but also providing for "the right to a dignified life for all Poles" (social welfarism) – and "this campaign will decide whether there will be this equality and freedom in Poland or whether it will be undermined" by opponents of the government who are, by implication, fighting against PiS's project of social inclusion (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość 2019b).

The 2019 parliamentary election campaign saw a continuation of this social-welfarist accent in justifying the government's record as a whole, but also a re-emergence of populism as a re-instituting moment in the party's discourse. PiS campaigned on the slogan "A good time for Poland," emphasizing the government's accomplishments (and its promised implementation of "good change") in the field of social and economic policy. The party's election program foregrounded the notion of a "Polish welfare state model" as the guiding paradigm of government policy since 2015, articulated in contrariety to the model of a "dependent market economy" and the period of "post-communism" that the government is supposedly guiding the country away from (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość 2019a, 17, 22). An entire chapter of the program (titled "Diagnosis: From post-communism to the Polish model of a modern welfare state") was devoted to retelling the story of post-1989 Poland in the anti-liberal nationalist and social-populist terms already seen in the previous phase of the party's discourse (2007–14):

> [After 1989] the elements of continuity decidedly outweighed the elements of change […]. In the state apparatus, processes adapted to the new situation were put it motion. The most important of them was tied to the expansion of liberal ideology, which in practice took on forms of something like social Darwinism masked by slogans of the freedom of the individual. […] This situation created excellent conditions for the takeover of ownership by the communist nomenklatura. […] In the Third Republic, some oppositional milieus during the PRL period as well as individuals uninvolved in politics previously were coopted into the communist nomenklatura. […] The pathology of the state apparatus linked up with the pathology of the market and organized criminality. […] Scientists and commentators call this kind of attitude, found not only among the elite, "postcolonialism" […] the withdrawal of a significant part of the elite from loyalty to the Polish state was, without a doubt, a serious characteristic of the system created after 1989. (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość 2019a, 23–25)

All this was effectively a recycling of earlier articulations, except for the new notion of "postcolonialism" as a nodal point linking not only the various pathologies of post-1989 power relations (populism), but also alleged elite

disinterest in a state capable of both cracking down on these pathologies and representing specifically "national" values (populism and nationalism). The account continued into the 2007–15 period, which the program now referred to as a "system of late post-communism" (corresponding to the prior designation "Tusk system") with its associated equivalential chain of pathologies, such as: "power as the supreme goal," "image politics," but also the "disavowal of the political enemy" that "divided society into those entitled and unentitled to participation in public life"; the "privatization of state functions"; the dismantling of "mechanism[s] of control of the government" such as the CBA; and the "*de facto* control of all major media by those in government" (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość 2019a, 27–32). Ironically enough, all of these elements were arguably suggestive of PiS's own ruling practices since 2015; yet the program then went on to claim that the outgoing PiS government has,

> in practice, done away with all features of the "project" described above. It has banked on credibility, honest relations with the citizens, as well as justice and actions geared toward strengthening the social basis of democracy. (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość 2019a, 34)

This sequence points in exemplary fashion to the normalizing move of justifying the government's post-2015 actions as no worse than those of previous governments and, indeed, as an improvement on the latter: PiS, according to this reasoning, has simply corrected the pathological power relations of "late post-communism" – such as the fact that "the opposition has a decisive advantage in the majority of media" or that the judiciary "has become a very significant, and possibly even fundamental […] pillar of the system of post-communism and late post-communism" (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość 2019a, 36). If PiS's previous populist phase (2007–14) had receded to the background as an instituting horizon for a largely non-populist discourse between 2015 and 2019, populism now re-emerged in PiS's 2019 campaign discourse as a re-instituting moment that provided an explicit retroactive justification for the party's post-2015 ruling practices in contrariety to all the problems of the pre-2015 "system." PiS ultimately retained an absolute majority in the Sejm on an increased share of the vote (while losing the Senate majority) as part of the "United Right" bloc in the 2019 elections following a campaign dominated by welfare spending promises from all sides, suggesting that PiS has been able to reproduce a hegemonic partial fixation around its agenda of welfare expansion from 2015 onwards – to the point that "social spending has become the new norm in Polish politics" (Bill and Stanley 2020, 386). Future developments remain to be seen, however, with open divisions emerging within the ruling bloc during the new legislative term and the government facing significant protest mobilizations against its increasingly anti-abortion and anti-LGBT agenda in particular.

The anti-clerical liberal populism of Palikot's Movement (2010–11)

Amid PiS's social-populist turn (2007–14), a short-lived populist challenge emerged that contested PiS's hold over populist discourse in the party system after 2007: namely, Palikot's Movement (RP) and its unexpected success in the 2011 elections. The origins of RP go back to July 2010, when the PO MP Janusz Palikot courted controversy with his assertion that the late president Lech Kaczyński "has blood on his hands" and bears "moral responsibility" for the April 2010 Smolensk air disaster that took his life in addition to those of 95 state officials and aircraft crew (Lech Kaczyński ma krew na rękach 2010). In response to the backlash that followed (including from within the PO), Palikot released an "Appeal for a Movement in Support of Palikot" on his blog a week later, which opened with the claim: "There are 10 million of us! That many people in Poland believe that Lech Kaczyński or his milieu brought about the Smolensk catastrophe" (Palikot 2010). Palikot (2010) thus took up an outsider position *vis-à-vis* the cross-party backlash against him and appealed to a wider collective subject – narrowly defined in this context as those united by the belief that the late president was morally responsible for the Smolensk disaster – in contrariety to the "bishops and elites, who – as can be seen – hastily buried Lech Kaczyński in the Wawel [castle complex in Kraków]." Palikot (2010) referred to the fallout from the Smolensk disaster as pointing to a "crisis of the elites" and provocatively demanded a detailed investigation, including publications of "conversations between Jarosław and Lech Kaczyński on board the aircraft" and any "substances" found in the "blood of the deceased president." While this call for a Palikot's movement was limited to a single issue onto which Palikot focused the collective identity of the "10 million of us," the interpellation of the latter in contrariety to a power bloc of "bishops and elites" provided a foretaste of the anti-clerical liberal populism that was to come. The founding congress of the Movement in Support of Palikot (RPP) in October 2010 adopted a list of "15 Postulates," ranging from the "separation of state from Church" and civil unions for "hetero- and homosexual" couples alike to "universal access to the Internet," the introduction of single-member districts, abolition of the Senate, and abolition of parliamentary immunity (O czym marzy Palikot? 15 postulatów posła 2010). In his congress speech, Palikot articulated these broadly anti-clerical and liberal demands in terms of a populist opposition to the "political dinosaurs" that have taken turns governing the country: "These are the same politicians, the same political dinosaurs: Waldemar Pawlak, Jarosław Kaczyński, and even Donald Tusk, these are the people present in politics for 20 years" (Ja to miłość, wiara, nadzieja i optymizm 2010) – setting the tone for a joint articulation of anti-clericalism, liberalism, and populism. In May 2011, Palikot registered a new political party under the name "Palikot's Movement" (RP) as a vehicle for contesting the upcoming parliamentary elections.

In the 2011 election campaign, RP featured an anti-clerical liberal populist discourse pitting the "citizens" and the demand for a "modern Poland" against "the same elites" that have governed the country for "20 years" (populism), including the "men dressed in black" and their moral prescriptions (anti-clericalism), thus equivalentially linking a series of demands for secularization, reduction of bureaucracy, civil liberties, and LGBT and women's rights (liberalism). The RP's election program opened with the following declaration:

> We have had enough of having someone decide for us, having someone tell us how to live, how to love, how many children to have and with whom. Of having men dressed in black decide who can have children, who is to be buried in the Wawel, and whom to vote for in elections, and also who is a Pole. We have had enough of a state that is not an ally but an enemy, in which the bureaucrat decides what kind of house we can build, what kind of business or association we can run, and – above all – when we can do so! We have had enough of a politics in which two men have divided up all democratic institutions, manning them with people whose sole competence is blind loyalty. (Ruch Palikota 2011, 3)

An equivalential construction of a power bloc thus took shape, encompassing the clergy ("men dressed in black"), "the bureaucrat," and "the two men" (Kaczyński and Tusk) who have allegedly divided up power between themselves. This power bloc was pitted against the "we" who are fed up and deprived of self-determination in various spheres of life, from marriage rights and business activity to democratic control of the state. The program went on to articulate a collective identity of the "citizens" linked to an equivalential chain of demands for a "modern Poland":

> A modern Poland is a secular Poland, just like all the countries of the West. A modern Poland is a Poland with citizen control over bureaucrats, prosecutors, wiretaps. It is a Poland in which a woman has the same rights as a man and she decides about her own womb, and every citizen decides on the money for the Church that they belong to. We want this kind of Poland. (Ruch Palikota 2011, 3–4)

The "citizens" took on the function of an empty signifier by holding together an equivalential chain of demands both in the populist terms of "citizen control" against the overweening control of the state and in the anti-clerical liberal terms of individual citizens' rights in contrariety to the normative prescriptions of the clergy or the bureaucracy. In this joint articulation of anti-clericalism, liberalism, and populism, the equivalential construction of the opposing power bloc encompassed not only the clergy, bureaucracy, and the Kaczyński-Tusk duopoly ("POPiS"), but also "the same elites" that have

come and gone in the last "20 years" – against which RP positioned itself as a genuinely new alternative from below:

> We are the first social movement after 1989 that has decided to act politically. We come from below, as a Movement of people who want to reclaim their country, and not as a jigsaw puzzle of the few continuously same faces of 20 years. […] We are not the next jigsaw puzzle of the same elites – how many there have been already: AWS, PiS, PO, ZChN, PC, KPN, ROP, and now PJN – different names, yet the same people. (Ruch Palikota 2011, 4)

RP, like the various centrist populisms in the Czech Republic (see chapter 3), thus emphasized its newness and outsider status in displacing the established logic of competition (PO vs. PiS) onto a populist frontier of "citizens" vs. "elites." RP's discourse also posed a counter-populist challenge that sought to dislocate PiS's own populist self-positioning, alleging that PiS is, in fact, part of "the same elites" that have continuously run the country and, indeed, part of a duopolistic arrangement whereby power is effectively divided up between Kaczyński and Tusk. In addition, RP specifically pointed to dislocated promises of the last SLD-led government (2001–05), which had

> [i]n 2001 […] promised the termination of the Concordat, the liquidation of the property commission, the return of religion to the sphere of *sacrum*. After winning the elections, however, it immediately backed off from all of these demands. (Ruch Palikota 2011, 6)

The RP program foregrounded these demands under the heading of "division of state and church" – the anti-clerical dimension of an anti-clerical liberal populism that identified the power of the Church as standing in contrariety to both "citizen control" and individual freedoms. Figure 5.6 summarizes the RP discourse, with the empty signifier "citizens" linking the anti-clerical, liberal, and populist oppositions against an equivalentially constructed power bloc on the opposing side of the antagonistic frontier. "POPiS" becomes a floating signifier (in italics) insofar as the discourses of the PO and PiS themselves articulate each other's identities as fundamentally opposed, whereas the RP constructs them equivalentially on the side of the "same elites" – lending the RP's discourse a counter-populist thrust *vis-à-vis* the established populism of PiS.

RP ended up scoring a major success in the 2011 elections, finishing third behind the PO and PiS with 10% of the vote. In the legislative term that followed, however, RP's populism receded as the movement struggled to stabilize its collective identity beyond the context of an election in which a wide-ranging equivalential chain could be mobilized around the populist opposition to the power of the clergy, the bureaucracy, and "the same elites." In the election campaign, RP's liberalism had even incorporated the PO's earlier demand for a

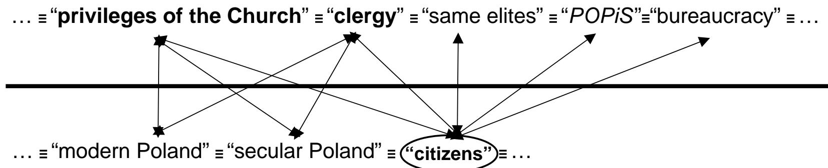

Figure 5.6 Anti-clerical liberal populism of RP (2010–11).

flat tax; shortly after the elections, however, the RP parliamentary group brought on the well-known left-wing labor activist Piotr Ikonowicz as a social policy advisor. Pushed in an interview about how he would reconcile such left-wing and neo-liberal positions within the same party, Palikot maintained that "we are neither left nor right"; when the interviewer pointed out that "anti-clericalism" seems to be the only unifying element, Palikot effectively conceded the point by responding: "Not only anti-clericalism, but issues of worldview [*światopoglądowe*[5]] in general" (Gursztyn 2011). Instead of continuing the populist strategy of frontier displacement ("citizens" vs. "elites"), Palikot ultimately opted for a strategy of equivalential subsumption into a "left" vs. "right" logic and pursued alliances with various left-of-center parties, in what has been described as "an abrupt leftward turn" from 2012 onwards (Stanley and Cześnik 2016, 707). This began in February 2012 with an open letter from Palikot to SLD chairman Leszek Miller inviting the latter to a debate on "the future of the left" and insisting on the "need for an authentic left-wing politics" (Palikot napisał list do Millera. Chce debaty 2012). The culmination of this process was the incorporation of RP, rebranded as Your Movement in October 2013, into two left-wing electoral alliances: Europa Plus, featuring UP, SDPL, and the Union of the Left (UL), which failed to win a seat in the 2014 European Parliament election; and the SLD-led United Left (ZL) coalition for the 2015 parliamentary elections, which fell marginally but spectacularly short of the 8% threshold for alliances, leaving the Sejm without a single nominally left-of-center formation for the first time after 1989. In this process of electoral demise, Palikot's formation effectively abandoned populism in favor of incorporation into a "left" bloc; the populist interpellation of a power bloc of the clergy, the bureaucracy, and "the same elites" that had been a defining feature of the 2010–11 RP discourse was absent from the programmatic statements and campaign discourse of either alliance.

The nationalist anti-party populism of Kukiz'15 (2015)

In the 2015 elections – just as PiS's discourse was turning institutionalist and Palikot's formation had all but faded as an independent entity – another populist challenge emerged that took up a combination of nationalism and (anti-party) populism in pitting "the Nation" against the power of the

"political class" and the "party oligarchy." Paweł Kukiz, a rock musician who had been active in the music scene since the 1980s, declared his presidential candidacy in a February 2015 interview with the intention to "take the state away from party clans and hand it over to the citizens" (Paweł Kukiz wystartuje w wyborach prezydenckich 2015). Kukiz ran a virtually single-issue presidential campaign around the demand to introduce a majoritarian electoral system of single-member districts (SMDs or "JOW" in Polish; already in place for the Senate) for all parliamentary elections. He articulated this demand in the specifically anti-party populist terms of "ordinary people" vs. the "particracy":

> No parliamentary party is interested in a change of electoral system. […] SMDs are a threat to the parties, and especially their "barons," and that is why I am also counting on the support especially of ordinary people, for whom decency and competence are more important than party slogans. (Nizinkiewicz 2015)

Kukiz also maintained that the PO, which he had openly supported in the past, had "used SMDs as flypaper on the voters" and that its betrayal of this demand starting around 2009 had led him to go to "war with the [Civic] Platform, and with the entire system" (Nizinkiewicz 2015). Kukiz surprisingly won over 20% of the vote in the first round of the May 2015 presidential elections, finishing third; the heavily favored PO incumbent Bronisław Komorowski, who finished slightly behind Andrzej Duda of PiS, moved to differentially incorporate Kukiz's flagship demand on the day after the first round by promising a referendum on the introduction of SMDs. While Komorowski ended up losing in the second round, the referendum went ahead in September 2015 and, despite Kukiz's campaigning for a "yes" vote, fell well short of the validity threshold of 50% turnout with a dismal 7.8% – suggesting that the resonance of Kukiz's presidential campaign had little to do with the SMD demand in its differential particularity, but rather the populist terms in which he had articulated it.

On the heels of his presidential run, Kukiz formed an electoral committee under the name "Kukiz'15" to contest the October 2015 parliamentary elections, while repeatedly promising to never form a political party – in line with the anti-party populism that he had articulated in the presidential campaign. The election program of Kukiz'15 foregrounded a joint articulation of this anti-party populism and nationalism, opening with the declaration that "[w]e are the voice of a Nation that has awakened and wants to take back control over its state" (Kukiz'15 2015, 3). The program thus interpellated a "Nation" as collective subject and set it in contrariety to a power bloc of the "political class," "the same politicians," and especially the "party oligarchy" (anti-party populism) that has presided over an equivalential chain of ills – such as selling out the economy out to "foreign capital" (nationalism, reminiscent of the SRP discourse) and building a state

that privileges the strong over the weak (reminiscent of PiS's anti-liberal social populism):

> The fundamental problem that we have to eliminate as fast as possible is the parasitic political class disconnected from the problems of the Nation. For the last 25 years, our state has been appropriated by corrupt and ineffective politicians. The same politicians who divided up power at the Round Table scare children from the Sejm pulpit and from television screens to this day. It is this political class, directed by a party oligarchy, that has already driven three million of our compatriots abroad. They have driven the health service and higher education into collapse. They have indebted each of us with 82,000 zloty. These politicians have made a neo-colonial zone out of the Polish economy, surrendering the majority of Polish industry and trade to the hands of foreign capital. These politicians have made a cheap labor force and credit slaves out of us. They have built a state that is weak toward the strong and strong toward the weak. (Kukiz'15 2015, 3)

The program of Kukiz'15 thus equivalentially incorporated contrarieties that had long been present in the anti-liberal nationalist populism of the SRP (subjugation by "foreign capital") or the anti-liberal nationalist and social populism of PiS (the "social Darwinism" of "liberal Poland") – while displacing the frontier onto one pitting "the Nation," represented by Kukiz'15 as a genuinely new movement from below, against all the "politicians" and "parties" that had come before it. With this frontier displacement, Kukiz'15 emphasized the unity of "the Nation" (nationalism) over all the particularistic divisions that the "politicians" in power are trying to impose on it (nationalism and populism):

> For 25 years, politicians of all parties have consistently destroyed our national community by playing us off against one another – playing off employees against employers, young against old, women against men, city inhabitants against rural inhabitants, bureaucrats against clients, patients against doctors, and students against teachers. They have forgotten that the Republic is our common good, and not a piece of cloth that everyone can nip something off of for themselves. We have to take back our state from them! We have to convince our divided Nation to no longer let itself be divided and to permanently unite again for a common goal. (Kukiz'15 2015, 3)

Like in PiS's earlier discourse, the "Nation" took on the function of an empty signifier defined not by the essentialization of ethnic or some other difference, but as an unredeemed whole held together by opposition to the power bloc ("politicians of all parties") allegedly preventing it from realizing its wholeness. Much also like PiS's partly Sanacja-inspired nationalist

populism of cleansing the “elites” and particularistic ills in order to restore the wholeness of “the Nation,” the nationalist populism of Kukiz’15 referred to the “political class” as an illness that had to be purged from the body of “the Nation” through a “repairing of the state” and an “ethical revolution” – thus taking up PiS’s long-standing promises in this regard and dislocating them as unfulfilled ones even after years of PiS being in politics:

> The current Polish political class is like a cancer on the healthy tissue of the Nation. That is why it is necessary to carry out rapid qualitative change in our public life. We must bring new, honest, competent people worthy of respect into politics. This change must, to a large extent, be generational. But this change must, above all, be an ethical revolution, because the most important qualification for governing is moral qualification. (Kukiz’15 2015, 3–4)

The notion that the cleansing of ruling elites had to be both “ethical” and “generational” pointed to a radicalization of PiS’s earlier demand for a “moral revolution,” which could not possibly incorporate a generational component given the Kaczyńskis’ self-identification with their background in the Solidarity movement. This emphasis on “generational” change took up what had also been a key part of the counter-populist repertoire of RP in claiming to represent a popular underdog against the same old “elites” of the past 20–25 years. Figure 5.7 summarizes the Kukiz’15 discourse, with the empty signifier “Nation” holding together an equivalential chain of demands against an opposing one centered on the “political class.”

While all this suggested that the populism of Kukiz’15 was in no small part about dislocating PiS’s earlier populism and turning it against PiS (and others), the self-positioning of Kukiz’15 *vis-à-vis* PiS was curiously ambivalent from the beginning – a theme that would continue after the PiS victory in the 2015 elections, in which Kukiz’15 finished third with 8.8% of the vote. Kukiz’15’s program had foregrounded as the first in its list of demands the adoption of a “new constitution with a majoritarian electoral system, obligatory referendum, and presidential system” – implying, in turn, that “we must win the parliamentary elections in the fall and build a constitutional majority that will approve a new Constitution restoring

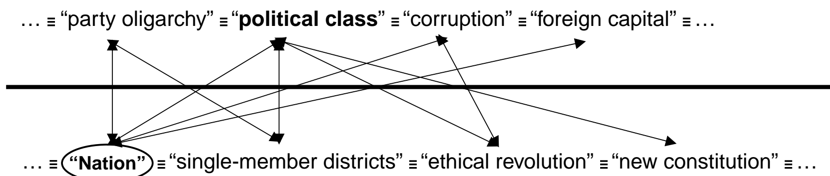

Figure 5.7 Nationalist anti-party populism of Kukiz’15 (2015).

subjectivity to the Nation" (Kukiz'15 2015, 6–7). In a pre-election interview, Kukiz expressed hope that his future parliamentary group would at least be able to push through a differential incorporation of this demand via PiS, declaring that "I will vote for a PiS minority government if Jarosław Kaczyński agrees to a change in constitution" and adding that "maybe it will turn out that PiS, which is interested in strengthening the role of the president, will have an ally in us" (Majewski 2015). While the combined seat shares of PiS and Kukiz'15 ultimately did not yield a two-thirds constitutional majority, Kukiz'15 took an ambivalent stance on the PiS government's subsequent constitutional moves, often defending the government against EU-level and PO-led opposition criticisms while opposing other legislation – such as the July 2018 judicial reform bill, for which Kukiz joined opposition calls for a veto by President Duda (which the president acquiesced to, only for a modified version of the bill to be passed soon after with the president's signature) (Szczerbiak 2018).

This combination of an ambivalent positioning *vis-à-vis* the new party in power and the lack of organizational structure meant that Kukiz'15, much like RP before it, "struggled to develop a distinctive political identity" in the ensuing legislative term beyond the populist appeals of the election campaign (Szczerbiak 2018). The lack of organizational structure was, in part, by design: in line with the anti-party populism and the promise to never form a party, Kukiz'15 registered itself as a civic association and thus became ineligible for public funding for political parties, while also developing minimal on-the-ground organization. When it came to forming its lists for the 2015 parliamentary elections, Kukiz'15 had solicited external applications and invited members of various right-wing to far-right nationalist groupings such as the National Movement (RN) to stand under its banner. This equivalential chain of different subject positions soon unraveled, however, with numerous MPs (including eventually the RN ones) defecting from the Kukiz'15 parliamentary group. Following an RN demonstration in February 2018 featuring anti-Semitic slogans, Kukiz even conceded in a statement on his Facebook page that the equivalential incorporation of the RN in the name of "anti-system" politics had been a serious mistake:

> I sincerely apologize for bringing the "nationalists" [*"narodowców"*] into the Sejm. In my defense: before the elections, many sectors demanded an alliance of all anti-system forces – SMD activists, Libertarians, Nationalists. Unfortunately, the "nationalists" in their current form are turning out to be more dangerous for Poland than the system. (Kukiz 2018)

In the absence of a stable and coherent political identity, Kukiz'15 – like RP before it – ultimately opted to sacrifice its independence as a political force

in the interest of electoral survival, equivalentially subsuming itself into an alliance with forces that it had previously rejected in populist terms. After winning no seats in the 2019 European Parliament election, Kukiz'15 entered the "Polish Coalition" with the PSL – a party that Kukiz had previously labeled a "criminal organization" – for the 2019 parliamentary elections, running candidates on PSL lists rather than registering itself as part of an alliance in order to circumvent the 8% threshold for alliances. While this arrangement secured the return of six Kukiz'15 MPs to the new Sejm, it amounted to a concession of its independence as an electoral entity at the national level, at least for the next four years.

Conclusion and summary

The goal of this chapter was to present a systematic analysis of populist discourses in the Polish party system and set them in relation to shifts in the discursive terrain of post-1989 party politics. The chapter began with a brief exploration of how popular signifiers were constructed in Poland before 1989, including Gomułka's interpellation of the "working masses" as the subject of "democratization" that constituted a founding moment of the post-1956 regime and defined a discursive terrain from which the Solidarity movement, with its articulation of demands of the "workers" as the dislocated subject of this system, could emerge. The first major populist discourse in the Polish party system after 1989 – namely, that of the Union of Labor (UP) – emerged from the grouping Labor Solidarity and its interpellation of the "working milieus" as the dislocated subject of the Solidarity leadership's post-1989 abandonment of class politics. The UP's discourse (1993, 1997–2000) was an anti-liberal left-wing populist one pitting "ordinary people" against "elites giving themselves ownership" through their "liberal" politics of privatization. The party's populism was eventually displaced, however, by a "left" vs. "right" logic of equivalentially aligning itself with the SLD in the name of defeating the "right and liberals." In this context, the anti-liberal nationalist populism of the Self-Defense of the Republic of Poland (SRP) dislocated the UP's earlier populism in opposition to the continued "liberal" politics of the SLD-UP government, presenting a sweeping rejection of "elites" and "affairists" allegedly "giving themselves ownership" through privatization and selling out the economy to "foreign capital" at the expense of "the Nation." The SRP's populism (2001–05), in turn, was displaced by an emphasis on anti-liberalism after the party entered the 2006–07 coalition government; in this context, the anti-liberal nationalist populism of Law and Justice (PiS), which had radicalized in both an anti-liberal and populist direction in government with the narrative of an "*układ*"-"liberal" conspiracy, became the dominant populist discourse in the party system, monopolizing the long-standing link between anti-liberalism and populism on its own terms and even deploying it against the SRP after Lepper was accused of abuse of office as a cabinet minister. PiS's discourse

subsequently shifted in a social-populist direction after the 2007 elections, with the notion of the ever-present "*układ*" receding in favor of a "solidaristic" vs. "liberal" opposition, whereby "liberalism" was equivalentially linked to an entrenched system of privileges and, starting in 2014, the "Tusk system." Notably, this populism receded from PiS's discourse in the 2015 elections and its ensuing term in government, while taking on the function of a prior instituting horizon for the authoritarian practices of monopolizing state institutions under the guise of political normality. In the 2019 elections, PiS's populism then re-emerged as a re-instituting moment that retroactively justified these practices in contrariety to the pathological "system of late post-communism" that the government had supposedly set out to correct. It is worth noting that PiS's overall move away from populism from 2015 onwards goes hand in hand with a hegemonic partial fixation of the terms of party competition around its agenda of welfare-state expansion, thus taking up the PO's own terrain of economic competence rather than relying on a conspiracist populism as PiS had done in its first term.

It is also worth noting that PiS is the only party that has managed to deploy populist discourse over an extended timeframe since 2005, in contrast to the short-lived populist challenges of Palikot's Movement (RP) in 2011 and Kukiz'15 in 2015. Neither of these movements managed to extend the populism of the election campaign into a stabilized project of laying claim to a collective popular identity; the populism of both self-styled "movements" was soon displaced by an incorporation into existing blocs in the party system (under the aegis of the SLD and PSL, respectively). It can also be seen that anti-liberalism is an element of continuity in the populist discourses of UP, SRP, and PiS, albeit in a strictly economic sense for the UP and in both an economic and cultural one for the SRP and PiS; a unifying theme across all three discourses is the notion of "liberalism" as driving post-1989 processes in favor of powerful economic groups at the expense of the wider mass of people. With PiS's move in government (2005–07) of articulating this opposition to "liberalism" in the name of "the Solidarity camp" (against its "traitors" who supposedly joined the "*układ*"), a break occurs in the terms in which political conflict after '89 is imagined and articulated, away from a post-"Solidarity" vs. anti-"liberalism" logic to a "solidaristic" vs. "liberal" one. In this context, the anti-clerical liberal populism of RP can be read as an attempt to re-inscribe liberalism in a counter-populist opposition to PiS as part and parcel of "the same elites," but one that ultimately fails to resolve the internal tension between social and economic liberalism within Palikot's project.

Table 5.1 summarizes the different types of populist discourse in terms of their constructions of the popular subject, while Table 5.2 summarizes the source material used for the analysis of each populist discourse. In addition to covering programmatic statements for each case, the analysis seeks to take into account subtle differences in

Table 5.1 Summary of populist discourses in Poland

Party	*Type of discourse (time frame)*	*Construction of popular subject*
UP	Anti-liberal left-wing populism (1993, 1997–2000)	“ordinary people” ≡ “majority” ≡ “social security” ≡ “left” ***vs.*** “elites” ≡ “liberals” ≡ “right” ≡ “giving themselves ownership” ≡ “unemployment”
SRP	Anti-liberal nationalist and social populism (2001–05)	“social minimum” ≡ “ordinary people” ≡ “Homeland” ***vs.*** “affairists” ≡ “political-financial usurper elites” ≡ “liberals” ≡ “privatizations” ≡ “giving themselves ownership” ≡ “foreign capital”
PiS	Anti-liberal nationalist populism (2001–07)	“mass of people” ≡ “cleansing” ≡ “Nation” ≡ “Solidarity camp” ***vs.*** “communist nomenklatura” ≡ “networks” (*układy*) ≡ “elites” ≡ “corruption” ≡ “criminality” ≡ “liberalism”
PiS	Anti-liberal nationalist and social populism (2007–14, 2019)	“solidaristic Poland” ≡ “common good” ≡ “justice” ≡ “Polish welfare state model” ***vs.*** “communist nomenklatura” ≡ “liberal Poland” ≡ “social Darwinism” ≡ “Tusk system” ≡ “late post-communism”
RP	Anti-clerical liberal populism (2010–11)	“modern Poland” ≡ “secular Poland” ≡ “citizens” ***vs.*** “privileges of the Church” ≡ “clergy” ≡ “same elites” ≡ “POPiS” ≡ “bureaucracy”
Kukiz ’15	Nationalist anti-party populism (2015)	“Nation” ≡ “single-member districts” ≡ “ethical revolution” ≡ “new constitution” ***vs.*** “party oligarchy” ≡ “political class” ≡ “corruption” ≡ “foreign capital”

performativity, triangulating between interventions in the press, the parliament, and party congresses for the UP while drawing extensively on election campaign material for the SRP (which saw the extensive use of street campaigning with leaflets) and, in the case of PiS, incorporating the Kaczyński brothers’ use of their speaker positions within state institutions for partisan interventions. For RP and Kukiz’15, the selection of source material also takes into account the prominent use of the leader’s personal blog and Facebook page, respectively, as part of the discursive practices of these formations.

Table 5.2 Summary of source material used

Party	*Source (year)*
UP	Founding declaration (1992)
	Parliamentary election program (1993)
	Parliament speech by Ryszard Bugaj (1994)
	Party program (1995)
	Parliamentary election program (1997)
	Pre-election newspaper column by Tomasz Nałęcz (1997)
	Party congress resolution (1998)
	Programmatic declaration (1999)
	Press release (2000)
	Party congress speech by Marek Pol (2000)
SRP	Parliamentary election program (1993)
	Parliamentary election campaign leaflet (1997)
	Parliamentary election program (2001)
	Parliamentary election campaign leaflet (2001)
	Party program (2003)
	Parliamentary election program (2005)
	Parliamentary election campaign leaflets (2005, 2005)
	Post-election report on government record (2006)
	Parliamentary election campaign leaflet (2007)
PiS	Founding declaration (2001)
	Interview with Jarosław Kaczyński (2001)
	Parliamentary election program (2001)
	Parliamentary election program (2005)
	Parliament speech by Jarosław Kaczyński (2006)
	Interview with Lech Kaczyński (2007)
	Parliamentary election program (2007)
	Parliamentary election campaign broadcast (2007)
	Presidential commemoration speech by Lech Kaczyński in Gdańsk (2009)
	Parliamentary election program (2011)
	Party program (2014)
	Parliamentary election campaign broadcast (2015)
	Interview with Jarosław Kaczyński (2015)
	Party convention speech by Jarosław Kaczyński (2019)
	Parliamentary election program (2019)
RP	Founding appeal by Janusz Palikot (2010)
	Founding programmatic declaration (2010)
	Founding congress speech by Janusz Palikot (2010)
	Parliamentary election program (2011)
	Interview with Janusz Palikot (2011)
	Open letter by Janusz Palikot to Leszek Miller (2012)
Kukiz’15	Presidential pre-election interviews with Paweł Kukiz (2015, 2015)
	Parliamentary election program (2015)
	Pre-election interview with Paweł Kukiz (2015)
	Facebook post by Paweł Kukiz (2018)

Notes

1 Ost even refers to Wałęsa's politics in this phase as "market populism" or "neoliberal populism"; his description of Wałęsa's discourse, however, is more suggestive of a combination of anti-communism (against "communists" and their legacy) and nationalism (against "foreign" forces opposed to "Polish nation").
2 While Pol was acting with the support of the party leadership at the time, later UP chairman Waldemar Witkowski retrospectively referred to this move in a 2018 interview as a mistake and characterized the situation of Pol representing the PSL in the cabinet as "ridiculous" (Olczyk 2018).
3 Left and Democrats (LiD) – an SLD-led electoral alliance (including UP, Social Democracy of Poland (SDPL), and the Democratic Party – demokraci.pl) that contested the 2007 parliamentary elections.
4 PiS would also declare in subsequent programs that "[w]e do not define nation in an ethnic sense" (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość 2014, 9) and that "[a]lthough nations have their ethnic cores, they are above all political and cultural communities. The Polish nation took shape and grew by being joined into a community of ethnically different people" (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość 2019a, 12).
5 It is worth noting that the term is often associated with a secular vs. religious divide in Polish politics.

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6 Populism in Slovakia

Introduction

Populism makes an early appearance in Slovakia with the political projects of Vladimír Mečiar, first with the momentary articulation of a "people" vs. "party center" divide within the Public Against Violence (VPN) after the latter's victory in the 1990 parliamentary elections and then as a secondary element within the primarily nationalist discourse of the Mečiar-led Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS). In the context of a post-1989 imaginary deeply divided in terms of support for or opposition to Mečiar's nation-building project claiming to enact the promises of November '89, the discourse of the HZDS took on a primarily populist iteration in the specific context of the 2002 elections, in which the HZDS, after four years in opposition, constructed a "people's" or "popular" identity against power blocs of the past ("totalitarianism") and present ("government of Mikuláš Dzurinda"). The same 2002 elections, however, saw the emergence of a centrist populist challenge in the form of Robert Fico's Smer, which foregrounded the demand for "order" against a power bloc encompassing both Mečiar and Dzurinda as well as established forces of both "left" and "right." This amounted to a major break in the pro- vs. anti-Mečiar divide that had defined Slovak party politics; while Smer abandoned its centrist populism after the elections, its subsequent embrace of a "left" and "social-democratic" identity signaled a reshuffling of the discursive terrain of party competition along the lines of "social" and "national" vs. liberal and Christian-democratic forces. In this context, the period since 2012 has seen a concentrated re-emergence of populism in the discourses of Ordinary People and Independent Personalities (OĽaNO), Boris Kollár's Sme Rodina (We Are Family), and, to some extent, Marian Kotleba's People's Party Our Slovakia (ĽSNS), all of which construct an opposition between the "people" (*ľudia*) against an allegedly Smer-led power bloc of corrupt "politicians" and their "oligarch" sponsors, while also taking up various dislocations in Smer's long-standing "social state" discourse, from allegations of rampant corruption and oligarchization to demands for

greater social protections such as Sme Rodina's flagship demand of "debt amnesty."

This chapter begins by presenting a brief historical background of populism in Slovakia before 1989 with targeted snapshots of how popular signifiers emerged in mass politics, especially in the context of the formation of a national imaginary and its condensation around the demand for the recognition of Slovak national difference that Mečiar and the HZDS eventually incorporated into a project of nation-building and national identity formation, of which populism is a limited, albeit recurring, element. It is in this context that a divided imaginary of post-1989 transition condenses into a pro- vs. anti-Mečiar divide in the discursive terrain of party competition throughout the 1990s. Embedded into this account is a detailed analysis of populist discourses: the HZDS's foray into centrist populism in the 2002 elections; Smer's centrist counter-populism in the same elections, which articulates a break in the established logic of pro- vs. anti- Mečiar; and the post-2012 period featuring the conservative anti-party populism of OĽaNO, the nativist entrepreneur populism of Sme Rodina, and the ĽSNS's mix of ethno-nationalist reductionism and populism.

Historical background: the saga of "the people" between 1848, 1918, and 1989

In Slovakia, the notion of a "people" came inscribed within nationalist discourses interpellating a distinct "Slovak nation" with the emergence of a national imaginary in the 19th century, albeit with arguably weaker populist inflections than in the other V4 countries. At the time of the 1848 Revolutions, the idea of "Slovak nation" constituted itself in terms of a twofold subaltern positioning not only within the Austrian Empire, but also within the Kingdom of Hungary that the Slovaks had been part of as a non-titular minority for about nine centuries. In this context, Slovak nationalist discourse was centered on an articulation of national difference and an attempt to differentially incorporate this national identity into a project of democratization – the central claim here being that the Slovaks constitute a separate nation among the different "nations of Hungary" (*Uhorsko*, referring to the Kingdom of Hungary, as opposed to *Maďarsko*, referring to the ethno-linguistically connoted Hungarian nation) and should be equally represented in a system of democratic institutions. Two months after the outbreak of the March 1848 uprising in Budapest, a group of Slovak nationalists led by Ľudovit Štúr gathered in the town of Liptovský Mikuláš (present-day Žilina Region) and adopted the "Demands of the Slovak nation." The document featured a list of 14 demands, the first of which entailed a moment of antagonistic break in positing the very existence of a "Slovak nation" in contrariety to the oppressive "stepmother" that its own "Hungarian homeland" (*uhorská vlasť*) had become:

> The Slovak nation in the Hungarian homeland is awakening after a nine-hundred year sleep as an original nation [*pranárod*] of this country, realizing that this sacred land and motherland, being the spring and cradle of legends of the ancient glory of its ancestors and the theater on which its fathers and heroes spilled blood for the Hungarian crown, has until recently only been its stepmother, treating it mercilessly and holding its language and nationality in the chains of disgrace and dishonor. (Žiadosti slovenského národa 1998, 307)

In this moment of populist-inflected nationalism, the declaration interpellated an underdog "nation" oppressed by its own "homeland." With the very next sentence, however, the text pivoted toward a differential logic of calling for the harmonious coexistence of the different "nations of Hungary," insisting that "the Slovak nation, at the moment of its awakening, wants to forget the centuries of injustice and disgrace [...] [and] calls, under the banner of this age of equality, all the nations of Hungary [*národy uhorskie*] to equality and brotherhood [...]." The second of the 14 demands called for the creation of

> one general parliament of brotherly nations on the basis of the equality of the nations of Hungary [*uhorských národov*] living under the Hungarian crown, in which every nation will be represented as a nation – and every national representative is bound to represent his nation in his national language and to know the languages of the nations legally represented in the parliament. (Žiadosti slovenského národa 1998, 308)

This 1848 declaration – one of the founding moments of a Slovak national imaginary – was thus characterized by an institutionalist logic *par excellence* of differentially inscribing the identity of a separate "Slovak nation" in the democratizing project of '48, thus extending the Hungarian revolutionaries' claim to national self-determination onto other differential subject positions without questioning the framework of rule by "the Hungarian crown" as such. It was only after the Hungarian revolutionary authorities rejected the demands and declared them illegal that Štúr and his associates, in September 1848, took the step of forming a Slovak National Council that declared secession from Hungary and unification with "the Austrian monarchy [...] where not one nation will manage and the other serve, but all will be equal heirs in a single home" (Výzva Slovenskej národnej rady k národu slovenskému! 1998, 316). In this context, the Austrian imperial government pursued a differential divide-and-conquer strategy, initially condoning the formation of Slovak volunteer units to fight against Hungarian forces and then ordering their disbandment once Austro-Russian forces had crushed the Hungarian Revolution following the initial suppression of the Slovak uprising by the Hungarian State.

The demand for the recognition of a Slovak national identity and its differential incorporation into the structures of the Hungarian state re-emerged, however, with the 1861 "Memorandum of the Slovak nation," which demanded legal recognition of the "personality of the Slovak nation and the uniqueness of the Slovak language," including the latter's use in schools, higher education, press, and civic associations, within the Kingdom of Hungary (Memorandum národa slovenského 1998, 338). The declaration articulated this demand in the liberal institutionalist terms of a differential expansion of "civic freedom" and "civic equality," arguing that "[j]ust as, for the individual, the recognition of his personality is the first condition for freedom and civic equality, among nations, the recognition of national personality is the first condition of national equality" (Memorandum národa slovenského 1998, 338). These demands would remain unfulfilled, however, with the newly semi-sovereign Hungarian parliament continuing to reject them after the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867 differentially co-opted the Hungarian demand for national autonomy (while ignoring those of other nationalities). The Slovak National Party (SNS), established in 1871, and the Slovak People's Party (SĽS), founded in 1905 by the Catholic priest Andrej Hlinka, subsequently became the main organized vehicles of Slovak nationalism that contested parliamentary elections and continued to articulate demands for recognition of national (and especially linguistic) difference within the Kingdom of Hungary. In both parties' discourses, signifiers such as "the people" (*ľud*) or "popular" (*ľudový*) were commonly used synonymously with "Slovak nation" as well as "Catholic" identity in the case of the SĽS, which maintained a twofold claim to speak in the name of "God" and "Slovak nation" (Lorman 2019). A notable exception could be seen in an isolated reference to "popular-ness" (*ľudovosť*) in the SNS program of 1914: in a very similar manner here to T. G. Masaryk's democratic populist project of Czech national independence (see chapter 3), the SNS articulated the demand for national autonomy rights first in terms of a "popular" understanding of democracy ("Popular-ness [*ľudovosť*] calls for the political equality of all strata and nations"), while also firmly inscribing it in a "national" imaginary ("Our slogan is *nationality* [or nationness, *národnosť*], as nationality is the main thought [and] idea of centuries-long national struggles in Europe") (Výklad programu Slovenskej národnej strany 1998, 402).

Indeed, it was through differential incorporation into the Masaryk-led project of a "Czecho-Slovak nation" that the long-standing demand for Slovak national difference found political recognition for the first time. In October 1918, at the initiative of the SNS, a cross-party group of 200 Slovak politicians and public figures convened in the town of Martin – the site of the signing of the 1861 Memorandum – and adopted the Martin Declaration, which articulated the identity of the "Slovak nation" as a differential "branch" of an independent "Czecho-Slovak nation":

> 1. The Slovak nation is part of the linguistically and cultural-historically unified Czecho-Slovak nation. In all the cultural struggles that the Czech nation fought and that made it known across the world, the Slovak branch, too, took part. 2. For this Czecho-Slovak nation, we, too, demand the unlimited right to self-determination on the basis of complete independence. (Martinská deklarácia 1998, 513–14)

The Slovak nationalism of the past half-century that had limited itself to the claim to national difference – while stopping short of demanding a separate Slovak state – thus found institutionalized incorporation in the form of the new Czechoslovak Republic. In this context, however, Hlinka's SĽS began agitating for "national autonomy" rights for the Slovaks, invoking the 1918 Pittsburgh Declaration – a memorandum of understanding signed by Czech and Slovak émigré groups in the United States that had called for separate administrative structures for Slovakia within the new state (Suppan 2004, 227–32). The SĽS – officially renamed Hlinka's SĽS (HSĽS) in 1925 – soon established itself as the largest party in the Slovak part of the republic, winning up to 35% in parliamentary elections. The demand for national autonomy, for which the party put forward three bills between 1922 and 1938, finally found its differential incorporation after the infamous Munich Agreement of 1938 when the rump Czechoslovak government relented to the Žilina Agreement of October 1938, which declared the HSĽS to be the "legal political representative of the Slovak nation" and called for the "immediate assumption of executive and governing power in Slovakia by the Slovaks" (Žilinská dohoda 1998, 180). This document is notable for not even paying lip service to a generalizable principle of popular sovereignty, foregrounding instead the notion of national difference ("We Slovaks as a separate Slovak nation") and simultaneously enshrining the authoritarian claim of a single party to be the sole legitimate representative of that nation. What followed was a period of one-party rule, with the HSĽS list being the sole contestant in the 1938 parliamentary elections; with Jozef Tiso (Hlinka's successor as party leader) as prime minister, Slovakia became a formally independent state as a satellite of Nazi Germany from March 1939 until the end of World War II.

With the postwar takeover of power by the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ) and the establishment of a unitary Czechoslovak Socialist Republic (ČSSR), the Slovak part of the republic was integrated into a discursive context of one-party rule in which the February 1948 coup brought to the fore an instituting moment of authoritarian populism and the Prague Spring saw the brief experiment of a liberalizing institutionalism from above (see chapter 3). In November 1989, following the violent suppression of a student demonstration in Prague, the Public Against Violence (VPN) formed in Bratislava on the same day as the Civic Forum (OF) in Prague and hegemonized the fledgling protest discourse of what became known as the "Gentle

Revolution" within Slovakia by articulating the moment of antagonistic break between an equivalential chain of demands and the existing regime framework. While the contents of these demands were reminiscent of the liberalizing institutionalism of '68, calling for the differential expansion of "freedom" ("freedom of the press," "freedom of entrepreneurship, assembly, association, movement, conscience, and other civil rights and freedoms"), the VPN's "Programmatic declaration" of November 25, 1989, equivalentially articulated these various demands in common contrariety to the "leading role of the KSČ anchored in the constitution," the abolition of which it openly called for (Verejnosť proti násiliu 1989). In addition, the VPN inscribed these demands for more "freedom" within the horizon of a national imaginary, articulating the dislocated demand for a "democratic federation of Czechs and Slovaks and the legal adjustment of the rights and standing of the nationalities on the principle of full and actual equality" (Verejnosť proti násiliu 1989). With the VPN's hegemonic partial fixation, the imagined break of November 1989 thus came to stand for not only a movement toward democratization, but also the long-awaited consummation of the historical struggle for national recognition – a coupling that came to the fore in the first of the VPN's 12 points: "We demand turning the Slovak National Council into a true parliament of the Slovak nation, in which all segments of our society will have representation" (Verejnosť proti násiliu 1989) – a "true parliament," in other words, both in terms of democratic pluralism and in representing "the Slovak nation" as the constituent subject of the new democratic order.

With the ensuing cabinet reshuffle and Havel's indirect election as Czechoslovak president in December 1989, the VPN, like the OF in the Czech lands, inscribed its project of democratization and national recognition into institutionalized channels while discouraging continued protest – with leading VPN figure and Havel advisor Milan Kňažko even declaring in a television address that "the time for revolution on the streets" was over (cited in Krapfl 2013, 23; translation in original). While nationalist organizations such as the newly established Slovak National Party (SNS) staged protest actions in support of an independent Slovak state, the response of the VPN – which now headed the reshuffled Slovak cabinet with Milan Čič as interim prime minister – was an institutionalist one of trying to defuse open conflict and claiming that the promise of national sovereignty was being processed non-antagonistically via institutionalized channels:

> VPN leaders condemned the radical nationalists as emotional demagogues standing outside the tradition of November and emphasized that VPN stood for the "completion" of Slovak sovereignty via legitimate political channels and negotiation with federal partners. (Krapfl 2013, 24)

Amid all this, when President Havel proposed changing the name of the new state to the "Czechoslovak Republic" (dropping the "Socialist" epithet) shortly after taking office, the ensuing "hyphen war" saw a series of negotiations between the Czech and Slovak cabinets that led to a compromise outcome, whereby the official name would be "Czechoslovak Federative Republic" in Czech and "Czecho-Slovak Federative Republic" in Slovak; a subsequent agreement in April 1990 saw the two sides settling on "Czech and Slovak Federative Republic" (ČSFR) as the name in both languages. The symbolic difference, of course, was far from trivial: the hyphenated version "Czecho-Slovak" as well as the eventual compromise "Czech and Slovak" incorporated the long-standing demand for the recognition of Slovak national difference within the "single Czecho-Slovak nation" that the Martin Declaration of 1918 had invoked (with a hyphen at the time).

In the June 1990 parliamentary elections, which featured simultaneous elections to the federal, Czech, and Slovak parliaments, the VPN positioned itself as the force that "stood first on the November squares and opened the door for democracy and political pluralism" (Verejnosť proti násiliu 1990, 13). In the aftermath of the November protests, the VPN's election program argued, the new formation had worked within a "[r]enewed parliament" to pave the way for democracy and new elections against the "power of totalitarian structures"; it now presented itself to the electorate with the claim that "[w]e fulfilled the promise that we would arrange for [new elections]" (Verejnosť proti násiliu 1990, 3). The VPN's hegemonic claim was that it was differentially fulfilling, within the reformed institutions, the promises of democratization and national recognition in particular; the program went on to list a series of objectives, with the latter two at the forefront:

> Our goal is to construct anew the home of the Slovaks and Slovakia, based on political democracy, the sovereignty of Slovakia in the common federation, market economy, the renewal of civil society, adherence to the rights of minorities, the renewal of morals, responsibility, and conscience, social policy, and social compassion keeping in mind the interests of the weakest. (Verejnosť proti násiliu 1990, 3)

The VPN emerged as the largest formation in the Slovak National Council with 29.4% of the vote and went on to form a coalition government with the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH; second largest with 19.2%) and the Democratic Party (DS; 4.4%), with the VPN's Vladimír Mečiar as prime minister. As the new VPN-led government went about trying to enact its founding post-1989 promises, however, numerous complications – including an early appearance of populism in Slovak party politics – would emerge.

Pro- vs. anti-Mečiar: the divided imaginary of post-1989 transition

Between nationalism and populism: the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS)

Under the premiership of Mečiar, the VPN's institutionalist approach to differentially enacting the promises of democratization and national recognition now came to be complemented by moments of antagonistic division in which Mečiar articulated a fundamental incommensurability between the fulfillment of the government's agenda and his political opponents. These contrarieties often took the form of personal conflicts with cabinet or party members whom Mečiar deemed to be disloyal and typically also accused of being former secret police (ŠtB or KGB) agents in order to discredit them; the journalist Marián Leško (1996, 187) would argue in this vein that a core feature of "Mečiarism" was "conflict affinity" (*konfliktogénnosť*), or the "production of unproductive conflicts." An early example of this could be seen when, just four months after taking office in June 1990, Mečiar demanded the resignation of Interior Minister Anton Andráš (KDH), which the VPN and KDH party leaderships both rejected; Mečiar eventually got his way when Andráš tendered his own resignation. More broadly, a rift was forming within the VPN between the party in national office (led by chairman Fedor Gál) and the party in public office (led by Mečiar, who did not have an executive function within the VPN). In March 1991, a grouping of regional district representatives known as the Trnava Initiative founded the platform "For a Democratic Slovakia" (VPN-ZDS) within the VPN, declaring commitment to the VPN's 1990 election program and issuing a statement to the following effect:

> 2. We unambiguously stand behind the politics of the government of the Slovak Republic headed by Vladimír Mečiar. 3. We reject the deliberately led campaign against so-called nationalism, separatism, chauvinism, attempts to concentrate power, etc., aimed at discrediting representatives of our movement who are consistently pursuing the national interests of Slovakia. 4. We protest against the undemocratic methods of work of some leading representatives of our movement, especially Fedor Gál [*followed by a list of other names*] […] in the area of internal democracy in the movement and the biased informing of the citizens. (Vyhlásenie zástupcov Trnavskej iniciatívy VPN 1996, 22)

The VPN-ZDS thus articulated a contrariety between "the national interests of Slovakia" and "the politics of the government" (more on this below) on the one hand and the politics of the VPN leadership on the other. This articulation entailed, more precisely, a double movement: on the one hand, the institutionalist construction of a fundamental harmony between "government"

and "national interests"; on the other hand, the flipping over of this differential relation between "government" and "national interests" into an equivalential one in common contrariety against the VPN leadership – a contrariety that could also take on a populist character, such as when Mečiar declared at a VPN-ZDS rally in March 1991 that a new form of organization was needed that would "transmit the will of the people, not follow orders from a center" (cited in Krapfl 2013, 30; translation in original). Here, Mečiar's populism was arguably a momentary one, appealing to an underdog "people" against a party "center" in the specific context of intra-party struggles over organizational structures and direction. The formation of the VPN-ZDS platform soon provoked an open split within the VPN; with the votes of anti-Mečiar VPN MPs, parliament dismissed Mečiar as premier in April 1991, installing Ján Čarnogurský (KDH) as head of the coalition government. The VPN-ZDS platform then left the VPN to form the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) with Mečiar as chairman in June 1991, thus resolving the organizational struggle between the anti-Mečiar "center" and pro-Mečiar dissidents, while crystallizing in the discursive terrain of competing party organizations the divide between support for and opposition to Mečiar's project of post-1989 transition.

More generally, the interplay between a logic of difference (i.e. institutionalism) and antagonistic division (some combination of nationalism and populism) constituted a defining feature of Mečiarist discourse for the next decade. In his brief first term as prime minister, Mečiar emphasized a differential harmony between the "national interests" and a government working to enact the latter, especially when it came to the VPN's programmatic commitment to market reforms, a simultaneous emphasis on "social security," and advocacy of a "confederation" of the Czech and Slovak Republics. The joint articulation of market reforms *and* social security could be seen in a September 1990 interview in which Mečiar called for economic restructuring to eliminate "inefficient production," yet coupled with state intervention to differentially absorb the dislocatory effects of such measures:

> There can be no talk of mass social insecurity in our country. The government gives guarantees that everyone will have something to eat and will be able to live, if in no other way than by providing everyone with allowances. […] People have to realize that if they don't work honestly and of high quality, they don't need the work, because non-prospering enterprises do not have to continue with inefficient production. (Javorský et al. 1992, 20)

The differential articulation of these demands from the speaker position of a government fulfilling them for the "people" turned into an equivalential one, however, as soon as they were pitted against a constitutive outside supposedly blocking their collective realization. This outside presented itself in the

form of the federal government's neo-liberal transformation project (spearheaded by Finance Minister Václav Klaus) and opposition to a confederation (especially from President Havel), leading to a series of tense negotiations at the federal level that dominated the 1990–92 legislative term. In this context, the demands for "social security" and "confederation," in particular, linked up in a relation of equivalence in common contrariety against the federal government's economic agenda and anti-confederal orientation; in a March 1992 interview, Mečiar articulated his preferred economic policy of "gradual steps" in contrariety to both "shock therapy" and "the unitary character" of the reform framework blocking, in turn, the particular interests of Slovakia:

> The fundamental divide is shock therapy or a system of gradual steps. Shock therapy has brought a great deal of evil to Slovakia [...] It is a path to darkness. We are therefore saying today, logically, that either a space has to be created for the particularity of Slovakia within the current macroeconomic parameters, or there has to be an end to the unitary character of the reform. (Javorský et al. 1992, 26)

In this manner, in the run-up to the 1992 parliamentary elections, the HZDS's discourse condensed around the demand for Slovak "sovereignty" within a "confederation," as continued commitment to "social security" became incompatible with federal economic policies and, by extension, the very framework of a federal Czechoslovakia. The party's campaign featured the slogan "Free citizen, sovereign nation" and foregrounded the promise of a declaration of "political sovereignty" as a means toward "economic sovereignty" and economic recovery:

> The political sovereignty of every state is unthinkable without economic sovereignty. Therefore, one of the goals of the economic policy of the HZDS is fully securing the sovereign right of the Slovak Republic to dispose of its own resources, of what is produced on its territory. [...] If the economy is in recession, decline, it is not possible to apply a restrictive policy of savings, but it is necessary to revive the economy. (Slobodný občan, zvrchovaný národ 1996, 42)

This primarily nationalist and social-welfarist discourse was hardly populist insofar as it articulated the central demand for national "sovereignty" (nationalism) in contrariety to the wrong economic policy of austerity and shock therapy (social welfarism), rather than in terms of opposition to a power bloc. At the same time, the HZDS's discourse featured a delicate balancing act between antagonistic brinksmanship – risking the breakup of the state in the pursuit of a nationalist and social-welfarist agenda – and an institutionalist insistence on openness to negotiations. Indeed, the party insisted in a campaign leaflet that it "is not breaking up Czecho-Slovakia, is

not pitting Czechs against Slovaks," but rather trying to "find a new quality of coexistence of both sovereign republics" (Vážení spoluobčania 1996, 41). Mečiar argued in a pre-election interview that his party, unlike the SNS, is against the "breakup of the state," while also criticizing Václav Klaus for presenting an "ultimatum"-like choice between a "reinforcement of the current centralism and the common rules of economic reform" on the one hand and the acceptance of a breakup on the other (Mečiar 1998, 17). After winning the June 1992 elections with a resounding 37.3% of the vote in Slovakia, the HZDS formed a minority government with Mečiar as prime minister and immediately adopted a "Declaration of sovereignty of the Slovak Republic"; following further negotiations with Klaus, now Czech prime minister after the ODS's 1992 election victory (see chapter 3), the two leaders finally reached an agreement in August 1992 on the breakup of the federation. In this manner, the demand for Slovak "sovereignty" found its realization, rather anti-climactically, in a largely differential, administrative, and non-antagonistic manner – giving rise to the epithet "Velvet Divorce" – and without a referendum, in spite of the HZDS's own promise in the election campaign of an eventual "referendum on sovereignty" as well as the fact that over 2.5 million citizens across the federation signed a petition demanding a referendum following the Klaus-Mečiar deal, with opinion polls showing less than 40% in both republics supporting the breakup.

With the formation of an independent Slovak Republic in 1993, the HZDS discourse took on the character of a hegemony project of national identity formation grounded in the dual pillars of (increasingly ethnicized) nationalism and social welfarism, while a deepening division crystallized in the discursive terrain of party competition in terms of support for or opposition to Mečiar's nation-building project. Indeed, a rift immediately emerged within the HZDS on the question of how to adequately represent the newly constituted "nation"; Michal Kováč (HZDS), widely perceived as a Mečiar ally and elected as president of the republic by parliament in February 1993, declared his wish to be the president of "all Slovaks" and began publicly exerting pressure on Mečiar to form a "broad coalition" government (Haughton 2003a, 272–74; Leško 1996, 104–07). Mečiar, however, chose to form a nationalist coalition in October 1993 with the SNS, which had been the main proponent of an independent state since 1990; while this gave the government a parliamentary majority, an anti-Mečiar faction within the HZDS parliamentary group took up Kováč's call for a broad coalition and broke with the HZDS in March 1994 to form the Democratic Union (DÚ) and join with opposition parties in parliament to pass a motion of no confidence against Mečiar. Kováč then proceeded to dismiss Mečiar (a prerogative assigned to the presidency under the 1992 constitution) and got the broad coalition that he wanted, with Jozef Moravčík heading a coalition government of the DÚ, KDH, and the Party of the Democratic Left (SDĽ). This was a very heterogeneous alliance united, above all, by opposition to Mečiar; while the SDĽ, as the formal

successor organization of the Communist Party of Slovakia (KSS), had rapidly transformed itself into a moderate center-left party in favor of market reforms and liberal democracy under the leadership of Peter Weiss, it now took responsibility for a particularly hard-hitting austerity budget with Brigita Schmögnerová (SDĽ) as finance minister and effectively locked itself into support for austerity and shock therapy within the framework of a center-right-led anti-Mečiar coalition (Haughton 2004). When the new government decided to call new elections after only half a year in office, however, the HZDS came back to win the 1994 elections with nearly 35% of the vote, forming a coalition government with the SNS and the Union of the Workers of Slovakia (ZRS), which had been formed by SDĽ dissidents opposed to the outgoing government's economic policies. Within the first two years of Slovak independence, therefore, a divide between two equivalential camps established itself: nationalist and social-welfarist vs. anti-Mečiar and market-liberal.

The 1994–98 period, which turned out to be the only full legislative term of Mečiarism in power, showcased an authoritarian iteration of nationalism characterized by a clientelist and vindictive approach to formally independent institutions. Now prime minister for a third time, Mečiar initiated a more or less permanent campaign to undermine President Kováč, restricting his appointment powers, cutting staff funding, and even organizing a surreptitious kidnapping of his son in an infamous 1996 incident. In addition, some of the first moves taken by the coalition to disable institutional checks included occupying disproportionately large majorities within key parliamentary committees and instituting large-scale turnover in favor of party personnel in state organs overseeing privatization and public media (Haughton 2003a, 275–77, 283–86). This authoritarianism of trying to monopolize state power dovetailed onto the institutionalist claim that the government was simply enacting the nation's sovereignty via institutionalized channels – as "the first government that has emerged from free and democratic elections in the sovereign Slovak Republic," as the government's programmatic declaration of 1995 put it (Vláda Slovenskej republiky 1995). Mečiarism in power thus presents an early example of an authoritarian institutionalism (later seen in full flourish with Fidesz in Hungary; see chapter 4) founded on the claim to an exclusive link between the nation and its government. This could be seen in exemplary fashion in the HZDS's 1998 election program, which defended the "successes" of the "transformation process" against "anti-national propaganda [that] claims something else" (Hnutie za demokratické Slovensko 1998) – thus situating criticisms of the government's post-1989 nation-building project outside the national imaginary altogether. The program also featured a distinctive format of introducing each policy with the heading "The citizens are demanding: […]" followed by a demand, then "The HZDS is undertaking: […]" followed by a policy proposal – exemplifying the institutionalist

construction of a non-antagonistic relation between the addressers of demands and the addressees working to implement them in government.

In a related vein, Williams (2000) proposes that "Mečiarism" can be understood as a synthesis of "economic centrism," "political illiberalism," and "cultural essentialism" – with nationalism serving as the overarching logic linking all three elements. The function of "nation" (or "Slovak nation") as a nodal point holding together the HZDS discourse can be seen in the economic nationalist orientation toward establishing a Slovak "economic identity" (Williams 2000, 5) and "creating a domestic entrepreneurial stratum" (cited in Deegan-Krause 2012, 187; translation in original); the illiberal delegitimization of political opponents as "anti-national" (such as in the 1998 election program); and an ethnicized conception of "Slovak nation" tied to a founding myth of Great Moravia (Williams 2000, 9–11). In this discourse, recurring references to the "people" or the "citizens" tended to take on either a nationalist ("people" as "nation") or a social-welfarist character ("people" as carriers of socio-economic rights). The latter could be seen in the party's consistent articulation of social policy in terms of the state's "responsibility for people's living standards" and the "economic and social rights of citizens," as argued in the 1994 election program (Hnutie za demokratické Slovensko 1994, 129) – yet following a largely differential logic of a government enacting demands for the "people" and without the populist division of underdog vs. power. The moments of antagonistic division that did recur in the HZDS's discourse followed a primarily nationalist logic, as can be seen in references to "anti-national" political opponents, national Others such as the Hungarians, or indeed all of them together – articulated in classic equivalential fashion by the HZDS MP Dušan Slobodník in a 1997 article in the party newspaper:

> We have our own historical memory and will not let ourselves be deprived of it by advocates of Czechoslovakism and the idea of Great Hungary, by cosmopolitans who would like to rob Slovakia of its Christian and national gist. (cited in Deegan-Krause 2012, 188; translation in original)

Populism, in this context, emerged in a limited sense as an internal moment of this nationalist discourse whenever the foreigners or foreign-minded Slovaks were interpellated as powerful forces oppressing an underdog Slovak nation. This could be seen in the notion that Slovakia is in danger of "becom[ing] forever the vassal of foreign interests" (HZDS Interior Minister Krejči in 1998, cited in Deegan-Krause 2012, 188; translation in original) or under permanent threat from global hegemonic powers (HZDS deputy chairman Húska in 1998, cited in Williams 2000, 11; translation in original):

> The morally sick international community is an inter-state superethnicity, sustained by violence, in which the urge for an outbreak of the takeover

> syndrome constantly renews itself through a camouflaged, concealed bid for supremacy. […] Slovakia is moving on the ruins of the forcibly superimposed Soviet hegemonialism [*sic*] […] The economically-created European Union and the Euroatlantic military community are also competing for this geopolitical space. Within these communities (which, it is true, are democratic) lurk the aspirations of former hegemons. […] For only if we retain the will to resist selfish foreign interests in defending Slovak national interests shall we survive not only as a sovereign state but also as a state providing existential good to our citizens.

Here is a particularly stark example of a populist construction of underdog vs. power articulated internally to the nationalist opposition of national vs. foreign – indeed, in the stridently ethnicized terms of an essentialized national community fighting an existential struggle against other, more powerful, but equally ethnicized ("superethnic") forces.

The distinguishing feature of the HZDS in government, however, continued to be a balancing act between antagonistic and non-antagonistic (i.e. institutionalist) nationalism, with such bouts of conspiracy theorizing by leading party figures coexisting with a ruling agenda firmly committed to Slovakia's integration into the EU and NATO. This balancing act suffered a major dislocation, however, when the November 1997 European Council summit in Luxembourg refused to take up accession talks with Slovakia concurrently with the other three V4 countries. This failure was subsequently taken up as a rallying cry by the anti-Mečiar opposition, which had also consolidated around the Slovak Democratic Coalition (SDK) led by longtime KDH politician Mikuláš Dzurinda as an alliance of center-left to center-right parties. In the 1998 elections, the SDK almost matched the HZDS's vote share on its own (26.3% vs. 27%), easily allowing it to form a coalition government with Dzurinda as prime minister. Notably, this was an oversized (as opposed to minimal winning) coalition including not only the SDĽ (14.7%), but also the Party of the Hungarian Coalition (SMK; 9.1%) for the first time as well as the newly established Party of Civic Understanding (SOP; 8%) led by Košice mayor Rudolf Schuster. This disparate anti-Mečiar coalition, which declared itself to be a "government of national renewal," proceeded to implement an accelerated reform agenda of liberalizations and privatizations in the name of putting Slovakia's EU bid back on track. The SDĽ – contrary to its programmatic pledges – once again took responsibility for a series of unpopular austerity budgets with Schmögnerová as Finance Minister; with the party's poll ratings plummeting, Pavol Koncoš, newly elected SDĽ chairman in 2000, openly demanded Schmögnerová's dismissal from the cabinet, which Dzurinda refused (until Schmögnerová eventually tendered her own resignation in January 2002, not long before the next elections). This internal infighting between parties in national and public office – very much reminiscent of the earlier Mečiar governments (1990–91, 1993–94) – pointed to a dislocation in

the government's promise of renewal that would be taken up by the populist challenger discourse of Robert Fico's Smer (see next section).

In this context, the HZDS – now consigned to opposition for a full legislative term for the first time – sought to regroup in its Trnava congress of March 2000, adopting a new organizational statute and changing its official name to "Movement for a Democratic Slovakia – People's Party" (HZDS-ĽS). In referring to itself as a "people's party" (*ľudová strana*) or a "party of a popular type" (*strana ľudového typu*), however, the HZDS still featured little in the way of populism: the "Political declaration" adopted by the Trnava congress was more notable for the attempt to differentially incorporate broadly liberal elements from opposing party discourses – foregrounding demands such as "individual rights," "pluralist civil society," and "united Europe" – and a simultaneous emphasis on Christian values and the "moral inheritance of Christianity" as "part of the set of values that the citizens of Slovakia universally recognize" (Hnutie za demokratické Slovensko 2000). This latter aspect was suggestive of an equating of "popular" identity with a "Christian" one, as already seen historically with Hlinka's SĽS – with Christianity serving as something like "a popular ideological relish" catered to the perceived demographic makeup of the electorate (Haughton 2001, 753). In addition, the Trnava declaration expressed a commitment to the "values and principles promoted by the popular and non-collectivist parties of Europe," suggesting a construction of "popular" identity in contrariety to "collectivism" and, indeed, articulating opposition to "collectivist ideologies and dogmas and all forms of totalitarianism, especially fascism and communism" in light of "the history of Europe and our nation" (Hnutie za demokratické Slovensko 2000). This anti-"totalitarian" dimension of "popular" identity would subsequently re-emerge in the HZDS's upcoming election campaign.

The centrist populism of the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (2002)

The only instance of a primarily populist phase in the HZDS discourse arguably emerges with the 2002 parliamentary elections, which the party contested after four years in opposition and two years after its re-branding with the "People's Party" epithet. The HZDS's election program, titled "With the people and for the people" (*S ľuďmi a pre ľudí*), foregrounded a populist opposition between the "people" (*ľudia*) or the "citizens" on the one hand and "the specter of the government of Mikuláš Dzurinda" and the latter's "corruption and clientelism" on the other:

> A specter is haunting Slovakia – the specter of the government of Mikuláš Dzurinda. Four years of lingering societal crisis have brought an enormous intensification of negative phenomena in society. In addition to the lowering of the standard of living, corruption and

> clientelism have risen. The citizen has stopped trusting the traditional pillars of democracy; trust in government, parliament, and the institutions of the state have fallen. The citizen is incessantly confronted with decline in the standard of living, while the privatization of the most important and most valuable property of Slovakia is being praised. (Hnutie za demokratické Slovensko 2002, 4)

The HZDS's construction of the power bloc thus comprised the outgoing government and an equivalential chain of government policies detrimental to "the citizen," from "corruption and clientelism" to "privatization." Against this constitutive outside, the HZDS interpellated a "people's" or "popular" (*ľudový*) identity in the inclusive sense of "all people" united against the ruling powers, harking all the way back in equivalential fashion to "the people's" struggle against "totalitarianism" that the party traced its roots back to:

> We are a people's [*ľudová*] political party. We emerged from the people's movements against totalitarianism, for democracy and freedom. In the service of the people [*ľud*] and the homeland, the Slovak Republic, we want to shape public life for the good of all. Our goal is to express the interest of all people in Slovakia regardless of sexual, ethnic, religious, racial, social, and other differences and foster their support and cooperation as well as the struggle against intolerance, violence, and political extremism. (Hnutie za demokratické Slovensko 2002, 1)

The HZDS's election program thus took up and extended the anti-"totalitarian" conception of "popular" identity – already seen in the 2000 Trnava declaration – onto a populist opposition against the present government, while also continuing the strategy of differentially incorporating elements of opposing party discourses: in addition to declaring commitment to the "development of human rights and freedoms, humanity, tolerance […] open society, rule-of-law state founded on the principles of freedom, law, and democracy," the HZDS even explicitly stated in this vein that "[w]e support the development of liberal values" (Hnutie za demokratické Slovensko 2002, 1). The HZDS, in other words, sought to forge a wide-ranging equivalential chain appealing to "Christian," "liberal," and "social state" values alike around a "popular" or "citizen" identity, which functioned as an empty signifier representing this open-ended chain of equivalences in collective opposition to the ruling forces of past and present. As such, the character of the HZDS's discourse at this juncture defies straightforward classification, with the nationalism that had been such a stable defining feature of the party's discourse now taking a back seat in the 2002 campaign. The party was clearly at pains to "present a fresh image" in these elections (Haughton 2003b, 70) – a strategy that suffered two notable dislocations, however, when Mečiar threatened a television journalist and

then walked out of the studio of another program in response to questions about the financing of his luxury villa (thus reinforcing, if anything, the image of a media-bashing authoritarian reverting to his old ways)[1] and when a group of longtime HZDS politicians, including former parliament speaker Ivan Gašparovič, quit the party to form the Movement for Democracy (HZD) after being left out of the party list as part of the Mečiar leadership's agenda of image makeover (Haughton 2003b, 70–71).

Figure 6.1 summarizes the HZDS discourse, with the "people" as an empty signifier linking "liberal," "Christian," and "social" principles in common contrariety to anti-popular powers of the past ("totalitarianism") and present (the "Dzurinda government" with its various pathologies). The HZDS's populism in the 2002 campaign is arguably best understood as a centrist populism insofar as it sought to incorporate left-wing and right-wing elements alike in terms of the contents of its demands, in addition to positioning itself against the "right-left jumble" that is the Dzurinda government:

> The HZDS-ĽS is aware that no government founded as a right-left jumble is capable of managing the difficult tasks of the present, the consequence of which is the current state of Slovakia. (Hnutie za demokratické Slovensko 2002, 4)

Part of the HZDS's populist construction of the opposing power bloc, therefore, was the latter's perceived incoherence along the left-right spectrum – which the HZDS, in turn, sought to displace, positioning itself simply as a "stabilized political party with a developed regional structure [and] the highest ratings in the long term" (Hnutie za demokratické Slovensko 2002, 4). This claim to transcend the "right-left jumble," however, was also indicative of an attempt to pivot from populism (directed against the outgoing government) toward institutionalism (positioning itself in a non-conflictual manner as a government-in-waiting and, indeed, a previously successful government). The HZDS declared in this vein that

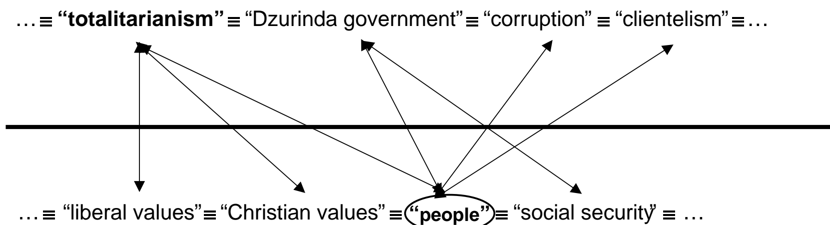

Figure 6.1 Centrist populism of the HZDS (2002).

> [w]e are a party with stable support from society with developed political structures, we have experience with running the state, we know what has to be done, and we have people who will get it done. (Hnutie za demokratické Slovensko 2002, 1)

All this, however, also made the party vulnerable to a counter-populist challenge that would interpellate the HZDS as part of the power bloc of established forces that has already had a chance to run the country and failed – a challenge that indeed emerged in the form of Robert Fico's newcomer party Smer.

"Just like they stole under Mečiar, so they steal under Dzurinda": a break in the post-1989 imaginary

The centrist populism of the early Smer (1999–2002)

Smer (meaning "Direction") was founded in December 1999 under the leadership of Robert Fico, who had been elected to parliament for the SDĽ in 1998 but subsequently left the party to oppose the Dzurinda government as an independent MP. In its founding declaration, Smer (1999) stated its main objectives to be "order, justice, and stability" and positioned itself as "the natural result of the development after November 1989, which has unleashed public dissatisfaction with disorder in economic and public affairs." In addition, the new party interpellated the "people" (*ľudia*) in opposition to the "politicians" who have failed them with "unreal" promises:

> Smer has respect for the people and their capacity to recognize the unreality of political promises. It is not guided by slogans, but by realities. Smer knows that people have stopped believing politicians and consider political and electoral programs to be empty promises. […] Smer will act openly in relation to the people. Oversight of its activities will not be performed mainly by party organs, but by the public and by mass communication media. (Smer 1999)

A populist discourse thus took shape, centered on the "people" as the unredeemed subject that the reigning "disorder" and all the post-1989 "politicians" have failed to represent. The dual oppositions of "people" vs. "power" and "order" vs. "disorder" structured this discourse in accounting for what exactly had gone wrong since November '89: the "disorder in social and economic affairs" found further elaboration in an equivalential chain of ills (in common contrariety to the demand for "order"), namely:

> the dysfunctionality of the rule-of-law state [*právný štát*], deep injustice, the state's lack of interest in the individual, the disdainful neglect of education and experience, the pilfering of state property, incessantly growing crime, as well as the overall moral decline of society. (Smer 1999)

The responsibility for these ills, in turn, rested with the "politicians" of the post-1989 period as a collective entity, who now had to be replaced by a "new political generation" that breaks with the practices of "politicking and the reckless advancement of partisan and individual interests" (Smer 1999). This discourse was populist, therefore, to the extent that the numerous manifestations of "disorder" were traced back to the equivalentially constructed power bloc of "politicians" in contrariety to the wider "people" whom Smer now claimed to represent by bringing forth a change of "generation."

Smer's populism at this stage was a specifically centrist populism insofar as it sought to displace "left"/"right" differences with its construction of the "order" vs. "disorder" and "people" vs. "politicians" frontier, while also incorporating left-wing and right-wing contents alike into its own discourse. On the one hand, the founding declaration affirmed "pragmatism" over the "ideologization of affairs" and argued that the party "does not consider the crisis conditions in the state and in its economic, legal, and societal spheres to be left or right" (Smer 1999). In addition to this claim to transcend the left-right spectrum on the level of self-identification, Smer's discourse sought to triangulate between left-wing and right-wing policy demands. In the section on the state, for instance, the founding declaration articulated the role of the state in terms of the "realization of our national interests," the "social character of the state," but also the "rationalization of administrative functions," including a "smaller number of civil servants" (Smer 1999) – thus taking up nationalist, social-democratic, and liberal constructions all at once and equivalentially articulating them against the established "politicians" who had allegedly failed to fulfill any of these promises. Smer's discourse thus mobilized a wide-ranging equivalential chain around the demand for "order" (and the "people"), foregrounding its own newcomer identity in an attempt to hegemonize the center ground of the party spectrum – competing, in this respect, with the HZDS after its post-2000 rebranding.

The September 2002 parliamentary elections thus featured two different centrist populisms – HZDS and Smer – both of which claimed the center ground in the name of the "people" against a power bloc,[2] but notably differed in the construction of the latter: while the HZDS sought to re-articulate the long-standing pro- vs. anti-Mečiar divide in terms of the HZDS representing the "people" against the outgoing Dzurinda government, Smer aimed to displace this frontier entirely by constructing an equivalence between Mečiar and Dzurinda as representing one and the same power bloc of post-1989 "politicians." Contesting the elections as "Smer – Third Way," Fico's party launched an early billboard campaign, beginning in May 2002, that emphasized this populist messaging (Haughton 2003b, 77): one billboard featured three shoes with the question "On which feet do you want to place Slovakia?" – with the options being (in ascending order of shoe size) "Mikuláš Dzurinda corruption," "Vladimír Mečiar privatization," and "Robert Fico

order"; another billboard, perhaps the most famous one from this election campaign, featured the slogan "Just as they stole under Mečiar, so they steal under Dzurinda." If the HZDS's populism was not only about "people" vs. "government," but also the promise of better government by those who had governed previously (this being the pivot toward institutionalism), Smer's populism dislocated this claim by interpellating Mečiar equivalentially with Dzurinda as part of the same corrupt power bloc that has alternated in government and failed. In a subsequent campaign broadcast, Fico defended his billboard slogan and articulated a populist opposition to "the same people" of the "left" and "right" who have merely "taken turns in government" since 1990:

> "Just as they stole under Mečiar, so they steal under Dzurinda." I stand by this statement because it captures the reality in Slovakia. For 12 years, the same people have taken turns in government.

He then went on to elaborate as follows:

> The left quarrels with the right, and the result is disorder everywhere – a dysfunctional rule-of-law state, criminality, and the like. This, too, is a reason why Smer emerged and why we have come forward with the idea of a change of political generations.

This segment was immediately followed by a brief statement from a law student sitting next to Fico who explained that he won a merit-based competition for a place on Smer's party list with a paper that he submitted, adding that "I do not know any other party that would offer my generation a similar chance." Fico concluded the broadcast by affirming:

> We truly want to bring people into politics who are not burdened by the past or by ideologies. People who do not consider the crisis situation to be left or right but will tackle with common sense the concrete difficulties of concrete people. This, for me, is the Third Way.

Smer's epithet "Third Way" thus came to be constructed in a specifically centrist populist manner against the corrupt power bloc of established forces of both "left" and "right," interpellating the wider "people" defined by collective non-belonging to this discredited power bloc.[3] The "people," performatively enacted in this case by Fico and the young law student, thus took on the function of an empty signifier standing for an equivalential chain of demands held together by collective exclusion from the power bloc on the other side of the antagonistic frontier. Figure 6.2 illustrates this discourse, with the "people" being pitted against the power bloc of "politicians" of "left" and "right," including both Mečiar and Dzurinda, with "disorder" serving as an empty signifier on the other side that stands for the

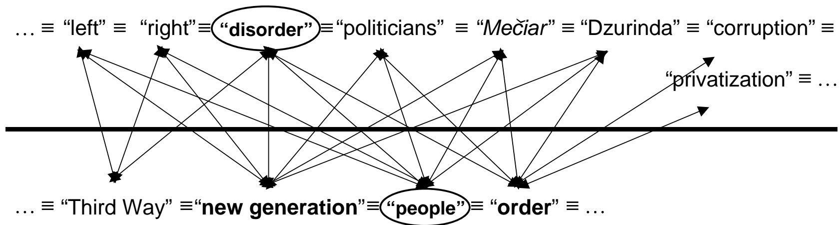

Figure 6.2 Centrist populism of Smer (1999–2002).

entirety of the opposing chain. The counter-populist thrust of this discourse can be seen in the manner in which "Mečiar" turns into a floating signifier (in italics) belonging to the corrupt "politicians" side of the frontier in Smer's populist discourse and to the "people" side in the discourse of the HZDS (as seen in the previous section).

In the context of Smer's election campaign, the signifiers "people" and "order" arguably alternated in performing this empty signifier function: while the "people" as the underdog subject of Smer's discourse found, above all, a performative enactment in Fico's staging of proximity to the commoners whom Smer claimed to bring into politics, the demand for "order" was ubiquitous as a signifier in Smer's campaign material. The party's election program, for instance, presented each policy area with the heading "Order in public finances," "Order in unemployment and the social sphere," etc., while the campaign slogan "Vote for order!" appeared on virtually all Smer billboards. The interplay of the central signifiers "people" and "order" could be seen in another campaign broadcast in which Smer politician Monika Beňová, appearing as an ordinary housewife, held up two T-shirts with images of Mečiar and Dzurinda and complained that "for years, I have been washing with ordinary laundry detergent and I still can't wash out these two stains"; Fico then makes a genie-like appearance and recommends the new brand "Master Order" (*Majster Poriadok*), which swiftly wipes the "two stains" off the shirts. This sequence points in exemplary fashion to the recurring articulation of the demand for "order" as a long-standing demand of the common "people" that has been repeatedly frustrated "for years" and can only be fulfilled by the newcomer party Smer sweeping away the established "politicians."

Smer's centrist populism once again combined under this flexible catch-all demand for "order" a wide variety of left- and right-of-center contents: from "national interests," "European social state" and "active employment policy by the state" to "reduction of expenses of the state" or "entrepreneurship, individual responsibility, and education as the pillars of development" (Smer – tretia cesta 2002, 1, 3, 5), Smer's election program took up elements of liberal, nationalist, and social-democratic discourses alike as part of the attempt to

displace the “left” vs. “right” and pro- vs. anti-Mečiar frontiers in the name of “order” against the “disorder and chaos introduced by preceding governments” (this being the unifying element of populism) (Smer – tretia cesta 2002, 2). Beyond this foray into the discursive terrains of the HZDS, SDK, or SDĽ, Smer also displayed a willingness to venture deep into SNS territory in singling out “the irresponsible growth of the Roma population” as an issue, as Fico expounded in another campaign broadcast:

> We also have the courage to speak out about the irresponsible growth of the Roma population. Even though we will be criticized from abroad, we are prepared to carry out a social policy that will demand from parents the responsibility for the raising and living standards of their children.

Fico went on to problematize the likes of “unadaptable parents,” “ethno-tourism,” and alleged positive discrimination for the Roma:

> Social benefits will be paid out to unadaptable parents only upon confirmation of regular school attendance of their children. We will do everything so that the time bomb of the Roma population does not explode and the ethno-tourism of speculator groups in society does not discriminate against the entire republic.

This formula of centrist populism with a dose of anti-minorities illiberalism thrown in foreshadowed not only what would later be seen with Public Affairs in the Czech Republic (see chapter 3), but also Smer’s subsequent willingness to integrate the SNS into broadly social-welfarist and nationalist coalition governments (picking up right where the HZDS left off in this regard).

In the context of the 2002 elections, Smer’s centrist populism constituted a counter-hegemonic challenge to both the HZDS and the outgoing government – with Dzurinda’s newly constituted party, the SDKÚ, campaigning on a largely institutionalist platform of continuity with the slogan “We’ll finish what we started. We are on the right path.” While the HZDS likewise claimed the center ground as well as a “people’s” or “popular” identity against a “government founded as a right-left jumble,” Smer displaced this frontier by presenting itself as the sole party standing above and beyond the left/right logic *and* the failings of all previous post-1989 governments. This also meant conceding the discursive terrain for a “left” identity to the likes of the Communist Party of Slovakia (KSS), which targeted the void created by the impending collapse of the SDĽ in positioning itself as “the only truly left-wing party in Slovakia” and presenting more radical demands such as state ownership of over 50% of key industries (Komunistická strana Slovenska 2002). On the other hand, Smer’s claim to be the sole newcomer occupying the center ground was partly displaced by the emergence of the

Alliance of the New Citizen (ANO) led by media magnate Pavol Rusko, who used his ownership of the leading private TV channel Markíza to promote his political project. While ANO's discourse was hardly populist, it likewise marketed its newness while claiming the center ground with its (ostensibly similar) promise to "organize the running of the affairs of state" in a more competent manner, albeit with a decidedly liberal construction of "the individual" as the central political subject ("the state exists and functions from the will of the individual, in the name of the individual, and for the good of the individual") (Alianca nového občana 2002, 1). What thus emerged was a crowded contest for the center that limited the extent to which Smer could position itself as the sole alternative to the established forces of both "left" and "right."

With 13.5% of the vote, Smer ultimately fell short of its clearly stated ambition to lead a government; Dzurinda formed another coalition government of his SDKÚ with the SMK, KDH, and ANO, while the HZDS again came in first on a much-reduced share of the vote (19.5%). The emergence of Smer already signaled, at this juncture, the beginnings of a break in the post-1989 imaginary by partly displacing the pro- vs. anti-Mečiar frontier that had defined Slovak party politics (see also Haughton 2003b; Malová 2017). The slogan "Just as they stole under Mečiar, so they steal under Dzurinda" pointed in exemplary fashion to this frontier displacement via the construction of an equivalence between the two established camps. After the 2002 elections, however, a pronounced shift occurred in Smer's discourse away from centrist populism and toward an explicit identification with the "left" and "social democracy," capped by the party's rebranding from "Smer – Third Way" to "Smer – Social Democracy" in 2005 (Malová 2017; Marušiak 2006; Rybář and Deegan-Krause 2008). In the process, a series of smaller social-democratic parties, including the remnants of the SDĽ as well as the Social Democratic Alternative (SDA), formed by Schmögnerová and Weiss after quitting the SDĽ shortly before the 2002 elections, merged themselves into Smer. Smer's hegemony project was now one of occupying the left-of-center ground vacated by the SDĽ and, indeed, re-articulating the identity of the "left" away from the SDĽ and its record of participating in center-right-led coalitions. In its 2006 election program, Smer defined itself as "an internationally recognized center-left political party" that represents "a clear political, economic, and social alternative to the current right-wing governance," especially in terms of advocating a "social state" (*sociálny štát*) and a "social Slovakia" (Smer – sociálna demokracia 2006, 1–2). In this social-democratic discourse, opposition to the government was now articulated primarily in terms of a "left" vs. "right" frontier as well as the contrarieties organized around the nodal point "social" (and related syntagmas such as "social state" and "social justice") vs. the "anti-social" policies of the government.

Smer went on to win over 29% of the vote in the 2006 elections, beginning a streak of four consecutive parliamentary elections in which it would emerge as the most-voted party by over ten percentage points. With this success and the HZDS's precipitous decline (8.8% in 2006, then out of

parliament from 2010 onwards), Smer managed to displace the pro- vs. anti-Mečiar divide for good, embracing instead the "left" vs. "right" frontier that its earlier centrist populism had set out to displace in the 2002 elections. After the 2006 elections, Smer also established the precedent of a social-welfarist and nationalist coalition government with the HZDS and SNS – signaling a partial fixation in the terms of party competition around an opposition between "social" and "national" forces on the one hand and various (largely fragmented) liberal and Christian-democratic forces on the other. This strategy could be seen in exemplary fashion in Smer's 2010 election campaign broadcast, in which Fico called on the voters to re-elect a "strong, Slovak, and social government" as opposed to the "right-wing and Hungarian parties" (Smer – sociálna demokracia 2010).[4] In the period from 2006 to 2020, which continuously featured Smer-led cabinets with the exception of 2010–12, the defining feature of Smer's discourse was an institutionalist logic of differentially implementing "fairly random" patchworks of welfare measures (Malová 2017, 11), from minimum wage rises and utility price reductions to free train passes for students and pensioners (pointing in exemplary fashion to a differential logic of singling out specific areas and/or status groups for state support). In this context, Smer's discourse has also been characterized by the conspicuous absence of a populist construction of an underdog vs. power divide, while frequently featuring references to the "people" in the institutionalist sense of a government working to differentially enact demands in their name (with slogans such as "Don't forget the people"). In the process, however, the many years of Smer-led government have seen numerous dislocations in the party's promises – such as accusations of corruption, oligarchization, or inadequate social protections – some of which have been taken up in populist challenger discourses that construct Smer as an integral part of the very power bloc that the party had once defined itself against. This later wave of 2010s discourses – most notably, those of Ordinary People and Independent Personalities (OĽaNO), Sme Rodina (We Are Family), and, to some extent, Marian Kotleba's People's Party Our Slovakia (ĽSNS) – constitutes the second main phase of populism in Slovakia (after 2002).

The conservative anti-party populism of Ordinary People and Independent Personalities (2012–present)

Ahead of the June 2010 parliamentary elections, with opinion polls largely predicting another majority for the Smer-SNS-HZDS coalition, the businessman and activist Igor Matovič (2010) announced the formation of a civic initiative called "Ordinary People" with the initial aim of preventing a Smer-SNS "constitutional majority" and launching a referendum campaign titled "On the politicians' heels," featuring ten different referendum questions aimed at limiting abuses of power by politicians. The founding logic of this initiative, therefore, was the populist interpellation of "ordinary people" in

contrariety to the "politicians," performatively enacted in the form of "people" organizing within civil society outside the framework of the parties – a theme that would remain central even after the transformation of "Ordinary People" into an officially registered party. Shortly before the elections, Matovič and his three co-initiators dropped the referendum idea and decided to stand as independents on the party list of Freedom and Solidarity (SaS), a center-right party founded in 2009 under the leadership of Richard Sulík and featuring a combination of civil and market libertarianism. The four "Ordinary People" initiators made a point of being placed on the last four slots on the SaS list so that any preferential votes that they receive would be "earned" rather than "by chance" (Matovič 2010). With SaS winning 12.1% of the overall vote, the Matovič-led four received enough preferential votes under the open list system to be elected to parliament; moreover, with the SNS and HZDS suffering heavy losses parallel to Smer's gains, a center-right coalition government of SDKÚ-DS, SaS, KDH, and the Hungarian party Most-Híd was able to take office. Less than a year after the elections, however, Matovič was expelled from the SaS parliamentary group after voting for Smer's proposal for restricting dual nationality in response to the new Hungarian nationality law (see chapter 4).[5] Only a few months after that, the Radičová government collapsed after linking the vote on the European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF) – which SaS vehemently opposed – with a confidence vote, which it then lost, triggering early elections for March 2012. In this context, "Ordinary People and Independent Personalities" (OĽaNO) officially registered itself in November 2011 as a political party – while maintaining a self-designation as a "movement" rather than a "party" – and prepared to contest the 2012 elections.

In the election campaign, with SDKÚ-DS and SaS cratering in the polls and Smer heavily favored to come at least close to an absolute majority of seats, OĽaNO featured a populist discourse pitting the "people" or "citizens" against the "politicians" and "parties." In its election program, OĽaNO interpellated the "people" in terms of an equivalential chain of objectives that are being blocked by the "politicians" who have turned politics into a corrupt "business" for a privileged few:

> If corruption, clientelism, and stealing of public finances and public property are going to be commonplace in politics, then there will not be enough money in Slovakia for basic services such as: healthcare, schools, support for families, the elderly, or health-impaired citizens. We do not want to look on idly and wait passively for the future that politicians are preparing for us, but we want to give people in Slovakia hope that together we will succeed in turning politics into service and not business for the anointed. (Obyčajní ľudia a nezávislé osobnosti 2012, 1)

In this context, OĽaNO's program called for sweeping away the "old generation of politicians" and the behind-the-scenes power groups allegedly connected to them so that the "voters and citizens" could finally find proper representation:

> Our main goal, therefore, is to bring new blood into politics. To hold the citizens' mirror up to the old generation of politicians and give voters and citizens the opportunity to choose representatives who will actually defend their interests and not the interests of party centers and lobby groups. (Obyčajní ľudia a nezávislé osobnosti 2012, 1)

In an election campaign in which Smer articulated its slogan "People deserve security" in the social-democratic institutionalist terms of "eliminat[ing] the influences of the crisis" and safeguarding "societal stability and security for people" (Smer – sociálna demokracia 2012), OĽaNO took from Smer's playbook from ten years earlier by re-articulating the "people" in populist terms against the entire "old generation of politicians" (including Smer) systematically blocking the realization of "people's" demands. In addition, OĽaNO specifically constructed "civil society" as a locus of independent citizens' activity in contrariety to the rule of parties ("particracy") and "party dinosaurs," thus constructing an equivalentially wide-ranging power bloc encompassing all established "parties" and "politicians" who have effectively reduced the "citizens" to the status of "second-class people" for all these years:

> We aim for civil society to get closer to so-called high politics, so that particracy, government of party dinosaurs, professional stealing, lies, and populism come to an end. We have to rid the citizens of the feeling that they are second-class people and that politicians are interested in them only for a few days before elections. We want to be equal not only in obligations, but also in rights. (Obyčajní ľudia a nezávislé osobnosti 2012, 2)

OĽaNO expanded on this "citizens" ≡ "civil society" vs. "parties" ≡ "politicians" frontier with the demand to "return the state to the hands of citizens" and reform the state so that "the citizen is greater than the politician and the bureaucrat" – from eliminating parliamentary immunity and heightening criminal proceedings for abuses of power to "develop[ing] actual civil society" as a safeguard for "less space for corruption" and allowing "independent candidates" to stand in parliamentary elections (Obyčajní ľudia a nezávislé osobnosti 2012, 15). This latter demand, in particular, dovetailed onto a performative enactment of OĽaNO's specifically "anti-party populism" (Gyárfášová 2018, 120) on the level of organizational structures: in order to reproduce its identity as a "movement" (rather than a party) claiming to represent "ordinary people and independent personalities," OĽaNO pursued an

unorthodox strategy of maintaining just a four-person membership and not building up an organizational base, while filling the rest of its candidate list with non-party independents.

In addition to this anti-party dimension, OĽaNO's populism featured a joint articulation with conservatism in foregrounding "traditional values." The election program opened with a commitment to an equivalential chain of principles centered on "traditional values" such as raising children, freedom, and "responsibility" in contrariety to a corrupt and over-bureaucratized state:

> We believe in a Slovakia that honors traditional values, enables its citizens to live and raise their children in a safe environment so that they can freely develop their individual facts, in awareness of their own responsibility to assist […] those who depend on it. […] We are convinced that the development of Slovakia is predicated on the stopping of corruption, the high-quality and responsible management of public affairs, justice, the enforceability of the law, and true rule of law without excessive bureaucracy. (Obyčajní ľudia a nezávislé osobnosti 2012, 1)

Figure 6.3 summarizes this discourse, with "people" functioning as an empty signifier organizing relations of contrariety to every element on the opposing side, supplemented by the nodal point "civil society."

This conservative populism, linking conservative values to the populist opposition to corrupt "parties" and "politicians," initially also found expression in the forging of equivalential links with two small conservative parties – namely, the Civic Conservative Party (OKS) and the Conservative Democrats of Slovakia (KDS) – with representatives of these parties contesting the parliamentary elections on the OĽaNO list. Notably, this strategy pointed to a trade-off between the anti-party and conservative dimensions of OĽaNO's populism, circumscribing the logic of anti-party populism in integrating two established parties – provided that they were small and conservative – into the "people" side of the antagonistic frontier. In February 2012, however, the OKS and KDS members left the OĽaNO list after Matovič provocatively proposed lie detector tests for himself and the chairmen of the OKS and KDS in order to verify that they "never took

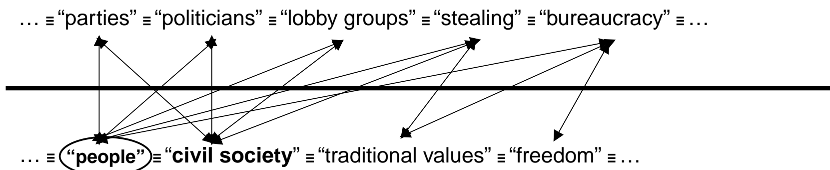

Figure 6.3 Conservative anti-party populism of OĽaNO (2012).

bribes" (Koniec Matovičovej kandidátky! "Matovič zabíja svoje dieťa," tvrdí Zajac 2012). Following this incident, Matovič noted with satisfaction in an interview that "we are left with a candidate list full of independent personalities, of course without party men from the OKS, KDS, and their people" (Matovič o spolupráci s človekom z Gorily 2012) – thus reinforcing the anti-party dimension of OĽaNO's populism.

The 2012 election campaign also took place against the backdrop of the "Gorilla affair," in which a series of leaked transcripts emerged in December 2011 of conversations from 2005 and 2006 – recorded at the time by the Slovak Intelligence Service (SIS) under the codename "Gorilla" – between then-government officials and business figures about large-scale bribes involving privatizations and public procurements (see also Školkay 2018). The main actors implicated were the parties of the second Dzurinda government (2002–06) and the investment group Penta, but opposition parties such as Smer were also mentioned in the conversations. The affair, which prompted a series of protest rallies across the country, amounted to a major dislocation in suggesting that the Dzurinda government's far-reaching privatization agenda in the name of "European integration" and "renewal" was actually tied to rampant corruption (as Smer had claimed with its centrist populism in the 2002 elections) and implicating a wide range of parties in the process (including Smer itself). Fico largely tried to bypass the issue, denying any involvement by Smer and emphasizing that the party had been continuously in opposition at the time, while the SDKÚ-DS was placed firmly on the defensive, with Dzurinda questioning the timing of the leak a few months before the elections. OĽaNO, on the other hand, took up the dislocation in terms of its anti-"politicians" populism; in January 2012, Matovič placed on the gates of parliament a large sticker depicting a gorilla with a banana on its head in the shape of the Slovak coat of arms with the double cross. Setting the tone for what would become a recurring practice of staging disruptive actions in parliament, Matovič held a makeshift on-site press conference in which he declared:

> There are politicians here who have been pilfering Slovakia for 23 years and the citizens do not deserve having such people lead. They hide behind the double cross, masquerade as a state organ, and in reality are criminals. This state symbol is going to represent them much better. (Matovič zavesil na parlament znak gorily s banánom 2012)

Matovič thus sought to articulate the scandal in the populist terms of the "citizens" in contrariety to a criminal power bloc of "politicians" who have ruled since 1989 and utterly failed to represent the "citizens" in the process. OĽaNO's campaign billboards likewise incorporated the Gorilla imagery into a populist construction of corrupt "politicians," juxtaposing the slogan "Let us together prevent politicians from pilfering Slovakia" with the montage of a gorilla in the background. However, this populist construction

suffered a dislocation of its own when it emerged that Jozef Špírko, a former Penta group associate, was involved in putting together OĽaNO's candidate list and election program (which, incidentally, did not mention the Gorilla affair by name). Matovič sought to distance himself from Špírko in a February 2012 interview by referring to the latter as a "fan of the OKS" who had been involved in OĽaNO by virtue of his proximity to the OKS, which had already quit the OĽaNO list by this point (Matovič o spolupráci s človekom z Gorily 2012). While Matovič thus sought to deflect the issue of Špírko's involvement in anti-party populist terms by pointing to the fact that the "party men from the OKS, KDS, and their people" have already departed, this episode highlighted the sheer range of the dislocatory implications of the Gorilla affair and the limitations of OĽaNO's attempt to hegemonize the issue around an antagonistic frontier against the entire class of "politicians."

In the 2012 elections, OĽaNO ultimately came in third with 8.6% of the vote, while Smer formed a one-party government after becoming the first party in Slovakia after 1989 to win an outright majority of seats (on 44.4% of the vote). Once in parliament, OĽaNO maintained its populist discourse of "people" vs. "politicians," such as by aggressively promoting referenda as instruments for realizing "people's" demands otherwise blocked by the "politicians." In February 2014, the OĽaNO parliamentary group held a press conference in which it announced a "super-referendum" initiative with the goal of "repair[ing] and protect[ing] Slovakia from the perverse whims of politicians" (Matovič), allowing the voters to decide on a series of "questions that politicians do not want to, do not have the courage to, or do not know how to decide responsibly" (OĽaNO MP Miroslav Kadúc) (Obyčajní ľudia a nezávislé osobnosti 2014). As examples for such referendum questions, the OĽaNO MPs at the press conference mentioned the reduction of the validity quorum for referenda (from the current requirement of 50% turnout) or "whether they [the people] want marriage to be defined as a union of man and woman, whether they want children to be adopted by homosexual couples" (Obyčajní ľudia a nezávislé osobnosti 2014). The latter two questions, in particular, were taken up by the church-backed Alliance for the Family in its own referendum initiative beginning in June 2014, which led to a three-part referendum in February 2015 on defining marriage solely as a "union between one man and one woman," banning adoption of children by "couples or groups of the same sex," and barring schools from "requir[ing] children's participation in education in the field of sexual behavior or euthanasia." While OĽaNO supported participation in the referendum, it was internally divided on how to vote in it and ultimately refrained from endorsing one side or the other; in the end, the referendum fell well short of the 50% turnout threshold, with just 21.4% of eligible voters participating. The low turnout as well as OĽaNO's inability to take a coherent position pointed to the limitations of OĽaNO's strategy of promoting referenda as a means of enacting the populist frontier of "people" vs. "politicians."

Another means by which OĽaNO sought to reproduce its populist discourse from within parliament was by staging actions with disruptive aesthetics in institutional settings in the name of the "people" against a self-enriching power bloc of "Fico's friends" and "Smerites" (*smeráci*) in particular. In May 2015, Matovič held up a banner outside the Smer party congress in Bratislava with the caption: "Fico, aren't you ashamed? You hand out billions to friends, and you go and buy off the people [*ľudia*] with small change?" In August 2015, Matovič held a press conference in parliament in which he referred to Fico as a "corrupt puppet in the hands of financial groups" and offered him a payment of €133,676 in exchange for an hour-long interrogation about his corrupt past on a lie detector (Obyčajní ľudia a nezávislé osobnosti 2015). In December 2015, Matovič gave a speech in parliament wearing a black-and-white T-shirt with the caption "Fico is protecting criminals" in large letters; Matovič (2015) began the speech by ridiculing Fico's promise to help the "people in the villages" and accusing him of only helping "his people" with underhanded "deals," contrary to Smer's professed opposition to privatizations in the past. OĽaNO's populism, therefore, now featured an increasing emphasis on dislocating Smer's "social" discourse by pointing to widespread corruption and oligarchization under the one-party Smer government; what distinguished OĽaNO's discourse from other opposition parties was the articulation of this opposition to a self-enriching Fico-centered power bloc in the consistently populist terms of the "people" as the underdog subject vs. the entire class of "politicians" with Fico at its center.

OĽaNO's 2016 election campaign saw a continuation of this messaging, with Matovič declaring in a campaign broadcast:

> A few of Fico's friends are getting miraculously rich, and to the people [*ľudia*] they are handing crumbs. They are ruthlessly pilfering the hospitals, and sick people are dying completely unnecessarily. Young people are departing and leaving lonely parents back home. We do not want to live like this. (Obyčajní ľudia a nezávislé osobnosti 2016a)

OĽaNO's 2016 election program interpellated the "people" in contrariety to both the perceived oligarchization of the state under Smer and the class of post-1989 "politicians" that OĽaNO had set out from the beginning to oppose. The program articulated the central demand for "good politics" in terms of a system in which "laws are made by people, not by puppets in the hands of financial groups" and "politicians do not place obstacles before the people in the direct management of public affairs" (Obyčajní ľudia a nezávislé osobnosti 2016b). In this vein, OĽaNO bemoaned a situation in which "[1]aws are often tailored to powerful lobby groups and oligarchs and not the actual interests of people" and again called for a strengthening of "civil society" as the sphere in which the "people" are organized as well as "non-governmental non-profit organizations" in order to counter the power of these behind-the-scenes groups (Obyčajní ľudia a nezávislé osobnosti

2016b). In addition, the program again articulated OĽaNO's long-standing demand for reducing the validity quorum for referenda in populist terms by referring to the high turnout threshold of 50% as enabling a "gradual blunting of the people's interest in the management of public affairs" (Obyčajní ľudia a nezávislé osobnosti 2016b). In summarizing the demand for "good politics," OĽaNO once again foregrounded the sweeping opposition to the "politicians" of the past "25 years":

> These politicians regard the people [*ľudia*] as sheep, whom it suffices to give at the end of the electoral period a few euros [or] some social package and the people will forget about the systematic pilfering of public money, the woeful state of our hospitals, schools, the bad services of the state. We believed that with freedom, there would also come a new generation of politicians who put the public interest ahead of their own interest and the interest of their parties. 25 years have passed since the revolution, but people's expectations have not been fulfilled. Politics is regarded as a dirty and corrupt affair; many honest, brave, and smart people prefer to engage in other professions rather than having to go into politics. [...] We would like to clean up politics and restore its original meaning of service for the benefit of people. [...] A better politics is not the privilege of elites, but a matter for all of us. (Obyčajní ľudia a nezávislé osobnosti 2016b)

OĽaNO thus articulated the demand for "better politics" in the name of "all" people against the "elites," with the latter being tied to an equivalential chain of ills such as "systematic pilfering" and mismanagement of public services, while attributing these ills to not only the outgoing government of "Fico's friends" and "Smerites," as Matovič had done in other articulations, but also to the entire class of post-1989 "politicians" who are equally complicit in these malpractices and have collectively failed "the people's expectations."

OĽaNO contested the 2016 elections as part of an electoral alliance with the liberal-conservative party NOVA – founded in 2012 by two ex-KDH MPs – again pointing to a willingness to compromise its anti-party populism on the question of joint candidacies. OĽaNO-NOVA won 11% of the vote, coming in third behind Smer (28.3%) and SaS (12.1%), and has continued to operate as an alliance ever since. In the context of a Smer-SNS-Most-Híd coalition government, OĽaNO's populism subsequently maintained its dual constitutive outside of "politicians" and the "Smerites" in power. The February 2018 murder of journalist Ján Kuciak, who had been investigating links between Slovak businessmen and the Calabrian mafia, and his fiancée, Martina Kušnírová, signaled a massive dislocation for continued Smer-led rule in the form of large-scale anti-government protests as well as a coalition crisis in which numerous Smer ministers, including Interior Minister Robert Kaliňák and ultimately Fico himself, resigned after Most-Híd threatened to

withdraw from the government. In this context, Matovič referred to Fico as a "lackey of the mafia" and the government as a "mafia state"; after Fico's resignation in March 2018 and his replacement by Peter Pellegrini, OĽaNO held a press conference in which Matovič denounced the new government in populist terms as a "puppet government" that is continuing to let the mafia rule as opposed to the "people":

> The people yearn for a just Slovakia. They don't want the mafia to rule us in any form. Robert Fico, however, has not changed anything. In place of himself, he has installed the puppet Pellegrini. […] They have performed puppet theater, painted over the octopus, and nothing has changed. (Obyčajní ľudia a nezávislé osobnosti 2018)

OĽaNO's populist construction of the "Smerite" power bloc thus underwent a shift in emphasis following the dislocatory shock of the Kuciak murder, foregrounding the specifically "mafia"-like nature of the state as well as the dual "puppet"-like nature of the Pellegrini government as a puppet of Fico, who is in turn a puppet of the mafia that continues to "rule us." This construction of a "puppet government," therefore, sustained the populist frontier against the "mafia state" even in spite of Fico's attempt to defuse the dislocation in differential terms through his own resignation – a move that, according to OĽaNO, has not actually changed anything.

OĽaNO's 2020 parliamentary election campaign saw a continuation of this more targeted populist opposition to a Smer-led "mafia" power bloc rather than the sweeping rejection of "politicians." On the one hand, OĽaNO's election program articulated a sweeping contrariety between "people" and "politicians" with demands such as "We will return property stolen by politicians to the people" (Obyčajní ľudia a nezávislé osobnosti 2020b). At the same time, however, OĽaNO presented the election campaign primarily as a struggle against the ruling "mafia": "The victory of the mafia in the elections means even more deformed justice in the hands of politicians who think only of themselves and get rich at the expense of ordinary people" (Obyčajní ľudia a nezávislé osobnosti 2020b). With this equivalential link "mafia" ≡ "politicians," the (Smer-led) "mafia" now came to represent the main force holding together the opposing power bloc, whose victory or defeat at the elections will decide everything. OĽaNO's program even saw a conspicuous loosening of the sweeping opposition to "politicians," declaring that "[w]e are open to cooperation with all honest politicians who are concerned with a better life for the people, not deals with oligarchs and self-enrichment" (Obyčajní ľudia a nezávislé osobnosti 2020b) – pointing to an equivalential incorporation of "honest politicians" in common contrariety against the "oligarchs." OĽaNO's pre-election campaign broadcast, striking a broadly similar tone to its 2016 version, specifically foregrounded the "mafia" and "oligarchs" in power who have to be swept away:

> They think Slovakia belongs to them. They steal billions and buy off the robbed people with small change. They live in luxury, but sick people are dying unnecessarily. But in a few days, we can change everything together […]. You know us. We have results and people whom you can believe. (Obyčajní ľudia a nezávislé osobnosti 2020a)

It becomes clear in light of the development of OĽaNO's discourse since 2012 that the populist opposition to the "mafia" and "oligarchs" was now a more targeted one directed specifically against Smer and its allies – reflecting a strategy of hegemonizing the anti-Smer frontier in a fluctuating context of party competition featuring several new contestants in the 2020 elections (such as Progressive Slovakia and ex-President Kiska's "For the People"), while, at the same time, pointing to OĽaNO's track record of having maintained the most consistent rejection of "politicians" as a class ("You know us"). OĽaNO's ultimately achieved a stunning success in the 2020 elections, becoming by far the largest party with 25% of the vote. In his election night speech, Matovič, now slated to become prime minister, made the more narrowly anti-Smer orientation clear by declaring victory over "the 12 years of Smer governments" and expressly inviting Sme Rodina – the other main populist formation of the past four years – to be part of the new government.

The nativist entrepreneur populism of Sme Rodina (2016–present)

The 2016 parliamentary elections saw the emergence of another populist challenger in the form of businessman Boris Kollár's Sme Rodina ("We Are Family"). In November 2015, Kollár took over the marginal Citizens' Party of Slovakia and then simply rebranded the party in order to circumvent the process of having to register a new one from scratch. The name "We Are Family" pointed to the central role of the family in Kollár's discourse (as will be seen), while also suggesting an unapologetic, if self-ironic, reference to Kollár's recognizable status as an unmarried father of nine children from his numerous relationships with women. In its online self-presentation, Sme Rodina introduced itself as a "reaction to the situation in Slovakia, but also in Europe" characterized by a dual "threat to Slovak families from the outside, but also from the inside." The "threat from the outside" was constructed in the nativist terms of a "Muslim invasion":

> The threat from the outside is the currently ongoing Muslim invasion of Europe, which threatens not only our culture, faith, and freedom, but also our homes and families. […] Our task will therefore be to protect by all available means the borders of our country and the people living in it.

The "threat from the inside," on the other hand, came specifically from above, from powerful groups in society:

> The threat from the inside is what we all intensely feel every day. Financial groups and oligarchs, who have exploited the state budget through their political puppets and lackeys for years, are not feeling threatened. They are capable of buying off almost anyone.

All this was capped off by the claim that Kollár the businessman was uniquely placed to tackle both challenges:

> It is for this reason that the movement SME RODINA – Boris Kollár emerged with Boris Kollár at the helm, who has enough money so that no one could control or manipulate him, in order to cut off the oligarchy and financial groups from the state budget. (Sme Rodina – Boris Kollár 2016a)

What thus emerged was a joint articulation of nativism, directed against the perceived threat of Muslim immigration, and populism, directed against a power bloc of "financial groups and oligarchs" and "their political puppets and lackeys." The populist dimension was very much reminiscent of OĽaNO's discourse by this point, directed against corruption as well as the financial and oligarchical interests allegedly lurking behind the "politicians." What was distinctly new in Sme Rodina's populism, however, was the claim that Boris Kollár is uniquely capable of standing up to the "financial groups and oligarchs" thanks to his supposed incorruptibility as a sufficiently wealthy businessman – pointing to a specifically entrepreneur populism (already seen with ANO in the Czech Republic; see chapter 3) in conjunction with the nativism directed against "Muslim invasion."

Sme Rodina went on to contest the March 2016 parliamentary elections just four months after its rebranding under Kollár. The self-styled movement's election program began by foregrounding a populist opposition between the "political parvenus and financial groups" that are getting richer and the "employed people, small and medium entrepreneurs" who are left worse off as a result:

> Slovakia is badly run in a managerial sense. The standard of living of our political parvenus and financial groups has long caught up to the standard of living of their Western European colleagues who had to build up their business empires for many generations. The standard of living of employed people, small and medium entrepreneurs is falling in direct proportion to our political entrepreneurs losing their inhibitions. (Sme Rodina – Boris Kollár 2016c)

Against this background, Sme Rodina called for "eliminat[ing] this system of how the state functions" by bringing new people into politics who are not bound to the interests of the "financial groups and oligarchs" controlling the established politicians:

> Nothing will change in Slovakia if we do not eliminate this system of how the state functions. The main issue in these elections is whether we let everything run like it has up to now. Or we want to have people in parliament who are not bound to anyone. Only such people can make decisions in favor of their voters. […] If you support us in the elections, we will make good decisions that will help all Slovak families. We want everyone in Slovakia to hold together. We want you to feel that WE ARE FAMILY, all of us, in Slovakia. (Sme Rodina – Boris Kollár 2016c)

"Family" thus emerged as an empty signifier in this populist discourse by designating both a particular entity that Sme Rodina wants to support and a metaphor for the whole – the "all of us" held together by common opposition to the power interests that are preventing "the people" from being properly represented and need to be rooted out accordingly. In contrast to typical conservative discourses articulating the "family" in terms of a set of values, therefore, Sme Rodina constructed the "family" in populist terms as another name for the underdog subject being threatened "from the inside" by the power bloc of "financial groups and oligarchs" (in addition to the nativist construction of a threat "from the outside").

Within this populist discourse, Sme Rodina's "Programmatic priorities" articulated a series of demands in terms of an equivalential chain of "people," "working families," "children," "pensioners," and "entrepreneurs" as specific group categories in need of support. These demands included "tax holidays for working families" as a means of supporting "young people so that they could have more children"; a "debt amnesty" in order to "financially rehabilitate families" and give "people the chance to start over economically," akin to how the state recapitalized banks in times of financial distress; the "cancellation of fees for medication for children up to three years of age and for pensioners," which are "unjust" in a context in which "oligarchs and financial groups are pilfering the health sector and hauling off money from it out of Slovakia, especially to tax havens"; and "tax justice" in the form of graduated tax brackets for "entrepreneurs" (16%), "oligopolies" (33%), and "monopolies" (50%) (Sme Rodina – Boris Kollár 2016b). Sme Rodina's demands thus interpellated numerous underdog groups – equivalentially linked to the central interpellation "we are family" – in contrariety to the power bloc of "oligarchs and financial groups," with the signifier "family" performing a

dual function as a signifier for a particular subject position and as a representative ("empty") one for the entire popular bloc.

Sme Rodina's election campaign thus foregrounded this populism in the area of social and economic policy, with the demand for a "debt amnesty" in particular becoming a flagship demand that set Kollár's formation apart from its competitors. In pre-election interviews, Kollár referred to the policy as an "absolute priority" and a condition for supporting a hypothetical minority government, while articulating the issue of debt executions in populist terms as amounting to a "subjugation of people" brought about by "pseudo-entrepreneurs who give loans in non-banking lending houses [*nebankovky*] to people who don't fulfill the conditions for loans in banks" and then proceed to "make money off people's misfortune" (Boris Kollár: Chceme zastaviť finančné zotročovanie ľudí (rozhovor) 2016). In this vein, Kollár appealed to the "people" as the exploited, dispossessed subject in need of debt relief by the state, just as governments willingly bailed out "banks" and "oligarchs" in the past:

> If the state was able to write off debts for banks in the past, [and] the current government is again capable of writing off debts for oligarchs, then I ask: why wouldn't we be able to afford writing off debts for the people? (Boris Kollár: Chceme zastaviť finančné zotročovanie ľudí (rozhovor) 2016)

Sme Rodina's campaign billboards brought out the specifically entrepreneur populist iteration of this populism, featuring pictures of Kollár next to slogans such as "You can believe me. I'm not a politician" or "I'm not voting for politicians, I'm voting for Boris!" – thus emphasizing Kollár's identity as an incorruptible outsider uniquely placed to stand up to the "politicians" working in the interest of the "financial groups and oligarchs." Figure 6.4 presents a condensed summary of this discourse, with "family" functioning as an empty signifier holding together the equivalential chain via contrarieties against all of the threats ("inside" and "outside") on the opposing side of the frontier. "Entrepreneur," like "family," designates both a particular group and a metaphor – in this case, for Kollár's outsider position in contrariety to "politicians" that lends this discourse a specifically entrepreneur populist thrust.

Sme Rodina's entrepreneur populism points to the recurrence of a pattern already seen in OĽaNO's concurrent anti-party populism and Smer's earlier centrist populism: the central claim being that those in power, regardless of party or party bloc, have been stealing and working in the interests of behind-the-scenes power groups ever since '89. Yet Sme Rodina also radicalized the populist constructions of the "people" that came before it by extending the exclusionary scope in the nativist terms of a "threat from the outside," categorically rejecting the "acceptance of illegal immigrants" and

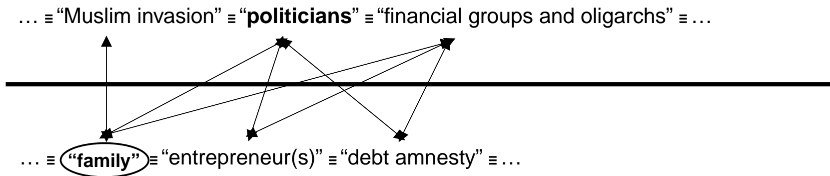

Figure 6.4 Nativist entrepreneur populism of Sme Rodina (2016).

calling on the "Slovak police and army" to be "prepared in case of need to install a fence" along Slovakia's borders. In this regard, Sme Rodina's joint articulation of nativism and populism aimed at a twofold dislocation of Smer's discourse by specifically raising issues of debt insecurity and insufficient social protections – contrary to Smer's long-standing promise of "social security" and a "social state" – and by radicalizing Fico's claim to resolutely oppose "migration" and "Islam" in the context of the so-called refugee crisis. Smer contested the 2016 elections with an institutionalist message of continuity in the area of "economic growth" and "successful social packages," coupled with the nativist construction of an external threat of "migrants and political instability" that the government is determined to stop, as Fico declared in his campaign broadcast (Smer – sociálna demokracia 2016). Smer's election slogan "We are working for the people. We are protecting Slovakia" pointed to this twofold claim to differentially enact social and economic promises and to fight back against the external threat of "migration." Coming off four years of one-party government, however, Smer's discourse faced dislocations along both dimensions, with Sme Rodina's nativist entrepreneur populism constituting one challenger discourse in which demands for greater social protections and an even more strident opposition to "migration" condensed into a populist frontier pitting the "people" (in terms of the metaphor of a "family") against a Smer-led power bloc of "politicians" working for "financial groups and oligarchs."

Sme Rodina won 6.6% in the 2016 elections, outperforming its pre-election polling numbers and entering parliament as part of the opposition to a Smer-led coalition government. Now an MP, Kollár continued his populist messaging through short videos on social media dealing with various topics, from the flagship issue of "debt amnesty" to statements directed against "standard politicians" and the "oligarch mafioso Fico." Notably, the Fico government announced in May 2017 that it would take measures toward private debt relief and thus moved to differentially incorporate Sme Rodina's flagship demand. Kollár (2017) responded to the announcement in a short video message on Facebook, in which he reaffirmed his populist

rejection of Fico as a representative of “oligarchs” while welcoming the differential adoption of the demand:

> I am glad that, after 25 years of government by standard politicians and the third government of Robert Fico, Robert Fico has discovered, after writing off debt for his oligarch friends, that there is something like a Slovak nation [...] that there are people plunged into a difficult life situation [...].

Kollár went on to promise his support for a debt amnesty bill in parliament, articulating this position with reference to “the people”:

> If he really means it seriously, then he has our eight votes in parliament. We certainly won’t fight against it and will support it, even if he’s stealing it [from us]. We don’t mind. Because we’re doing it for the people, first and foremost. (Kollár 2017)

Kollár and Sme Rodina thus continued to articulate the demand for “debt amnesty” in the populist terms of the suffering “people” vs. the “standard politicians” working for the “oligarchs,” while simultaneously offering to negotiate and support a debt amnesty bill proposed by the government. While the government never followed through with a bill amid all the other things happening during the legislative term – leading Sme Rodina to initiate a referendum petition on the issue in March 2019 – the debt amnesty issue points to a notable case of Sme Rodina maintaining a populist construction of its flagship demand even while working within institutional channels for the latter’s differential incorporation.

In the 2020 election campaign, however, Sme Rodina counteracted this threat of differential incorporation by ramping up its social demands and foregrounding as its flagship policy “the right to a state apartment for rent,” tied to a massive investment program leading to the construction of 25,000 new public housing units. As in 2016, these and other demands were articulated in terms of a populist opposition to “politicians” in the name of the “people” as a “family.” Kollár, who had campaigned four years earlier with the claim that “I am not a politician,” declared in his preface to the election program:

> My vision is that we are all a family in Slovakia, we should stick together. [...] After four years in parliament I realized that I am still not a politician. Because I still think with my heart. I will never come to terms with the fact that the state and big companies don’t share their revenues and profits with ordinary people, even when they’re doing well economically. (Sme Rodina – Boris Kollár 2020a, 3)

Against this bloc of “ordinary people” held together by the unifying metaphor of a “family,” Kollár constructed an equivalential chain of “two sets of politicians” that had ruled for the “past 30 years”: one of which

> helped the top 10,000 people, oligarchs, financial groups and their "buddies" – those were the governments of Mečiar, Slota, Fico, and Danko. But only facing them were the governments of Dzurinda, Radičová, Mikloš, and Beblavý, who looked after the top 500,000 people in the state. […] Five million ordinary common people rightfully expected change at every election, but only further disappointment awaited them. (Sme Rodina – Boris Kollár 2020a, 3)

What thus emerged was an antagonistic frontier pitting the "ordinary common people" against all the "politicians" looking after a privileged few and merely alternating each other in government – with Kollár declaring in this context that "SME RODINA is the only guarantee for the five million ordinary common people that they will not experience another disappointment after the next elections, but that the people will finally feel how the state helps them" (Sme Rodina – Boris Kollár 2020a, 4).

Like OĽaNO at the same elections, Sme Rodina again presented a populist frontier of "people" vs. "politicians"; just like OĽaNO, however, Sme Rodina also showed a willingness to moderate its sweeping opposition to "politicians" by differentiating between the good and the bad, the honest and the corrupt. In Sme Rodina's campaign broadcast, Kollár even referred to his MPs as "politicians" who work for the "people," as opposed to the others working for "their oligarchs":

> In Slovakia, we need an end to politicians who only think of the people with their wallets, how to steal with their oligarchs. But if real change is going to come, politicians must come who think of the people first and want to help them. How do we recognize these politicians?

What followed was a series of montages of Sme Rodina MPs, with press headlines referring to their advocacy of social demands such as a "debt amnesty" and Kollár referring to them in his voice-over as follows:

> They are the ones who know the solutions and answers to your most burning questions. Such as extreme indebtedness. […] We can't engage in trifling wars and question [our] cultural identity and our traditions.

Kollár concluded by once again articulating this combination of populism and nativism with reference to "ordinary common people":

> These are our priorities and the only possible way to help ordinary common people and give them hope, hope and a future here in Slovakia. (Sme Rodina – Boris Kollár 2020b)

In this context, Sme Rodina's reference to pro-"people" politicians signaled an equivalential opening and, in a manner similar to OĽaNO's strategy, a

targeted concentration of the anti-"politicians" opposition onto the Smer-led pro-"oligarch" forces. In this manner, the two populist discourses of OĽaNO and Sme Rodina in the 2020 campaign set the stage for an unexpected equivalential bloc of forces that emerged to form the next government: OĽaNO (25% of the vote), Sme Rodina (8.2%), SaS (6.3%), and "For the People" (ZL; 5.8%). The two main forces in this coalition, OĽaNO and Sme Rodina, featured quite similar populist discourses of the "people" vs. "politicians," "oligarchs," and "standard political parties"; beyond their common populism, however, they also formed equivalential links with two notionally "standard parties," albeit vehemently anti-Smer ones – Sulík's SaS and Kiska's ZL (with Kiska, however, conspicuously staying out of the new cabinet amid a series of scandals) – in order to attain a constitutional majority of three-fifths in parliament, indicating a notable displacement in the populist discourses of both OĽaNO and Sme Rodina.

Between ethno-nationalist reductionism and populism: Kotleba – People's Party Our Slovakia (2016–present)

In the context of an expansion of populism in Slovak party politics since 2012, Marian Kotleba's People's Party Our Slovakia (ĽSNS) arguably presents a notable case of a more or less openly neo-fascist party taking up populism as a secondary element within a stridently ethno-nationalist discourse. Kotleba had experimented in the 2000s with forming a political party of his own, named the Slovak Brotherhood, whose members staged provocative public appearances dressed in the uniforms of the Hlinka Guard (the fascist paramilitary wing of the HSĽS from 1938 to 1945); after an attempt by the Interior Ministry to have the party dissolved, however, Kotleba decided to take over an existing political party and rebranded it as the ĽSNS in 2010. In a stunning upset, Kotleba won the elections for governor of Banská Bystrica Region in 2013 for the ĽSNS, defeating the Smer incumbent in the second round on a much-reduced turnout after the latter had come just 0.5 percentage points short of an outright majority in the first round. As governor, Kotleba attracted nationwide media attention for his openly nepotistic appointment practices and the use of private security guards at public appearances; the party remained marginal at the national level, however, until it defied pre-election polls to enter parliament with 8% of the vote in the 2016 elections. While Kotleba lost his 2017 re-election bid in Banská Bystrica Region by a landslide, he received over 10% of the vote in the first round of the 2019 presidential elections, with the ĽSNS itself frequently polling in double-digit territory throughout the legislative term. (The party changed its official name to Kotleba – ĽSNS in 2015 and then to Kotlebists – ĽSNS in 2019 in response to a new law barring political party names from featuring leaders' names.)

The distinguishing feature of the ĽSNS is a strongly nationalist and ethno-reductionist discourse centered on an ethnically defined Slovak "nation," coupled with the familiar populist theme of opposition to corrupt "politicians." This joint articulation of ethno-nationalism and populism can be seen in the party's two oft-recurring slogans, "For God and for nation" (reminiscent of the interwar HSĽS) and "With courage against the system." It is worth noting here that "the system," in the wider context of the ĽSNS discourse, is constructed not only as a power bloc of "politicians" who "pilfer the state," but also in terms of the heavily ethnicized threat of "Gypsy terrorists" and "parasites" supposedly being condoned by the state. In its ten-point program for the 2016 elections, the ĽSNS introduced itself as a "legal political party [...] trying to prevent the further pilfering of Slovakia by politicians and parasites" – pointing to the dual constitutive outside of "politicians" and "parasites" (Kotleba – Ľudová strana naše Slovensko 2016, 1). The program went on to construct, on the one hand, a power bloc of "criminals from the government [who] enjoy unseen luxury" in contrariety to the "falling standard of living of decent people – employees, self-employed people as well as small and medium entrepreneurs"; on the other hand, it also interpellated these "decent people" in opposition to the "daily theft, rape, and murder by Gipsy extremists" who "get everything for free – homes, social benefits, and allowances" (Kotleba – Ľudová strana naše Slovensko 2016, 1–2). What the "politicians" and "Gypsy extremists" have in common, in other words, is that they are all "parasites" as opposed to the "decent people" – pointing to an intimate equivalential link between the populist opposition to "politicians" abusing their power and an ethnic Othering of "Gypsies" as fundamentally criminal and non-working elements within society. It is worth emphasizing that this discursive construction draws on elements that have long been mainstreamed into the party system by others – from Smer's targeted problematizing of the "Roma population" early on to the widespread anti-"politicians" populism – and are not, on their own, new or distinctive to the ĽSNS. What is new and distinctive is the stridently ethnicized thrust that the categories of "decent people" and "parasites" take on via the equivalential chain "Gypsy extremists" ≡ "parasites" ≡ "politicians"; it is in this light that the ĽSNS's slogan of opposing "the system" can be seen to have both an ethno-nationalist and a populist character. Indeed, Kotleba contested the 2019 presidential elections with the ubiquitous billboard slogan "Finally a Slovak president" – suggesting that the "system" of the last 30 years was, more than anything, a fundamentally foreign one, contrary to Mečiar's inaugural promise of national sovereignty as well as all the other nationalist discourses that have come and gone since then.

The ĽSNS thus presents a prototypical case of a reductionist construction of the "people" in terms of ethnic difference, in addition to the

populist gesture of interpellating the "people" equivalentially against a power bloc – a tension characteristic of the populist radical right and reminiscent of the earlier discourse of Jobbik in Hungary, albeit in the absence of clear phases of a primarily populist discourse as seen in Jobbik's election campaigns (see chapter 4). The "decent people" whom the ĽSNS claims to represent, in other words, are not only those who have been failed by the "politicians" who "pilfer the state," but also those who fulfill the positive criterion of being ethnically "Slovak." This slide of meaning between the equivalential "all" and the reduction onto ethnic difference can be seen in the party's promise to "offer work to all," while articulating this promise in contrariety to the "never-working Gypsy criminal" who is thus placed outside the scope of the "all" from the outset by virtue of an essentialized ethnic identity (Kotleba – Ľudová strana naše Slovensko 2016). It is worth emphasizing that this interplay of populism and reductionism is a question of degree: as seen in the previous section, Kollár's Sme Rodina also constructs the "family" of "all of us" in contrariety to both the power bloc "from the inside" (populism) and the foreign threat "from the outside" (nativism); yet Kollár's nativism, in calling for the protection of "the borders of our country and the people living in it," is not so much based on the essentialization of ethnic difference within the society. The reductionism of Kotleba's ĽSNS, by contrast, can be seen as one indication of a neofascist commitment to upholding an ethnicized notion of "people" and "nation" that circumscribes the populist logic of equivalentially constructing the "people" as an underdog subject defined, first and foremost, by collective opposition to a power bloc.

Conclusion and summary

This chapter began by tracing the development of a Slovak national imaginary and its condensation over one and a half centuries around the demand for the recognition of national difference within a multinational state, which Vladimír Mečiar and the HZDS took up after 1989 into what was initially a demand for a loose "confederation" of the Czech and Slovak Republics and then a full-fledged hegemony project of nation-building and national identity formation. Mečiar's project was characterized by a primarily nationalist discourse that alternated between the institutionalist claim of a government to enact demands such as "social security" and "national interests" on the one hand and moments of antagonistic division against political opponents (enacted in authoritarian fashion during the 1994–98 term in particular) on the other. The HZDS's discourse took on a primarily (centrist) populist character only in the context of the 2002 elections, in which the party,

coming off four years in opposition, constructed a "people's" or "popular" identity against power blocs of the past ("totalitarianism") and present ("government of Mikuláš Dzurinda"). In the same elections, however, the newcomer party Smer presented a (likewise centrist) counter-populist challenge to this more established discourse by articulating an equivalence between Mečiar and Dzurinda as well as between "left" and "right" as part and parcel of the same corrupt power bloc that has merely taken turns governing since '89. While Smer's initial emergence signaled a break in the post-1989 imaginary divided along pro- vs. anti- Mečiar lines, it was only after it abandoned centrist populism and embraced a "social-democratic" identity around a "left" vs. "right" frontier that Smer managed to redefine the terms of party competition around "social" and "national" demands against an increasingly fragmented right. In this context of near-continuous Smer-led government from 2006 to 2020, populism turned into a discursive resource for those declaring opposition to a Smer-led power bloc of "politicians" and its corruption and oligarchization tendencies, while, at the same time, equivalentially constructing the entire class of "politicians" since '89 as complicit in this corruption. The 2020 elections brought the two main populist formations from this period – OĽaNO and Sme Rodina – into government, both of which deployed a "people" vs. "politicians" frontier while also differentiating between good/honest and pro-"oligarch" politicians in the election context.

Table 6.1 summarizes the different types of populist discourse in terms of their constructions of the popular subject, with the conservative anti-party populism of OĽaNO and the nativist entrepreneur populism of Sme Rodina (in addition to the ĽSNS's mix of ethnonationalist reductionism and populism) belonging to this latter set of post-2002 populisms. While these discourses situate Fico and Smer at the forefront of the corrupt power bloc and, indeed, dislocate Smer's long-standing "social state" discourse with accusations of rampant corruption and oligarchization as well as targeted demands for greater social protections (e.g. Sme Rodina's "debt amnesty"), it can be seen that the pattern of equivalentially constructing all established post-1989 political forces as part of a systematically corrupt power bloc already begins with Smer's 2002 centrist populism. In this sense, the ultimately short-lived populism of the early Smer constitutes the major break in the post-1989 imaginary that reshuffles the terms in which political conflict is imagined and articulated. While Smer soon enough renounced its populism and embraced the "left" vs. "right" frontier that it had originally set out to displace, the later populist discourses of OĽaNO and Sme Rodina have maintained the radical opposition to a class of "politicians" through a set of performative practices that set these

Table 6.1 Summary of populist discourses in Slovakia

Party	*Type of discourse (time frame)*	*Construction of popular subject*
HZDS	Centrist populism (2002)	"liberal values" ≡ "Christian values" ≡ "people" (*l'udia*) ≡ "social security" ***vs.*** "totalitarianism" ≡ "extremism" ≡ "Dzurinda government" ≡ "right-left jumble" ≡ "corruption" ≡ "clientelism"
Smer	Centrist populism (1999–2002)	"Third Way" ≡ "new generation" ≡ "people" (*l'udia*) ≡ "order" ***vs.*** "left" ≡ "right" ≡ "disorder" ≡ "politicians" ≡ "Mečiar" ≡ "Dzurinda" ≡ "corruption" ≡ "privatization"
OĽaNO	Conservative anti-party populism (2012–present)	"people" (*l'udia*) ≡ "civil society" ≡ "referenda" ≡ "traditional values" ***vs.*** "parties" ≡ "politicians" ≡ "lobby groups" ≡ "oligarchs" ≡ "Fico's friends" ≡ "stealing"
Sme Rodina	Nativist entrepreneur populism (2016–present)	"people" (*l'udia*) ≡ "family" ≡ "entrepreneur(s)" ≡ "debt amnesty" ***vs.*** "Muslim invasion" ≡ "politicians" ≡ "financial groups and oligarchs"

formations apart from "standard parties," from OĽaNO's staging of disruptive actions and non-party structure of four founding members to Sme Rodina's entrepreneur populism (with both formations referring to themselves as "movements").

Finally, Table 6.2 summarizes the source material used for the analysis of each populist discourse. The selection of source material reflects differences in the performativity of each discourse, from Smer's aggressive publicity campaign in 2002 to OĽaNO's recognizable strategy of staging disruptive actions in institutional settings as well as Kollár's preferred format of regularly uploading short video messages on social media. In the case of the HZDS, the analysis takes into account Mečiar's frequent (not always peaceful) media appearances as well as more institutionalized forms of discursive practice such as the government's programmatic declaration for the 1994–98 term or the 2000 congress resolution that marked the HZDS's "people's party" turn. For all four populist discourses given systematic treatment in this chapter, therefore, the analysis covers a broad spectrum of programmatic and campaign material as well as distinctive forms of discursive practice particular to the party or movement in question.

Table 6.2 Summary of source material used

Party	*Source (year)*
HZDS	Interviews with Vladimír Mečiar (1990, 1992, 1992)
	Parliamentary election campaign pamphlet (1992)
	Parliamentary election program (1994)
	Programmatic declaration of the government (1994)
	Parliamentary election program (1998)
	Party congress declaration (2000)
	Parliamentary election program (2002)
	Parliamentary election campaign billboard (2002)
Smer	Founding declaration (1999)
	Parliamentary election program (2002)
	Parliamentary election campaign billboards (2002, 2002)
	Parliamentary election campaign broadcasts (2002, 2002, 2002)
	Parliamentary election program (2006)
	Parliamentary election campaign broadcast (2010)
	Parliamentary election program (2012)
	Parliamentary election campaign billboard (2012)
	Parliamentary election campaign broadcast (2016)
OĽaNO	Press conference by Igor Matovič in front of parliament (2012)
	Parliamentary election program (2012)
	Parliamentary election campaign billboard (2012)
	Pre-election interview with Igor Matovič (2012)
	Press conferences in parliament (2014, 2015)
	Protest action outside Smer party congress in Bratislava (2015)
	Parliament speech by Igor Matovič (2015)
	Parliamentary election program (2016)
	Parliamentary election campaign broadcast (2016)
	Press conference by Igor Matovič in parliament (2018)
	Parliamentary election program (2020)
	Parliamentary election campaign broadcast (2020)
Sme Rodina	"About us" section on website (2016)
	Programmatic declaration (2016)
	Parliamentary election program (2016)
	Parliamentary election campaign billboards (2016, 2016)
	Pre-election interview with Boris Kollár (2016)
	Video message on Facebook by Boris Kollár (2017)
	Parliamentary election program (2020)
	Parliamentary election campaign broadcast (2020)

Notes

1 In the most infamous incident, Mečiar threatened a TV moderator with the words: "You ask me that one more time, I'll fuck you so you don't remember." The quote was posted on top of HZDS billboards by anti-Mečiar activists during the election campaign, pointing to its dislocatory effects *vis-à-vis* the party's attempts at a much more civil self-presentation.

2 It is worth noting that the HZDS deployed the billboard slogan "Say the truth, provide work, create order" – pointing to an attempt to incorporate the central demand for "order" articulated by Smer since 1999.

3 While Fico often referred to Tony Blair's New Labour as an inspiration, therefore, his particular construction of the "Third Way" had a different accent and indeed sharply criticized privatization policies – albeit in terms of opposing "corruption" and "stealing" rather than, say, rejecting neo-liberalism and big business.
4 This frontier would undergo a notable displacement after the 2016 elections when Smer, having suffered heavy losses, incorporated the liberal Sieť and the Hungarian party Most-Híd into the ruling bloc in addition to the SNS. The persistence of the "social" and "national" vs. liberal and Christian-democratic divide can be seen, however, in the precarious (and dislocation-ridden) nature of this governing arrangement, including the breakup of Sieť due to strong internal opposition to the coalition with Smer as well as the formation of another Hungarian party, the Hungarian Forum (MF), as an explicitly anti-Smer alternative that formed an alliance with the SMK for the 2020 elections.
5 Smer proposed eliminating Slovak citizenship for anyone applying for citizenship of another country – thus targeting members of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia who had become eligible to apply for Hungarian citizenship under the new Hungarian law. Smer's bill passed in parliament thanks to enough coalition MPs either voting in favor or abstaining.

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7 Conclusions: discourse, hegemony, and populism after ’89

A recurring theme throughout the foregoing analyses is that populism always emerges as a force putting in question established orders and, in some cases, inaugurates breaks in the established post-1989 imaginary. It is not only that populist discourses construct an opposition between a popular underdog and a power bloc, as is the case by definition and as discussed on a conceptual level in chapters 1 and 2; a common feature of many of the populist discourses analyzed here is that they radically reshuffle the discursive terrain of what it means to be a society after 1989/90. If, starting in the 1990s, party discourses had clustered around divisions in the post-1989 imaginary – “Hungarianhood” vs. Hungary”; commitment to the legacy of “Solidarity” vs. opposition to the forces of “liberalism”; support for vs. opposition to Mečiar’s nation-building project – populist discourses emerge to proclaim that “the parties of the last 24 years” are equally corrupt and responsible for the nation’s “colonial” status (Jobbik in 2014); that part of the “Solidarity camp” had been in league with the liberal and post-communist “networks” all along (PiS in 2006); or that “just as they stole under Mečiar, so they steal under Dzurinda” (Smer in 2002). In the Czech Republic, where the notion of “post-November” transformation had found hegemonic stabilization in a differential framework of left/right competition, populists construct an opposition of the “people” vs. the “politicians” and “parties” of both “left” and “right” that have allegedly failed to fulfill the promises of November ’89. The question then becomes what patterns emerge across the four countries in terms of the classification of populist discourses and their interplay with hegemonic formations and imaginaries.

The following discussion proceeds by first presenting an aggregate overview of the empirical (which/when?) and interpretive (how?) findings for all four countries (Table 7.1), before delving into the aspect of critical contextualization by looking for patterns in the interplay of populist discourses with the post-1989 imaginaries as well as hegemonic stabilizations and partial fixations in the four countries. In the process, the discussion builds links to the area-specific comparative literature on populism and party politics, addressing issues such as the generational temporality of populism, the prevalence of “centrist” or “radical” populism, the role of “newness”

appeals and new party strategies, and the relationship between populism and democracy. A key pattern that emerges from this discussion is the concentrated emergence of *generational counter-hegemonic* populism in the context of "third-generation" (Pop-Eleches 2010) post-1989 election cycles, albeit with considerable variations in timing across the four countries and with Fidesz and PiS constituting two important exceptions that correspond to an *authoritarian hegemonic* type. What thus emerges is a periodized classification of the populist discourses in terms of discursive and hegemonic type alike. The discussion then circles back to the empirical and interpretive dimensions in light of these findings by identifying patterns in the emergence of different discursive combinations in conjunction with hegemonic or counter-hegemonic logics.

Patterns of populism: hegemonic and counter-hegemonic, centrist, conservative, liberal, nationalist, nativist, social

Table 7.1 presents a chronological overview of the parties, time frames, and discursive combinations in which populism emerges in the V4 countries since '89, as analyzed in the previous four chapters, including those discourses in which populism constitutes a secondary feature (in italics). The table thus gives an aggregate summary of the empirical (which/when?) and interpretive (how?) findings for all four countries, as presented for each country in tabular form at the end of chapters 3–6 (in addition to the discourses with populism as a secondary feature that were discussed in the analysis and have been included here).

This overview already indicates that populism emerges early on after 1989 and remains a recurring phenomenon in various discursive combinations in all four Visegrád countries. In order to take stock of the developments across the 30 years, however, it is first necessary to revisit the context of discourse and hegemony in which the story of populism is embedded. If Table 7.1 provides initial answers to the empirical and interpretive dimensions of inquiry, a more detailed account is needed as a bridge to the aspect of critical contextualization.

Populism as hegemonic and counter-hegemonic logic: from the first to the fourth generation

In each V4 country, the imagined break of 1989/90 marks the founding moment of a post-1989 imaginary: a structuring horizon that orders reality into a "before" and "after," a temporal marker for situating any given moment in time in relation to it. This imagined break, in turn, has different names in the different countries: "November 1989," "the system change," "the victory of Solidarity." The forces forming the first post-communist governments articulate this imagined break in terms of a partial fixation of meaning, with numerous similarities across the four countries: '89 as

Table 7.1 Summary of populist discourses in the Visegrád Four

Time frame (country)	*Party*	*Discursive type*
1990–92 (CZ)	Republicans (SPR-RSČ)	Anti-communist nationalist populism
1991–2002 (SK)	*HZDS*	*Populist nationalism*
1993, 1997–2000 (PL)	Union of Labor (UP)	Anti-liberal left-wing populism
1993–2001 (PL)	*Samoobrona (SRP)*	*Populist nationalism*
1994–2002 (HU)	*MIÉP*	*Populist nationalism*
1997, 2002–04 (HU)	*Fidesz*	*Populist nationalism*
1999–2002 (SK)	Smer	Centrist populism
2001–05 (PL)	Samoobrona (SRP)	Anti-liberal nationalist and social populism
2001–07 (PL)	Law and Justice (PiS)	Anti-liberal nationalist populism
2002 (SK)	HZDS	Centrist populism
2003–present (HU)	*Jobbik*	*Populist nationalism*
2006–09 (HU)	Fidesz	National-conservative social populism
2007–14, 2019 (PL)	Law and Justice (PiS)	Anti-liberal nationalist and social populism
2010 (CZ)	Public Affairs (VV)	Centrist populism
2010, 2014, 2017–18 (HU)	Jobbik	Nationalist populism
2010–11 (PL)	Palikot's Movement (RP)	Anti-clerical liberal populism
2011–13 (CZ)	ANO	Centrist entrepreneur populism
2012–present (SK)	OĽaNO	Conservative anti-party populism
2013 (CZ)	Dawn	Neo-liberal nativist populism
2013, 2017 (CZ)	Czech Pirate Party	Liberal populism
2014–present (CZ)	ANO	Centrist populism of "hard work" in power
2014–18 (HU)	*Fidesz*	*Illiberal populist nationalism in power*
2015 (PL)	Kukiz'15	Nationalist anti-party populism
2016–present (SK)	Sme Rodina	Nativist entrepreneur populism
2016–present (SK)	*ĽSNS*	*Populist nationalism*
2017 (CZ)	SPD	Neo-conservative nativist populism
2018 (HU)	Dialogue-MSZP	Left-wing populism

inaugurating a movement away from a "totalitarian" past and toward some form of "democracy," "market economy," "Europe," and, not least, a government finally on the side of the "people" after 40+ years of dictatorship – corresponding to an institutionalist (and distinctly non-populist) construction of the people/power relation. This post-1989 imaginary, in

turn, crystallizes in the discursive terrain of party competition in different ways: in the Czech Republic, a hegemonic formation emerges whereby competing party discourses articulate largely differential and non-antagonistic variations on the founding promises of "post-November" order; in contrast, party politics in Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia is arguably characterized by the lack of such hegemonic stabilization and the emergence of deeply divided imaginaries whereby party discourses tend to cluster around opposing constructions of post-1989 reality as the realization of ethno-national redemption for the community of "Hungarianhood" vs. the state of "Hungary," the continuation of the legacy of "Solidarity" vs. opposition to the forces of "liberalism," or support for vs. opposition to Vladimír Mečiar's nation-building project. Against this background, the question is how populist discourses interact with the established terrain of post-1989 imaginaries and hegemonic stabilizations in the four countries. Populism, understood as a political logic, can conceivably come in a hegemonic or counter-hegemonic guise as well as different variations thereof – whether as dislocating moments of existing hegemonic constellations and/or as instituting moments for new ones.

In the 1990s, populism in the V4 countries initially emerges in one of three main guises: 1) as part of challenger discourses fundamentally questioning the authenticity of the break with the old order (SPR-RSČ in the Czech Republic, MIÉP in Hungary); 2) as part of hegemony projects articulating the imagined break of 1989/90 in ethno-nationalist terms (Fidesz in Hungary, HZDS in Slovakia); or, more rarely, 3) as part of challenger discourses seeking to displace the main divide within the post-1989 imaginary by equivalentially constructing forces on both sides of this divide as part of one and the same power bloc (UP in Poland). Populism in this initial phase, in other words, tends to be concentrated in discourses that either 1) situate themselves outside the post-1989 imaginary, 2) situate themselves on the ethno-nationalist side of the main divide within the post-1989 imaginary, or 3) try to displace the main divide within the post-1989 imaginary in populist terms. The first cluster is exemplified by the Czech Republicans' construction of a power bloc of "communists and their cooperators" who allegedly staged the events of November 1989 from above in order to remain in power under a different guise; the MIÉP in Hungary, while similarly claiming that the "nomenklatura" has remained in power, also inscribes itself within the horizon of the "system change" by radicalizing the promise of ethno-national redemption already present in Prime Minister József Antall's interpellation of a community of "15 million Hungarians." The MIÉP's populist nationalism thus straddles the first and the second clusters: whereas the former claims that 1989/90 was a non-event and a sham, the latter claims to carry through the "true" promises of 1989/90 – by taking up, in the Hungarian context, the cause of national redemption for an ethnically defined national community. Fidesz (post-1994) and the HZDS firmly situate themselves within this second cluster, with populism taking on the

function of a secondary element within a primarily nationalist discourse pitting a national subject against "foreign" powers and/or a "foreign"-minded domestic "elite." The third cluster, finally, consists of the Polish UP, which situates itself neither along the main divide within the post-1989 imaginary nor outside the latter altogether, but rather seeks to displace this divide in the populist terms of "ordinary people" vs. a power bloc of "elites" and "liberals" straddling the post-"Solidarity" vs. anti-"liberalism" divide.[1]

It is this third cluster that, although rare in the 1990s, prefigures a widespread pattern that establishes itself from the turn of the millennium onwards: namely, the concentrated emergence of post-2000 populisms that displace the terms of party competition onto a divide pitting the "people" against a power bloc of forces that have merely taken turns in power since '89. The entire post-2010 spectrum of populisms in the Czech Republic (VV, ANO, Dawn/SPD, Pirates), the nationalist populism in Jobbik's election campaigns in Hungary, all of the non-PiS populisms in Poland after 2000 (SRP, RP, Kukiz'15), and all of the non-HZDS populisms in Slovakia (Smer, OĽaNO, Sme Rodina, and the primarily nationalist ĽSNS) fit this mold. As much as these discourses vary in their constructions of the popular subject, what they have in common is the notion that a class of "politicians," "parties," or "political dinosaurs" has remained continuously in power and is ultimately in league with each other – in spite of the ostensible divisions among them – against the wider "people." As such, all of these discourses rely on a self-positioning as newcomers and outsiders in contrariety to a power bloc of established forces collectively compromised by having been in power for too long. These populist discourses thus broadly follow a *generational counter-hegemonic* logic in claiming not only that the established terms of party competition are a sham (and that the real divide is people vs. power), but also that a "change of generation" and the entry of "new people" into politics is needed in order to sweep away the old power bloc and various associated ills such as corruption and mismanagement of the state.

In this vein, Pop-Eleches' (2010) distinction between three "generations" of post-communist electoral politics provides a useful point of reference for a periodized classification of populist discourses in the V4 countries. If the post-communist founding elections of 1989/90 are won by broad anti-regime coalitions (i.e. OF in the Czech Republic, MDF in Hungary, Solidarity in Poland, VPN in Slovakia), "second-generation elections," following Pop-Eleches (2010, 234), take place in contexts in which party systems have become "more differentiated" and generally result in a recognizable party bloc forming the government (i.e. ODS-led coalition after the 1992 Czech elections, MSZP-SZDSZ after the 1994 Hungarian elections, UD-led coalition after the 1991 Polish elections, HZDS after the 1992 Slovak elections). "Third-generation elections," on the other hand, take place after two competing party blocs have already alternated in government since the fall of state socialism (i.e. the 2002 Czech and Slovak elections, the 1998 Hungarian

elections, the 1997 Polish elections), thus generating a context of heightened "political opportunities for unorthodox parties" that now position themselves as alternatives to the entire spectrum of established post-'89 forces that have had a chance at governing (Pop-Eleches 2010, 256). What has been identified above as generational counter-hegemonic populism in the V4 countries follows this specifically "third-generation" logic of displacing the established terms of post-1989 party competition with the allegation that the established "politicians," "parties," or "political dinosaurs" of different stripes are ultimately part of the same, equally corrupt power bloc that has merely taken turns in power. In contrast, the anti-"November" populism of the SPR-RSČ corresponds to a distinctly "first-generation" logic of ascribing a fundamental continuity between the OF-led government and its immediate Communist predecessor and, indeed, articulating the demand for immediate early elections as the only means of bringing about a true break with the old regime. The other instances of populism in the 1990s – MIÉP and Fidesz in Hungary, UP in Poland, HZDS in Slovakia – point to a "second-generation" dynamic whereby all of these parties, in some way or another, try to radicalize or incorporate the founding promises of inaugural post-'89 governments (MDF in Hungary, Solidarity in Poland, VPN in Slovakia), while also tracing their own roots back to these first-generation anti-regime movements and, indeed, laying claim to the true legacy of the latter without articulating the people vs. power opposition in the generational counter-hegemonic terms of new, untainted outsiders vs. equally corrupt established forces.

The multiplication of generational counter-hegemonic populisms in the V4 countries from 2000 onwards, therefore, broadly corresponds to a shift from a second- to a third-generation logic of frontier displacement, albeit with considerable variation in the specific timing across countries. Only in Slovakia does the first third-generation election see the rise of generational counter-hegemonic populism (Smer in 2002); in the other V4 countries, the latter only comes with the second third-generation election of 2001 (SRP in Poland) or, after a considerable delay, with the 2010 elections (VV in the Czech Republic, Jobbik in Hungary). In both the Czech Republic and Hungary, it takes large-scale dislocations between the 2006 and 2010 elections for an electorally relevant generational populist discourse to emerge, whereas in Poland, the third-generation character of the 2001 elections is arguably magnified by the spectacular disintegration of the AWS – the first and only attempt at a unified post-Solidarity bloc – toward the end of its term in government. Indeed, the SRP makes its breakthrough in 2001 with a generational populist discourse constructing the entire spectrum of post-"Solidarity" and anti-"liberal" forces as responsible for corruption and the "selling off" of the nation to "foreign capital." In each country, the emergence of generational counter-hegemonic populism can thus be situated in the context of specific dislocations: from the erosion of "post-November" hegemonic stability (Czech Republic, 2006/10) or "the Őszöd speech" (Hungary, 2006) to the implosion of the post-Solidarity coalition (Poland,

2000/01) or a Dzurinda government held to be equally corrupt and infighting-ridden as Mečiar's (Slovakia, 1998/2002).[2]

Gyárfášová (2018) has extended the concept of "third-generation elections" for the Slovak case, situating OĽaNO, Sme Rodina, and ĽSNS as "fourth-generation" phenomena in a context in which a third (Smer-led) bloc since '89 has had an extended run in government (2006–10, 2012–20). From this perspective, the first fourth-generation election in Slovakia takes place in 2010 with an outgoing Smer-led government; indeed, it is in the 2010 elections that OĽaNO's founders make their first appearance as part of a joint candidacy with SaS, before entering parliament as an independent force in 2012. It is likewise the case, as chapter 6 has shown, that the discourses of OĽaNO, Sme Rodina, and ĽSNS take up specific dislocations in the "social state" discourse of Smer, from allegations of rampant corruption and oligarchization to social issues such as "debt amnesty," while constructing in various ways a Smer-led power bloc of post-1989 "politicians" and thus situating Smer as the representative of a corrupt oligarchy that it itself once opposed. In a similar vein, the concept of a fourth generation can be applied to the populist discourses of Palikot's Movement (2010–11) and Kukiz'15 (2015) in Poland, both of which emerge in a context in which a third (PiS-led) bloc has already governed (2005–07) and, in the process, reshuffled the terms of party competition into a "solidaristic" vs. "liberal" or PiS vs. PO bipolarity, which the populisms of RP and Kukiz'15 alike seek to displace as part of their opposition to the entire post-'89 class of "politicians" or "the same elites."

In this context, Fidesz in Hungary and PiS in Poland constitute two important exceptions to the trend toward generational counter-hegemonic populism in the V4 countries after 2000. Up to 2004, Fidesz's populist nationalism constitutes a second-generation phenomenon that seeks to co-opt the ethno-national imaginary of the "system change" from the MDF, interpellating the "homeland" against a "foreign"-like MSZP-SZDSZ government – a discourse that culminates with the 2004 referendum on granting citizenship to ethnic Hungarians abroad. If Fidesz re-invents itself from a liberal party to a nationalist one after 1994, it arguably re-invents itself a second time with its social-populist turn in the mid-2000s: indeed, it is during this phase (2006–09) that Viktor Orbán, for the first time, interpellates "the people" (against "the aristocracy") as a category above and beyond "the parties" and transcending "left" vs. "right" divisions – in contrast to his earlier construction of "the homeland" (against a "foreign"-like government) as the exclusive terrain of "our parties" in the 2002 post-election context. In this sense, Fidesz's 2006–09 populism, while not following a generational logic of new, untainted outsiders vs. equally corrupt establishment, can be understood as a third-generation phenomenon that re-institutes the divided post-1989 imaginary of "Hungarianhood" vs. "Hungary" in terms of a new frontier construction ("new majority" vs. "new aristocracy"). In the process, Fidesz's social populism not only dislocates the

temporary partial fixation brought about by the MSZP's "Welfare System Change" agenda (2002–06), but also serves as an instituting moment for a hegemonic reordering that follows with the "System of National Cooperation" (NER) after the 2010 landslide. The NER as a hegemonic formation effectively enshrines the ethno-national imaginary of the "system change" into a new institutional-legal framework – capped by a new constitution and nationality law – around Fidesz's exclusive claim to represent the "nation"; instead of a displacement of the main divide within the post-1989 imaginary, therefore, Hungarian party politics is characterized by hegemonic stabilization in favor of one side of the post-1989 divide over the other, not least by means of an unprecedented authoritarian expansion of ruling-party control over formally independent institutions. In this context, Fidesz's earlier social populism recedes to the background as an instituting horizon, with moments of populism re-emerging after 2010 as a secondary feature in a ruling-party discourse (2014–18) that re-defines the terrain of the "nation" against ever newer constitutive outsides, including foreign powers ("Brussels," "Soros") and their alleged domestic agents ("foreign"-backed NGOs).

PiS, in contrast to Fidesz, emerges only in 2001 as a newcomer party featuring a populist discourse from its very founding, albeit not a generational one: the Kaczyński brothers had long been prominent figures in various post-Solidarity formations and, indeed, positively invoked their backgrounds in the Solidarity union and "the Solidarity camp." Nonetheless, PiS's discourse inaugurates a break in the post-1989 imaginary during the party's first term in government (2005–07) by constructing an unholy alliance between the "*układ*" and "liberal" traitors of "the Solidarity camp," thus displacing the post-"Solidarity" vs. anti-"liberalism" divide that had crystallized in the 1990s and offering an anti-liberal populist explanation for the alleged failure of all previous governments of "the Solidarity camp" to root out the "*układ*" protecting its privileges. PiS's project of frontier displacement continues in opposition (2007–14) with the articulation of a "solidaristic Poland" vs. "liberal Poland" divide in the social-populist terms of the common good of all vs. entrenched structures of privilege. PiS's populism, though not generational, thus corresponds to a third-generation dynamic of establishing a new division in the post-1989 discursive terrain and displacing the earlier post-"Solidarity" vs. anti-"liberalism" divide within which its own (second-generation) predecessor formation, the Center Alliance (PC), had firmly situated itself. It is worth noting that PiS's third-generation populism thus also takes up the UP's and SRP's varying constructions of a power bloc of "elites" and "liberals" straddling the party spectrum; compared to the UP, however, PiS articulates its opposition to "liberalism" in an equivalentially much more wide-ranging manner in both cultural and economic terms, while the SRP largely abandons its populism under the PiS-led government and effectively allows PiS to monopolize the link between anti-liberalism and populism for itself (and, indeed, against the SRP in the context of the 2007 elections).

In contrast to the post-2000 trend toward various forms of generational counter-hegemonic populism, Fidesz and PiS draw on populism as part of projects of establishing *authoritarian hegemony*. The NER is founded on the authoritarian institutionalist notion that Fidesz, having previously positioned itself against the outgoing government in the social-populist (but not authoritarian) terms of "new majority" vs. "new aristocracy," can now proceed to occupy a "central field of power" and represent "the national interest […] in their naturalness," as Orbán put it in a 2009 speech, thus pointing to an exclusive and totalizing (but no longer populist) claim to the "nation." PiS's operation of displacing the established divide in the post-1989 imaginary by constructing an "*układ*"-"liberal" conspiracy goes hand in hand with an authoritarian logic of denying the legitimacy of the main parliamentary opposition and justifying the ruling party's attempts to remake the state in its own image. It is worth noting that populism is hardly present in PiS's post-2015 ruling discourse and only emerges in certain moments in Fidesz's post-2010 counterpart, while lurking in both cases in the background as an instituting horizon within which both parties' institutional practices find their implicit justification in the earlier antagonistic frontiers against an entrenched system of privileges that must be dismantled. When populism does re-emerge in the discourses of Fidesz (2014–18) and PiS (2019), it does so as a re-instituting moment that makes the antagonistic constitution of these hegemonic constellations explicit by (re-)defining the terrain of the "nation" against the likes of "Soros" or the system of "late post-communism" (and thereby also retroactively justifying the authoritarian expansion of ruling-party control over institutions). It is likewise important to note that the populism of Fidesz and PiS follows an authoritarian logic only in certain phases and specifically in close conjunction with nationalism and/or anti-liberalism (1997, 2002–04, 2014–18 for Fidesz; 2005–07, 2019 for PiS), while the authoritarianism of both parties is often articulated in largely non-populist nationalist or even institutionalist fashion (Orbán's "central field of power").

The authoritarian hegemony projects of Fidesz and PiS, in turn, inaugurate fourth-generation contexts of party competition in Hungary and Poland, in which other populist discourses constitute themselves in opposition to either the NER (Jobbik and Dialogue-MSZP in Hungary) or the PiS vs. PO bipolarity (RP and Kukiz'15 in Poland). The left-wing populism of Dialogue-MSZP, in particular, is notable for its distinctly non-generational logic: the allegation is precisely not that the forces that have governed since '89 are all the same – this cannot be, given how long the MSZP has itself been around and in power – but that a self-enriching and power-abusing "Fidesz elite" has established itself *since 2010*, the founding moment of the NER as a hegemonic reordering of the post-1989 space. In this context, it is also worth noting the shift (and de-radicalization) in Jobbik's nationalist populism, which went from constructing a power bloc of "politicians" in 2010 and "the parties of the past 24 years" ("Fidesz" ≡

"MSZP") in 2014 to emphasizing the opposition to a "Fidesz government" in the 2018 elections, indicating a shift in Jobbik's populism in this latter phase away from a generational counter-hegemonic logic and toward a specifically *anti-NER counter-hegemonic* one, in a similar vein to Dialogue-MSZP. As discussed in chapter 4, the ambivalent relation between the populisms of Dialogue-MSZP and Jobbik in the 2018 elections – both of which constructed a self-enriching and domineering Fidesz power bloc as the constitutive outside, yet articulated neither a clear contrariety nor an equivalence in relation to each other – points to the success of the NER in reproducing itself as a hegemonic formation without the emergence of a coherent anti-NER counter-hegemonic bloc. In Poland, the populist discourses of RP and Kukiz'15 likewise follow a fourth-generation dynamic of opposing both PiS and PO alike as part of "the same elites," but neither formation manages to reproduce itself as an independent electoral force beyond one legislative term.

Table 7.2 brings all these results together by grouping the populist discourses listed in Table 7.1 according to "generation" (from first to fourth) and classifying them in terms of hegemonic or counter-hegemonic ("c.-h." for short) logic. Where applicable, the table identifies which side of the divided post-1989 imaginary the discourse in question situates itself on (e.g. "Mečiarist post-'89" referring to the pro-Mečiar side of the post-1989 divide in Slovakia). By thus foregrounding the aspect of critical contextualization in relation to hegemonic processes, this second table complements the empirical and interpretive overview presented in Table 7.1.

As noted, populism in all four countries takes on an almost exclusively generational counter-hegemonic guise from third-generation elections onwards – with the exceptions of Fidesz and PiS as well as the post-2010 Jobbik and Dialogue-MSZP as fourth-generation oppositions to the hegemonic re-ordering under the NER in Hungary. A key overarching pattern is that in all four countries, it is populism that (co-)inaugurates the main break in the post-1989 imaginary – Czech Republic in 2010, Hungary in 2006/10, Poland in 2005–07, Slovakia in 2002 – with the difference being that the articulation of this break follows a generational counter-hegemonic logic in the Czech Republic and Slovakia and an authoritarian hegemonic logic in Hungary and Poland. In the Czech Republic, the anti-"dinosaur" populism of VV is the opening salvo of a post-2010 multiplication of populisms that caps the protracted breakdowns in "post-November" hegemonic stabilization since 2006. No new hegemonic stabilization, however, has emerged in place of the old one – not even with the rise of ANO's populism, given that ANO has only been able to govern in fairly volatile coalitions of convenience with the ČSSD, rather than as a cohesive hegemonic bloc, and has had to face robust competing populist and counter-populist challenges from SPD and the Pirates, respectively. In Hungary, the brief interlude of hegemonic partial fixation by the social-democratic institutionalism of the MSZP and its agenda of "Welfare System Change" (2002–06) breaks down

Table 7.2 Periodization of populist discourses in the Visegrád Four

Time frame (country)	*Party*	*Generation*	Hegemonic type
1990–92 (CZ)	Republicans (SPR-RSČ)	First	Anti-"November" c.-h.
1991–2002 (SK)	*HZDS*	*Second*	*Mečiarist post-'89*
1993, 1997–2000 (PL)	Union of Labor (UP)	Second	Counter-hegemonic
1993–2001 (PL)	*Samoobrona (SRP)*	*Second*	*Counter-hegemonic*
1994–2002 (HU)	*MIÉP*	*Second*	*Ethno-national post-'89*
1997, 2002–04 (HU)	*Fidesz*	*Second*	*Ethno-national post-'89*
2002 (SK)	HZDS	Second	Mečiarist post-'89
1999–2002 (SK)	Smer	Third	Generational c.-h.
2001–05 (PL)	Samoobrona (SRP)	Third	Generational c.-h.
2001–07 (PL)	Law and Justice (PiS)	Third	Counter-hegemonic
2003–present (HU)	*Jobbik*	*Third*	*Generational c.-h.*
2006–09 (HU)	Fidesz	Third	Counter-hegemonic
2007–14, 2019 (PL)	Law and Justice (PiS)	Third/fourth	Counter-hegemonic /Authorit. hegemonic
2010 (CZ)	Public Affairs (VV)	Third	Generational c.-h.
2010, 2014, 2017–18 (HU)	Jobbik	Third/fourth	Generational c.-h. /Anti-NER c.-h.
2011–13 (CZ)	ANO	Third	Generational c.-h.
2013 (CZ)	Dawn	Third	Generational c.-h.
2013, 2017 (CZ)	Czech Pirate Party	Third	Generational c.-h.
2014–present (CZ)	ANO	Third	Generational c.-h.
2017 (CZ)	SPD	Third	Generational c.-h.
2010–11 (PL)	Palikot's Movement (RP)	Fourth	Generational c.-h.
2012–present (SK)	OĽaNO	Fourth	Generational c.-h.
2014–18 (HU)	*Fidesz*	*Fourth*	*Authorit. hegemonic*
2015 (PL)	Kukiz'15	Fourth	Generational c.-h.
2016–present (SK)	Sme Rodina	Fourth	Generational c.-h.
2016–present (SK)	*ĽSNS*	*Fourth*	*Generational c.-h.*
2018 (HU)	Dialogue-MSZP	Fourth	Anti-NER c.-h.

following the Őszöd speech of 2006, with Fidesz taking up the dislocation in social-populist terms before pivoting toward the authoritarian institutionalist promise of a new era of one-party-led "national unity" with the 2010 landslide, while Jobbik adopts a stridently generational populist opposition to the "politicians" in this context and becomes a virtually co-constituent force behind the NER via Fidesz's differential co-optation of Jobbik's demands for a new constitutional order founded on ethnonationalist principles. In Poland and Slovakia, the post-1989 imaginary is deeply divided from the beginning and characterized by a lack of hegemonic

stabilization; even Mečiar's (partly populist) authoritarian hegemonic project of nation-building is repeatedly thwarted (1991, 1994, 1998) from reproducing its rule by a sufficiently cohesive anti-Mečiar bloc. In this context, PiS's anti-liberal populism of "solidaristic Poland" vs. "liberal Poland" from 2005 onwards and Smer's centrist populist opposition to "Dzurinda" ≡ "Mečiar" in the 2002 elections inaugurate breaks in the post-1989 imaginary that displace the established divides of post-"Solidarity" vs. anti-"liberalism" and pro- vs. anti-Mečiar in the two countries. While PiS's populism in its first term in government (2005–07) follows an authoritarian hegemonic logic of trying to root out institutionalized opposition, subsequent populism in Poland is mainly a feature of counter-hegemonic challenger discourses, including PiS in opposition (2007–14) as well as the fourth-generation populisms of RP and Kukiz'15. In Slovakia, Smer's subsequent turn toward a "left" vs. "right" logic, pitting a "social" and "national" bloc against fragmented liberal and Christian-democratic forces, brings about a hegemonic partial fixation in the terms of party competition from 2006 until the fallout from the Kuciak murder in 2018, with populism in this period being taken up exclusively by (fourth-generation) anti-Smer challenger discourses following a generational counter-hegemonic logic.

Centrist, conservative, liberal, nationalist, nativist, social populisms

It is now possible to bring together the empirical, interpretive, and critical findings to identify patterns in which specific types of populist discourse emerge at certain junctures and in conjunction with hegemonic or counter-hegemonic logics. *Centrist populism*, for instance, occurs in an almost exclusively generational counter-hegemonic guise (VV, ANO, Smer), with the exception of the short-lived centrist populism of the HZDS in the 2002 Slovak elections. The argument of generational centrist populists is that "left" and "right" are meaningless categories peddled by established forces that have merely taken turns in power since '89. The HZDS's centrist populism is the non-generational exception, inscribing itself in the established pro- vs. anti-Mečiar divide with the promise of successful government by a party that has already governed successfully – as opposed to the "right-left mishmash" government founded as a heterogeneous anti-Mečiar coalition. The foregoing analysis thus lends some credence to the observation of an ideologically diffuse "centrist populism" (Učeň 2007) in Central and Eastern Europe that becomes more prominent in the second decade of transition (Stanley 2017). Stanley (2017, 140) distinguishes here between two strands in the literature – the theories of "centrist" and "radical" populism – that view populism primarily as a reaction to "corrupt and incompetent leaders, rather than rejecting the politics of transition" (centrist populism) or, alternatively, as a "backlash against the liberal politics of post-communist transition and the elites responsible" (radical populism). Based on the foregoing analysis, it is worth emphasizing that the demand for

replacing corrupt elites who are "all the same" is hardly unique to centrist populism. Indeed, the centrist-populist discourses of VV, ANO, and Smer constitute only a small subset of the wider universe of generational counter-hegemonic populism, which includes various forms of *liberal populism* (Czech Pirates, Palikot's Movement), *conservative populism* (OĽaNO), *nativist populism* (Dawn/SPD, Sme Rodina), and *nationalist populism* (Jobbik, Kukiz'15, SRP). In the nationalist-populist discourses of Jobbik, Kukiz'15, and SRP, the rejection of corrupt, incompetent elites and the opposition to a liberal politics of transition are intimately linked. At the same time, the numerous examples of non-centrist generational counter-hegemonic populism indicate that many of these discourses do not seek out the "center" ground (neither in terms of self-identification nor the actual contents of their policy demands). Jobbik, for instance, is characterized by a radical ethno-nationalism that it maintains to varying extents (as seen especially clearly during the "migrant crisis") even as it successively de-radicalizes its populism under Vona's "people's party" strategy; among non-nationalist examples, Palikot's Movement – at least during its populist phase – outflanked the PO's economic and political liberalism with a much more pronounced anti-clericalism, civil libertarianism, and fiscal neo-liberalism.

In this vein, the instances of *conservative populism* (OĽaNO) and *liberal populism* (Czech Pirates, Palikot's Movement) are distinguishable from centrist populism insofar as their pronounced commitment to civil liberties or "traditional values" means that they do not necessarily stake out the center ground (in name and in content). As a general point, while all forms of generational counter-hegemonic populism specifically emphasize their claim to newness as outsiders representing the "people" or "citizens" against the entire class of "politicians" and/or "parties" that came before them, it is not necessarily the case that these are parties with "low ideological motivation," as Sikk (2012) defines his concept of "newness" as a common party strategy in Central and Eastern Europe (building on Lucardie's (2000) typology of new parties). To again give the two examples of liberal populism: Palikot's Movement, founded by an ex-PO MP, could very much be read as a project of reviving liberalism in anti-clerical populist terms in the wake of a string of anti-liberal populist discourses since the early 1990s (akin to Lucardie's "purifier party" type), while the Czech Pirate Party, as a member organization of Pirate Parties International, arguably fits the mold of Lucardie's ideologically pioneering "prophetic parties" with its cyber-liberal discourse of digital rights and freedoms. The three cases of generational centrist populism (VV, ANO, the early Smer) with their eclectic policy demand mixes tend to correspond more closely to Sikk's (2012, 467) characterization of "new parties with a broad set of policies similar to established parties yet without ideological motivation" – suggesting that Sikk's particular theory of newness, in the context of V4 populism, is more narrowly applicable to the subset of centrist populism.

The analysis in the preceding chapters also brings to light numerous populist discourses that performatively enact the claim to newness in organizationally distinctive ways, such as *entrepreneur populism* (ANO, Sme Rodina) and *anti-party populism* (Kukiz'15, OĽaNO). Both types occur solely in generational counter-hegemonic form and go hand in hand with a sweeping populist rejection of the entire class of "politicians" and "parties" that came before them. Entrepreneur populism corresponds to a subset of the wider "business-firm party" type, which includes other entrepreneur-sponsored projects such as VV (Havlík and Hloušek 2014); the defining feature of entrepreneur populism is the claim that the identity of the businessman leader in contrariety to "politicians" is what puts the party or "movement" in question on the side of the "people." (This is not necessarily the case for all business-firm parties, some of which may be entrepreneur-sponsored without necessarily constructing a populist opposition with reference to the identity of the businessman leader.) After entering parliament, however, ANO dropped the emphasis on Babiš the "businessman" and sustained the "people" vs. "traditional politicians" frontier by other means (e.g. the nodal point "hard work"); Sme Rodina has largely maintained the reference to Kollár's "businessman" identity in its self-presentation, while narrowing down its rejection of "politicians" to "standard" or "dishonest" ones. Anti-party populism, in declaring opposition to "parties" and the party form as such, is predicated on developing alternative organizational formats, from OĽaNO's four-person membership to Kukiz'15's insistence on registering as an association and not as a party. Among all the cases of populism analyzed here, Kukiz'15 maintains the most radical demarcation from the party form – more so than the various self-styled "movements" that nonetheless accept formally registered party status, e.g. ANO, Dawn/SPD, Jobbik, OĽaNO, RP, Sme Rodina – something that it has not been able to square with its continued existence as an independent formation beyond one legislative term, however. It is also worth noting that of the numerous populist discourses declaring opposition to "politicians" as such (ANO, Czech Pirates, Jobbik, OĽaNO, Sme Rodina), only OĽaNO maintained the unqualified signifier "politicians" as constitutive outside even after entering parliament (at least until 2020), sustained not least by its repertoire of staging disruptive actions in institutional settings.

Another recurring type of populist discourse in the V4 countries is *nationalist populism*, which includes both cases of authoritarian hegemonic populism identified in the previous section (Fidesz, PiS). The specific combination of nationalism and populism (and often also anti-liberalism) is intimately linked to the authoritarianism of both Fidesz and PiS – from the claim that the one true "homeland" cannot be in opposition against a "foreign"-like government to the notion that "the nation" is under existential threat from a conspiracy of "Soros" and his alleged network of domestic agents. As a general point, even for Hungary and Poland as oft-cited cases of "democratic backsliding," it cannot be said that populism

necessarily leads to some form of authoritarianism in power, both theoretically and empirically speaking (contrary to the likes of Halmai 2019; Müller 2017; Sadurski 2019; see also chapter 1). The relationship between populism and constitutional democracy hinges on how "the people" as the constituent subject of democracy is constructed (Blokker 2019; Möller 2017); a discourse that reifies "the people" in nationalist terms as a pre-political community (in addition to pitting it in populist fashion against an "elite") is suggestive of a heightened danger of an authoritarianism that claims that there is only one legitimate way of representing "the people." Indeed, based on the analysis in chapters 4 and 5, the populism of Fidesz and PiS takes on an authoritarian character specifically in close conjunction with nationalism and/or anti-liberalism (1997, 2002–04, 2014–18 for Fidesz; 2005–07, 2019 for PiS), while the authoritarianism of both parties often takes on largely non-populist nationalist or even institutionalist expression (Orbán's "central field of power"). Populism, therefore, is characterized by a double "ambivalence" (Rovira Kaltwasser 2012) or "undecidability" (Arditi 2005) in relation to democracy: not only as a political logic that can take on both democratic and authoritarian expression, but also as one of multiple possible logics that authoritarian claims can take on within democracy. Among discourses that deploy some form of *populism in power* (ANO, Fidesz, PiS), therefore, it is possible to draw Smilov's and Krastev's (2008, 9) "hard"-"soft" distinction between forms of populism that undermine the institutions of liberal democracy and those that do not.[3] The analysis presented here, however, presents a more nuanced picture by distinguishing between populist and largely non-populist as well as authoritarian and non-authoritarian phases for Fidesz and PiS, while also identifying a narrower set of populist party discourses – with Smer hardly featuring any populism after 2002 (see chapter 6) and PiS being the only party in the PiS-SRP-LRP coalition of 2006–07 that actually features a populist discourse in government (see chapter 5).

Finally, it is worth noting the numerous intersections between nationalist and *social populism*. Social populism entails the construction of a socio-economically defined popular underdog against a socio-economically defined "elite" or "oligarchy," coupled with demands for an expansive welfare state in the name of the popular underdog. This social-welfarist dimension is a constitutive feature of *left-wing populism*, as seen in the cases of UP and Dialogue-MSZP, but can also be observed to different extents with nationalist populism. A common theme running through all of the nationalism-populism combinations since the 1990s is the opposition to the "selling off of national property," articulated in the nationalist terms of "national" vs. "foreign," albeit with considerable variation between the strongly social-welfarist discourses of the SRP, HZDS, and later also PiS, Jobbik, or ĽSNS on the one hand and the more limited economic nationalism of the SPR-RSČ, MIÉP, and Fidesz on the other, which sing the praises of entrepreneurship and call for large-scale cuts to state bureaucracy

and taxes while featuring little in the way of a social-welfarist dimension beyond opposition to "austerity" and the "selling off of national property." Notably, Fidesz and PiS take social-populist turns in the mid- to late-2000s with an increased emphasis on the defense of public services and opposition to entrenched structures of privilege, whereas in their subsequent projects of authoritarian hegemony in government, PiS's emphasis on welfare-state expansion stands in contrast to Fidesz's more eclectic mix of welfare retrenchment and targeted social protectionism in specific areas (Bohle and Greskovits 2019). It is not only true, therefore, that there has never been an automatic link between neo-liberalism and right-wing populism, especially in Central and Eastern Europe (Mudde 2007); it is also worth noting that neo-liberalism tends to be more pronounced in other populist permutations than with nationalism – such as the centrist populism of VV, the liberal populism of RP, or the openly neo-liberal nativist populism of Dawn. In the numerous cases of nationalism and populism, by contrast – all of which are centered on the interpellation of an ethnically, historically, and/or morally grounded "nation" in contrariety to "foreign" Others, rather than (or going beyond) the nativist opposition to immigration[4] – the opposition of "national" vs. "foreign" typically extends onto a rejection of powerful domestic ("elite") and/or "foreign" forces allegedly benefitting from post-1989 economic processes, which tends to circumscribe the extent of neo-liberalism in these discourses.

Final remarks and outlook

The temporal scope of this book comes to an end with the February 2020 parliamentary elections in Slovakia, which took place shortly before most of Europe – with the V4 countries at the forefront – went into lockdown in response to the spread of COVID-19. The far-reaching impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on politics, including populism, remains to be seen and goes well beyond the scope of this work. It has been pointed out that there is neither a single "populist response" to the pandemic nor a global dying off of populism in the context of the pandemic (Katsambekis and Stavrakakis 2020); if one looks back at the last 30 years of party politics in the V4 countries – a region that has come to be intimately associated with the rise of populism – there is all the less reason to believe that populism will simply disappear. Populism regularly emerges as a force challenging established post-1989 imaginaries and, in all four Visegrád countries, inaugurates the main breaks in the established terrain of what it means to be a society after '89. Even with parties or self-styled "movements" coming to power on the back of populist discourses – as has been the case in all four countries – populism continues to be deployed by those in opposition and in government alike, whether to decry a corrupt, self-serving ruling elite or to accuse hidden sources of power in state and society of preventing the government from enacting popular sovereignty. With the main parties of government in

all four countries at the time of writing having recently deployed some form of populist discourse, the key task for populism research will be to provide nuanced analyses of populism in and out of power as well as in combination with or against other -isms. Even a cursory glance at the current landscapes is indicative of the ongoing flux, from the early emergence of pre-election alliances in the Czech Republic and Hungary to open divisions within the PiS-led ruling bloc in Poland as well as the arguably first populist-led government in Slovakia. In Hungary in particular, the formation of the first broad anti-Fidesz alliance ranging from Jobbik to MSZP at the national level suggests a potentially major dislocation in the NER's hegemonic logic of reproducing Fidesz's majoritarian rule in the face of a differentially fragmented opposition; to what extent this alliance will maintain itself as a coherent counter-hegemonic bloc up to the 2022 elections and beyond will be the key question. Whatever further twists and turns the future may hold from here, analyses of populism that are sensitive to the discursive contexts of hegemonic struggles over the construction of social order will remain as necessary as ever.

Notes

1 Samoobrona (SRP) has been left out here due to its electoral marginality until 2001, but its discourse during this initial phase (1993–2001) arguably fits more closely the mold of populist nationalism (see chapter 5).

2 It is again worth emphasizing here that, while a post-foundational discourse analysis cannot offer a causal explanation for *why* a specifically populist discourse emerges (as opposed to other possible alternatives) or is (electorally) more successful than others at a given juncture (see also Nonhoff 2006, 16–17), it can provide what has been referred to shorthand as critical contextualization, showing *how* hegemonic formations and partial fixations unravel at certain junctures and how these dislocations are taken up in the populist discourses that do emerge. As Stavrakakis (2000; Stavrakakis et al. 2018) has pointed out, therefore, the identification of dislocations plays a key bridging function between the analysis of a particular discourse and its discursive context of emergence.

3 It is worth noting that all three cases of populism in power involve some form of conspiracist narrative of deeper-lying forms of power within and beyond the state; the key difference is one of degree (e.g. Babiš's accusation that a "mafia" is behind the *Čapí hnízdo* investigation vs. Orbán's construction of "Soros" as a ubiquitous and existential threat) and the extent to which this construction is enacted so as to delegitimize all forms of political opposition.

4 While nationalism and nativism often overlap, they are conceptually distinct – as seen in examples such as PiS or SRP in Poland, which are vehemently nationalist but generally not focused on nativist opposition to immigration, or Dawn in the Czech Republic, which specifically targets immigration as an issue without much of a deeper narrative of national identity. In some cases of overlap such as Fidesz and Jobbik in Hungary, the nativist rejection of (actual or would-be) immigration is inscribed within a more far-reaching nationalism in these parties' discourses.

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Index

Note: Page numbers followed by "n" indicate note section.

Action of Dissatisfied Citizens (ANO) 52, 83–90, 91, 93, 94–6, 97–99, 100–2, 280, 282–5
Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ) 116, 119, 121, 123–5, 128, 132–3, 275, 277
Alliance of the New Citizen (ANO) 244
antagonism 5, 18, 26–8, 36, 38–40, 43, 48n1, 57–8, 70–2, 104n7; antagonistic frontier 5–6, 26–30, 35–9, 42, 56, 65, 77, 85, 124, 137, 151, 154, 178, 186, 194–7, 207, 241, 248, 250, 260, 279
Antall, József 110–11, 117–20, 122–3, 274
anti-communism 41–2, 62–8, 70, 75, 120, 172–3, 188; *see also* populism, anti-communist
anti-liberalism 41–2, 138–9, 142–3, 164–5, 174–9, 181–2, 184–9, 191–201, 210, 278–9, 284–5; *see also* populism, anti-liberal
anti-populism 41–2, 75
anti-Semitism 120, 165–6, 212
authoritarianism 1, 22, 24–5, 30, 56–7, 126, 133–7, 142, 156, 168, 196, 202, 226, 233, 278–82, 284–6

Babiš, Andrej 1, 83–90, 94–6, 98–9, 100–2, 284
backsliding *see* democracy, democratic backsliding
Bárta, Vít 77–80, 82, 100
Bokros package 123, 127
Bugaj, Ryszard 174, 178, 180
business-firm party 1, 284

Čapí hnízdo affair 88–90, 98–99, 101

Center Alliance (PC) 173, 185, 188, 278
Central Anti-Corruption Bureau (CBA) 187, 189–90, 197, 204
Christian Democratic Movement (KDH) 228–30, 244, 246
Christian Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party (KDU-ČSL) 70, 76, 86; *see also* Czechoslovak People's Party (ČSL)
Civic Center Alliance (POC) 172–3, 188
Civic Democratic Party (ODS) 69–77, 80–2, 96, 98, 102, 275
Civic Forum (OF) 45, 59–63, 65, 67–70, 275–6
Civic Platform (PO) 185, 188, 191–5, 197, 199, 201–2, 205, 207, 209, 277, 279–80, 283
class politics 17–21, 26, 40, 54–8, 113, 166–7, 169–70, 172, 174
cleavages 16–24
communism 40–1, 56–8, 60, 63–8, 70–2, 113–4, 117, 172–3, 176, 188, 195, 199–200; *see also* anti-communism
Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM) 71–2, 75–6, 95–6
Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ) 52–3, 56–60, 63–8, 100, 226–7
constitution: of Czechoslovakia 57–8; of Hungary 116, 134–5, 137, 145, 147, 154; of Poland 211–2
Constitutional court: of the Czech Republic 76; of Hungary 134; of Poland 196, 202
contingency 5–6, 14–15, 18–24, 26–7, 30, 38, 43, 46–7
contrariety 6, 36, 38, 48
Csurka, István 119–21, 124, 140, 143

Czech Pirate Party 52, 96–102, 275, 280, 283–4
Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD) 70–6, 79–82, 86–7, 95, 98, 102, 280
Czechoslovak People's Party (ČSL) 55–56, 70

Dawn of Direct Democracy 52, 83, 90–3, 97, 100–2, 275, 283–4, 286
democracy 5, 9, 21–4, 28, 30, 37–8, 41, 54–5, 61–3, 70–1, 95, 100, 111, 118–19, 130–3, 136, 145, 168, 196, 200, 225, 228, 237, 285; democratic backsliding 1, 284; direct 81, 90, 95, 97; liberal 2–3, 37, 138, 233, 285
Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) 173–4, 177–8, 180–1, 184–6, 188, 192, 207–8, 213–4
Democratic Union (UD) 172, 177, 185, 275
Dialogue for Hungary (PM) 153–7, 279–80, 285
difference: logic of 5–6, 26, 28, 30, 36–41, 45–6, 48
discourse: discourse analysis 2, 6, 8–10, 35, 38, 42–3, 46–8; discursive architectonics 4, 6, 15, 29, 39; *see also* post-foundationalism, post-foundational discourse analysis
dislocation 4, 6, 9, 24, 38, 46, 52, 76, 82, 90, 96, 100, 113, 115–6, 120, 128–9, 156, 170, 172, 181, 187, 193, 196, 222, 235, 237, 245, 249, 252–3, 258, 276–7, 281, 287, 287n2
Duda, Andrzej 201, 209, 212
Dzurinda, Mikuláš 222, 235–6, 238–44, 249, 264, 277, 282

empty signifier 6, 27, 31n4, 36–40, 62, 65, 67, 81–2, 84, 91, 94, 99, 130–1, 139–41, 147, 150, 154, 170, 176–7, 185–6, 190–1, 200, 206–7, 210–11, 237–8, 241–2, 248, 256–7
Endecja 165–7, 190
equivalence: chain of 5, 26–8, 36–40; logic of 5–6, 9, 26–30, 35–43, 48
European Union (EU) 22, 72, 89, 91–4, 124, 137–40, 149–50, 153, 196, 212, 235; membership in 72, 124, 196, 235; opposition to 72, 93–4, 196

Fico, Robert 222, 236, 239–43, 245, 249, 251–3, 258–60, 264, 267n3
Fidesz 110–11, 116–7, 119, 121–45, 147–59, 159n3, 159n4, 272, 274, 276–81, 284–7
floating signifier 99, 207, 242
Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD) 52, 92–5, 99–102, 275, 280, 283–4
Freedom and Solidarity (SaS) 246, 252, 261

Gomułka, Władysław 165, 169, 213
Gorilla affair 249–50
Gottwald, Klement 56, 61
Gyurcsány, Ferenc 125–9, 132, 153, 156

Havel, Václav 39, 53, 58–62, 69, 99, 227–8, 231
hegemonic formation 6–8, 35, 42–6, 104n7, 271, 287n2; "post-November" 8, 45–6, 52–3, 69–73, 75–6, 100, 102, 104n7, 274; "System of National Cooperation" *see* System of National Cooperation (NER)
hegemony: theory of 4–6, 26, 37–8, 42–6; *see also* hegemonic formation
Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) 110–11, 116–25, 133, 275–7
Hungarian Guard 144
Hungarian Justice and Life Party (MIÉP) 110–11, 121–5, 139, 144, 156, 274, 276, 285
Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) 110–11, 118, 121–8, 132, 134, 140–1, 148–51, 153–7, 159n3, 275, 277–80, 285

ideational: approaches to populism *see* populism, ideational approaches to; ideational turn 2, 9, 14, 20, 23
illiberalism 22, 41–2, 48n3, 81, 90, 102, 110, 138–41, 150, 156, 202, 234, 243; *see also* populism, illiberal
imaginaries 4, 6–9, 35, 43–6, 48n4; national 53, 55, 110–12, 119, 122–3, 125–6, 133–5, 137, 156, 165, 202, 223–5, 227, 233, 263, 277–8; post-1989 4, 8–9, 45–6, 58, 61–2, 69–70, 72, 77, 100, 110, 117, 119, 122–3, 125–6, 133–5, 137, 156, 164–5, 172, 188, 195, 222–3, 244, 264, 271–5, 277–82, 286
Independent Smallholders Party (FKGP) 113, 116–7, 122, 124–5, 144
institutionalism 30, 35, 39, 57–61, 72–3, 99, 110, 115–6, 118–20, 123, 125,

128–9, 132–9, 145, 151–2, 155–6, 171–2, 177, 197, 201, 208, 224–6, 229–31, 233, 238, 243, 245, 258, 263, 273, 279, 285; authoritarian 57, 110, 133–7, 139, 142, 147, 156, 168, 233, 279, 281, 285; humanist 59–61; social-democratic 125, 128, 181, 247, 280

Jobbik 110–11, 129, 134, 136–7, 139–57, 159, 159n6, 271, 275–6, 279–81, 283–5, 287
John, Radek 77–8, 80, 82

Kaczyński, Jarosław 1, 172–3, 186–8, 191, 194–5, 200–3, 205–7, 212
Kaczyński, Lech 173, 188, 193–4, 196–8, 205
Kádár, János 114–6, 118
Karácsony, Gergely 110, 153–6, 159
Klaus, Václav 69–71, 79–80, 83, 231–2
Kollár, Boris 222, 254–60, 263, 265, 284
Kotleba, Marian 222, 261–3
Kukiz, Paweł 209, 212
Kukiz'15 165, 208–15, 275, 277, 279–80, 282–4

Laclau, Ernesto 2–7, 14–15, 18, 26–30, 31n4, 35–7, 39–43
Law and Justice (PiS) 40, 164–6, 173, 185–205, 207–15, 271–2, 277–80, 282, 284–7
League of Polish Families (LPR) 186, 191, 194, 196
Lepper, Andrzej 182, 184–7, 196–7, 213
LGBT rights: opposition to 202, 204; support for 206
liberalism 9, 41–2, 54, 74, 96–7, 101, 116, 119, 121–2, 138, 143–4, 153–4, 164–5, 172–81, 184–8, 191–201, 205–7, 213–4, 233, 236–8, 240, 242, 244–5, 275, 277–9, 282–3; *see also* neo-liberalism; *see also* populism, liberal
logic: fantasmatic 6–7, 35, 43–4, 48n4; of difference *see* difference; of equivalence *see* equivalence; political 2–3, 6–8, 15, 35, 41–4, 274, 285; social 6–7, 35, 43–4

Masaryk, Tomáš Garrigue 53–6, 225
Matovič, Igor 245–6, 248–54
Mečiar, Vladimír 8, 46, 222–3, 228–33, 235, 237–8, 240–5, 262–5, 266n1, 271, 274, 277, 282
Mouffe, Chantal 5–6, 14, 26, 36, 39, 42–3
Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) 222–3, 229–46, 263, 265, 266n2, 274–6, 282, 285
Mudde, Cas 2–3, 23–5, 30, 31n2

Nagy, Imre 114, 116–7
nationalism 1, 6, 25, 29–30, 38–41, 55, 65–9, 92–3, 110–2, 115, 120–8, 138–52, 156–8, 164–7, 172, 182–93, 196–7, 201–4, 208–13, 222–7, 230–35, 237, 240, 242–3, 245, 262–3, 274–5, 279, 283–6; economic 65, 93, 146–7, 150, 234, 285; ethno- 45, 69, 81, 115, 118, 120–3, 143–4, 147, 150, 152, 232, 235, 261–2, 264, 274, 281, 283; populist 6, 40, 122, 124, 126–7, 139–44, 156–7, 274, 277; *see also* populism, nationalist
nativism 6, 29–30, 48n2, 68, 91–5, 140–1, 150, 152, 254–8, 260, 263, 286, 287n4; *see also* populism, nativist
neo-liberalism 42, 63–5, 67, 69–70, 73–5, 79, 81, 85, 90–1, 93, 102, 122–3, 145, 172, 208, 231, 283, 286; *see also* populism, neo-liberal
nodal point 6, 26, 37–8, 40–1, 61, 73–4, 84, 86, 88, 93–4, 123–4, 138, 150, 174, 176, 195, 234, 244, 248

Okamura, Tomio 83, 90, 92–5
Opposition Agreements 71, 75–6, 100
Orbán, Viktor 1, 39, 42, 47, 116–17, 124–39, 141–3, 150–1, 156, 158–9, 277, 279, 285
Ordinary People and Independent Personalities (OĽaNO) 222–3, 245–55, 257, 260–1, 264–5, 275, 277, 283–4
Őszöd speech 125, 128–9, 144, 156, 276, 281

Palikot, Janusz 205, 208, 214
Palikot's Movement (RP) 165, 205–8, 211–12, 214–15, 275, 277, 279–80, 282–4, 286
Party of the Democratic Left (SDĽ) 232–3, 235, 239, 243–4
people's camps (*tábory lidu*) 53–4
People's Party Our Slovakia (ĽSNS) 223, 245, 261–4, 275, 277, 285
Piłsudski, Józef 167–8, 190

Polish People's Party (PSL) 174, 177–8, 181, 184–6, 188, 197, 199, 213–4
Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) 169–71, 173, 175, 192, 199
Politics Can Be Different (LMP) 134, 153
popular writers (*népi írók*) 112–13
populism: anti-clerical 205–7, 214, 283; anti-communist 52, 57, 62, 64–8, 100, 120; anti-liberal 139, 143, 164–5, 174–6, 178–9, 181–2, 184–9, 191–4, 196–201, 203, 210, 213–14, 278–9, 282–5; anti-party 208–9, 212, 223, 247–50, 252, 257, 264, 284; centrist 52, 79, 81, 85, 87, 222–3, 238, 240–5, 249, 257, 263–4, 271, 282–3, 286; conservative 41, 223, 248, 264, 283; entrepreneur 52, 84, 88, 100, 223, 255, 257–8, 264–5, 284; ideational approaches to 5, 9, 14–15, 20, 23–8, 30; illiberal 110, 139–41, 156; in power 52, 87–8, 136, 139, 187, 194, 196–7, 285, 287n3; left-wing 110–11, 154–7, 175–6, 178–9, 181, 213, 279, 285; liberal 17, 41, 52, 96–7, 165, 205–7, 214, 283, 286; nationalist 6, 40, 52, 65–7, 100, 146–7, 149–51, 155, 157, 165–6, 176, 183–94, 201, 203–4, 208–11, 213, 275, 279, 283–6; nativist 52, 91, 94, 110, 140–1, 156, 223, 255–8, 260, 263–4, 283, 286; neo-conservative 52, 93–4; neo-liberal 42, 52, 64–5, 81, 90–1, 286; objectivist approaches to 9, 14–9, 23–7, 30; post-foundational approaches to 1, 4, 6, 9, 14–15, 25–6, 30, 36, 44, 47; right-wing 39–41, 286; social 110–11, 127, 129–32, 136, 141–2, 145, 156, 164, 183–5, 198–201, 203, 205, 210, 214, 277–9, 281, 285–6
post-foundationalism 1, 5–6, 9, 14–15, 25–6, 30, 40, 42–4, 46–7; post-foundational discourse analysis 6, 35–6, 38, 42, 46–7, 287n2; *see also* populism, post-foundational approaches to
psychoanalysis 22, 48n4
Public Affairs (VV) 52, 77–83, 87, 90–1, 100, 102, 104n9, 275–6, 280, 282–4, 286
Public Against Violence (VPN) 222, 226–30, 275–6

Rally for the Republic – Republican Party of Czechoslovakia (SPR-RSČ) 52–3, 57, 62–72, 100, 102, 104n5, 274, 276, 285
reductionism 39–40, 55–6, 113, 150, 166, 223, 262–4
referendum: demand for 77, 90, 93, 96, 132, 137, 150, 153, 209, 211, 232, 245–6, 250, 259; in Hungary 122, 126–7, 132, 135, 137, 140, 150; in Poland 169, 209; in Slovakia 250
Roma: discourses against 68–9, 75, 81, 102, 143–4, 147, 149, 243, 262–3
Rywin affair 181, 185–6

Sanacja 165, 168, 190–1, 210
sedimentation 6, 14, 42–3
Self-Defense of the Republic of Poland (SRP) 164–5, 181–8, 196–7, 209–10, 213–5, 275–6, 278, 283, 285, 287n1
Sládek, Miroslav 47, 62–3, 65–8, 102, 104n5
Slovak Democratic and Christian Union – Democratic Party (SDKÚ-DS) 243–4, 246, 249
Slovak Democratic Coalition (SDK) 235, 243
Slovak National Party (SNS) 225, 227, 232–3, 243, 245–6, 252
Slovak People's Party (SĽS) 225–6, 236, 261–2
Sme Rodina 222–3, 245, 254–61, 263–5, 275, 277, 283–4
Smer 222–3, 236, 239–47, 249–54, 257–8, 261–2, 264–5, 267n4, 267n5, 271, 275–7, 282–3, 285
socialism 18, 25, 41, 57–8, 70–1, 114, 169–70; social democracy 70, 125, 128, 153, 174, 181, 222, 240, 242, 244, 247, 264, 280; state socialism 1, 44–5, 275
Solidarity Electoral Action (AWS) 179, 185, 188, 191, 195, 276
Solidarity: trade union 8, 46, 164–5, 170–6, 178–80, 188–9, 191, 194–5, 211, 213–4, 271–2, 274–6, 278, 282
Solidarność see Solidarity, trade union
Soros, George: discourses against 39, 110, 119, 139–42, 156, 278–9, 284
system change (*rendszerváltás*) 110–12, 116–20, 123–6, 133–5, 143, 156, 272, 274, 277–8
System of National Cooperation (NER) 41, 111, 134–6, 138, 141–2, 147, 155–6, 278–81, 287

Topolánek, Mirek 75–7, 80, 87
Tusk, Donald 188, 193–5, 199, 202, 205–7

Union of Labor (UP) 164–5, 174–81, 184–5, 188, 208, 213–15, 217n2, 274–6, 278, 285

Vona, Gábor 144–6, 148, 150–3

Wałęsa, Lech 170, 172, 196, 217n1

Zeman, Miloš 71–2, 83, 104n10