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Why no populism in Portugal?

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INTRODUCTION

Why study populism? Because populism, left and right, has been on the rise. Talk of populism is all around us: countless talk shows, columns, and op-eds have been devoted to it and everyone seems to have a strong opinion about its dangers. Yet, both outside and inside academia, what populism means remains elusive and how it works is poorly understood. Half a century of populist research has failed to reach a consensus about a minimal definition of populism. It has today several different meanings, an implicit normative duplicity, and its operationalization remains at the very least challenging.

We propose a fresh approach to populism and discuss how to test this approach against the Portuguese case (having Spain as a reference point for comparison). For the purposes of our argument, we consider the period between 2011 and 2015, the political agents are political parties, and the empirical corpus includes the parties' public discourses. Theoretically, our approach supersedes both ontic and ontological approaches, and focuses instead on the work of articulation of contents within the logic of resentment by certain key political agents. Methodologically, in regard to populism, Portugal is conceived as a negative case. We hypothesize that the performative articulation of the populist logic of resentment by Portuguese political parties, turning a part of the Portuguese against another part in the name of the "people," failed to translate into electoral success. Our aim is to shed light on the distinctive features of the Portuguese case and on the reasons behind the relative failure of populist strategies by political parties in Portugal. To shed further light on these dimensions, we also consider a comparison with Spain, where the Podemos party nearly tripled its share of the national vote between mid-2014 and late 2015, and can thus be considered a case in which populism flourished in the intervening period.

In addition to the Introduction and the Conclusion, this chapter includes three sections. A first where we describe the rationale behind our idea and approach to populism; a second where we further explain the underlying theory and our proposed methodological approach to study the use of populist rhetoric; and a third in which we discuss the empirical implementation of our approach based on four cases of welfare retrenchment: health care, retirement pensions, unemployment benefit, and salary cuts.

THE RATIONALE BEHIND OUR IDEA

This essay sets out to answer one central research question: why has populism been unsuccessful in Portugal? This is particularly intriguing since populism, left and right, is on the rise virtually everywhere. Since 2011 a streak of electoral results has stunned the world: Syriza, Podemos, Fidesz, Law and Justice (PiS), Brexit, Trump. Talk of populism is all around us. Yet, so far Portugal is one of the few Western countries that seem to have escaped this global pattern. Salgado (2018) articulates some of the reasons behind this exception, which we propose to further analyse now with this new approach to study populism and populist discourse.

The significance of our discussion is that it combines theoretical innovation with a proposal for in-depth empirical research to account for the seeming absence of populism in Portugal. For this end we propose and develop a new research agenda for populism. In doing so, we take as our starting point and guiding idea the importance of social theory for understanding current ideas of populism. More specifically, the main intellectual aim of the paper is to shift the terms and focus of scholarly and political debate to an alternative vision of populism that is able to account for its relative lack of success in Portugal by pursuing five related objectives.

Theoretically, it (i) offers an alternative to the main approaches to populism today, as it focuses neither on contents nor on a given ontology *per se*, but on the work of articulation by political agents of certain specific contents within the ontology of resentment. Methodologically, it (ii) studies this work of articulation as a matter of performance by political agents (namely, political parties), by (iii) reference to different topics (areas of welfare retrenchment), against the (iv) normative background of shared political values (legal consciousness) and emotions (resentment), and (v) in a comparative perspective (with Spain, a "positive" case of populism).

For this purpose, we draw upon intellectual sources from both social theory and political philosophy. This is an unusual move since populism is seen as a natural remit of political scientists. However, we believe there are good reasons to combine political theory with social theory. First, as any other political phenomenon, populism is deeply embedded in social experience outside the political domain. Social theory, understood as a general and systematic reflection on modern societies, is thus in an ideal position to complement political theory in analysing issues such as how cultural meanings are performed

in politics and policy-making, the dynamics of leadership and charisma in political movements, the role of political representation in reflecting and constituting social and political cleavages, the long-term processes of state formation and democratization, and the relationship between state, media, and society more generally. Second, literature on populism since the 1950s has been markedly interdisciplinary, benefiting from contributions produced in disciplines such as philosophy of language (e.g. speech-act theory), as well as from broader intellectual traditions, such as structuralism (e.g. semiotics) and post-structuralism (discourse theory). As social theory functions less as a disciplinary specialism than as a platform for specialists from different backgrounds to think about questions of social order and change, it is well positioned to draw upon these various insights and complement political theories on populism, more narrowly focused on the political.

Eminent social theorists such as Zygmunt Bauman, Ulrich Beck, Richard Sennett, and Manuel Castells have analysed the origins and effects of the unchecked rise of global corporate and financial capitalism in increasing economic and social inequalities since the late 1970s, the mediatization of a heightened sense of insecurity in the face of global risks from environmental hazards to terrorism, the growing dualization of labour markets with the ensuing state of precarity that disproportionally affects younger generations in both the United States and Europe, and the gentrification of cities with their ever-growing gated communities and inward-looking political cultures around the world. Political theorist Wendy Brown (2010) has been calling our attention to a "proliferation of walling" around and within Western countries to cope with their waning sovereignty.

Although Brown does not refer to populism directly, it is impossible not to notice the relevance of her diagnosis for the recent rise of populist politics. Building walls has indeed become a trademark symbol of populist discourse in our time. There is hardly a more powerful symbol than a wall to signal the protection of "our people" from "the other people". The moral message is clear: the simple, hard-working "people" are to be kept safely apart from the "other", embodied in this case by immigrants, Muslims, and foreigners in general. In other forms of populism, the "other" is portrayed as the "corrupt elite(s)" (e.g. anti-elitism and in some cases anti-system as well).

But is populism necessarily associated with nationalism, racism, sexism, and demagoguery? Sheldon Wolin, another political theorist, disagrees. He finds democracy today to be not a characteristic of today's neoliberal modes of

power, but, rather, an "ephemeral phenomenon" enacted by those "who have no means to redress other than to risk collectivizing their small bits of power" (Wolin 2004, 601-602). Wolin locates democracy's "fugitive" energies primarily in voluntary organizations, the "great free schools of democracy" that Tocqueville praised for breathing civic life into formally democratic institutions, but also in broader social movements, such as nineteenth-century American Populism (2004, 603-604). If Wolin is right, and we think he is, then the task of rethinking populism is not merely an intellectual exercise – it is, first and foremost, an ethical task.

THEORY AND METHODS

Populism is notoriously difficult to define. Few political actors call themselves "populist". The "canon" of populist case studies is formed of an eclectic assortment of movements, parties and political leaders, ranging from the Russian *narodnichestvo* and the American Populists of the nineteenth-century to the Latin American charismatic populisms of Juan Péron and Getúlio Vargas of the 1950s, on to the neo-populist wave of the 1990s in Europe, exemplified by Jorg Haider's Freedom Party of Austria, and more recently to the left-wing opposition to the European Union's decisions on how to tackle the Euro Crisis (mainly Syriza and Podemos). As varied as these case studies are, so too are the approaches that have been employed to study them. These approaches vary in several regards, such as their degree of abstraction or generality, their primary aim or function, and their preferred methodology. These differences can be traced back to the epistemological foundations of these approaches.

On the one hand, there are ontic approaches. By this we mean approaches that conceive of physical, factual, and material reality as existing independently of our knowledge about it. Ontic approaches comprise empirical-deductive approaches, which are oriented toward explaining populism through the discovery of causal relationships between structural determinants and its populist consequences, and also hermeneutical approaches, whose aim is to provide a thick description of populism through historically detailed case studies. Despite their differences, both empirical-deductive and hermeneutical approaches are first focused on the *contents* (not on the *logic*) of populism. However, there is no consensus on what these contents are. Populism is variously defined as a thin ideology (Canovan 2002; Mudde 2004), a strategy or

form of organization (Weyland 2001, 14; Betz 2002, 198); a practice of political mobilization (Jansen 2011); a direct style of political communication (Jagers and Walgrave 2007); a discourse or form of persuasion (Kazin 1995). But it is impossible to be all of these things and remain something distinctive. As a result, ontic approaches are unable to account for the coexistence of "populist" movements with fundamentally different social bases, forms of organization, discourses, and ideologies.

On the other hand, there are approaches aimed not at describing the contents that characterize populism, but at identifying the logic according to which those contents are organized. Illustrations include some of Canovan's later work (1999) and Ernesto Laclau's *On Populist Reason* (2002). In the case of Canovan, we can see her moving away from hermeneutics toward structuralism. Her position now is that: "we shift our attention from the ideology and policy content of populist movements and concentrate instead on structural considerations" (1999, 3). By this Canovan refers to the three fundamental characteristics that all populist politics share: anti-elitism; a reference to "the people"; and a simple and direct style. Laclau, under the gaze of semiotics, goes even further and dispenses with contents altogether. With Laclau, populism ceases to be an ontic category to become pure logic: "Its meaning is not to be found in any political or ideological content entering into the description of the practices of any particular group", Laclau observes, "but in a particular mode of articulation of whatever social, political or ideological contents" (2005, 34). As a result, populism is understood to be immanent in politics, a logic that inheres in social and political experience. Yet this is not just any logic. Unlike classic theories of political representation, Laclau argues that the will of the people, rather than being constituted before representation, is instead constituted through it – it is, he stresses, the paradigmatic case of political representation (2002, 163). This means that "the people" becomes the logic that structures the political, i. e. that all politics *is* populism (2002, 47), and that "the people" becomes an empty, floating signifier: when the *plebs* sees itself as the *populus*, the part as the whole, it constructs a "people" – quite independently of any particular contents. Of course, identifying all politics with populist politics, as Laclau suggests, risks rendering the concept of populism not just empty, but redundant. This is because, we believe, his Schmittian-Gramscian ontology of hegemony replaces a one-sided emphasis on contents with an equally one-sided emphasis on logic. His ontology fails to fully account for the ontic, and thereby risks replicating in new terms the problems it sought to supersede in the first place.

Given the difficulties faced by mainly ontic or logic-oriented approaches, several authors have tried to tread a middle ground and integrate both dimensions in their work (Arditi 2007). In particular, it has led the so-called "new populist studies" to shift the focus "from the social content of populism and the ends toward which it is directed to the means by which it is done" (Jansen 2011, 82); to study why economic crises need to be "performed" by social agents as to become effective causes of populist politics (Moffitt 2014); to examine how the contents of populism seem to be organized by "discursive frames" (Aslanidis 2015) and to analyse how populist claims-making by American Presidential candidates between 1952 and 1996 follows certain scripts and involve specific rhetorical tropes (Bonikowski and Gidron 2016). This chapter joins this collective effort by developing a new understanding of what populism is and how it should be studied. Populism is here understood as neither a thing, nor as purely discursive logic. Drawing upon pragmatic sociology, democratic theory, and the analysis of political discourse, we argue that what makes one a populist is the pragmatic articulation of certain contents (ideas, things) within the logic of resentment. This means that resentment is here understood not as an ontic category (Shils1956; Barbalet 1992; Mudde 2004, 547; Müller 2016, 88) – a feeling, affect, or emotion – but as the logic according to which that particular sentiment is socially and politically organized (Demertzis 2006; Ure 2014; Engels 2015).

Why resentment? First, because populism is ostensibly about the conflict opposing the many to the few, the have-nots to the haves, the people to the elite, the out-groups to the in-group. It is not about one people against another people; instead, it is about one part of the people against another part of the same people. Second, the logic of resentment seems to be particularly adequate to capture this phenomenon because either mobilizing feelings of righteous indignation or downright envy, resentment supposes a relation of identification between the two parties, which does not exist in the case of the alien Other of the Schmittian logic of enmity. If this is obviously true in the case of indignation (I have a morally tinged disapproval of the fact that you have enjoyed some undeserved good fortune), it is also the case, Aristotle says, in the case of envy, which completely lacks the quasi-moral dimension of indignation: "envy is a certain distress caused by the fact that some other people like oneself seem to have done well with respect to the aforementioned goods. The subject envies these others not because he wants the goods in question for

himself, but because *they* have them." (Aristotle 174-5, cited in Geuss 2016, 176). Aristotle is clear in stressing that we envy only those we perceive to be "like" us. In other words, envy makes sense only among equal competitors in the same game. One can hate almost anyone, but one envies only those who are sufficiently like us to be some kind of rivals or competitors. We hate enemies, but a competitor is not *per se* our enemy (Geuss 2016, 176). This is why, for Schmitt and Laclau, the logic of populism is not enmity, but resentment.

Previous studies have related a politics of resentment with social class and other divisions within a country (Cramer 2016), with both symbolic and explicit violence (Engels 2015), and the construction of identity, nationalism, and specific forms of sub-state nationalism and of right-wing populism (Mann and Fenton 2017). But so far resentment has not been deemed an inherent characteristic of populism in its different manifestations, as we are now proposing.

Consider for instance the example of US President Donald J. Trump's "wall with Mexico" a central element of his campaign in 2016 and an enduring element of his political rhetoric. Trump's wall with Mexico can be designated as a populist symbol as opposed to, say, a nationalist symbol. The reason why the wall with Mexico came to represent Trump's populism is because it was about jobs: the jobs the "many" in America were losing because of the decision by America's "few" to open factories in Mexico and elsewhere, as well as about the jobs Mexican emigrants were taking away from the American "many". Hence Trump's pressure on the CEOs of companies such as Ford to bring jobs back from Mexico. It was not framed in nationalist terms, as one people against another people. In contrast, the wall separating Israel from the West Bank is framed in such terms: this wall has been rhetorically justified, legitimized, and culturally construed by the Israeli right as a form of protection of Jewish people from the attacks of the Palestinian people. This shows that competing agents can construe the exact same object in mutually contradictory ways for different purposes. For Obama, having the wall associated with nationalism would have been politically toxic: hence the Obama administration's attempt to keep its funding, construction undertaken if not in secrecy, as to attract as little media attention as possible. Trump spectacularly reversed this. He picked the exact same infrastructure and constructed it as a symbol of his politics. Trump's politics, insofar as it uses that object in order to mobilize the resentment of one part of the American people against another part, construes it as a populist symbol.

Our second methodological aim is to suggest how to study the ways in which this logic has been employed by political agents, with varying degrees of success, to pit one part of the people against another part in the name of "the people" to criticize (or legitimize), proposing as example the politics of welfare retrenchment in Portugal between 2011 and 2015. Welfare retrenchment, which has fuelled the "dualization" of European societies between labour market insiders and outsiders, is particularly relevant for this purpose. We therefore question why it is that welfare retrenchment failed to provide a fertile ground for populist politics in Portugal but not in neighbouring Spain? We address this question by analysing four central policies of welfare retrenchment: (i) health care; (ii) retirement pensions; (iii) unemployment benefit; and (iv) public servants' salary cuts.

Methodologically, our approach adopts the *extreme case* method of case selection because of its extreme value on the dependent (*Y*) variable of interest: populism. An extreme value is understood here as an observation that lies far away from the mean of a given distribution; that is to say, it is *unusual*. For case study analysis, it is precisely the rareness of the value that makes a case valuable, not its positive or negative value (Emigh 1997; Mahoney and Goertz 2004). This does not pose problems of sample bias because it refers back to a larger sample of cases lying in the background of the analysis. The aim is to *maximize* variance on the dimension of interest, not to minimize it. The case of Portugal between 2011 and 2015 looks unusual in that it does not seem to fit the international pattern of rise in populist politics since the 1990s, and more prominently in the aftermath of the financial crisis of 2008, when the conditions were met for the emergence of populism. Portugal is a "negative case" because it seems contrary to this general pattern. Hence the research question: *why has populism been unsuccessful in Portugal?*

Following what has been said above, populism is here understood to refer to the pragmatic articulation of the logic of resentment by political and social agents for material/symbolic gain. By pragmatic articulation we refer to the political performativity of certain agents through, and by reference to, both linguistic claims and material things. Logics organize contents of different sorts, including rational claims to transparency and intelligibility, as well as emotions. We believe this to be the case of the logic of resentment. The logic of resentment organizes the specific set of emotions under the umbrella of resentment, which includes envy and indignation. To claim that one logic pertains exclusively to one particular phenomenon would be to engage in a

topological exercise of little interest. Logics operate or exist at a different level than phenomena: it is perfectly possible, then, that the same logic animates different phenomena, and that any one phenomenon may be animated by more than one logic. It is better to think of the relationship between resentment and populism as one of elective affinity. We thus do not claim that populists are the only ones mobilizing resentment. What we do claim is that without resentment, there would be no populism. That is, there is an elective affinity between populism and the logic of resentment, although the latter can animate a plethora of social situations and phenomena (e. g. a situation in which one individual envies another's object or personal accomplishment), it animates populist politics when it acquires the specific configuration of pitting one part of the people against another part of the people, in the name of "the people". Ontic contents matter, but need to be understood in their relationship with the ways in which they are mobilized (not *per se*, as the naturalist perspective wants it, nor arbitrarily, as the post-structuralist perspective wants it). Populist politics, as politics in general is not an endless language game; it involves the material world that we inhabit as much as ourselves as agents.

As Stanyer, Salgado, and Strömbäck (2017) we acknowledge that non-populist political actors can also engage in populist rhetoric and populist strategies to achieve their goals. Populism is thus not a trait of populist actors only. In the case of the argument and approach here developed, these actors primarily include political parties engaged in policy discussion, but also other institutional agents that performed relevant roles in the politics of welfare retrenchment in Portugal in the period under examination: the Constitutional Court and trade unions are two cases in point. The question of accounting for the "negative case" of populism in Portugal is a matter of a "failed performance" (Austin 1962; Alexander 1987). Given that a performative may or may not work, that it may or may not succeed in realizing its stated intention, its appropriate evaluative standard is not truth and accuracy, but "felicitous" and "unfelicitous." Our proposal involves the investigation of the (in)felicity's conditions of populism in Portugal between 2011 and 2015, which include not only the speech act's interactional context (Goffman 1956), but also the political culture out of which particular signs are drawn by political agents, populism included (Worsley 1969).

This methodological strategy draws upon critical discourse analysis and political discourse analysis (see for example Fairclough and Fairclough 2012) and complements these with an original emphasis on the logic of resentment.

It advocates the study of political speeches from party leaders and parliamentary debates in Portugal and Spain as sources of power imbalances, potential conflicts of interest, and differences in values by political opponents in what is a democratic context of disagreement marked by a tendency toward the mainstreaming of a populism mode of representation and articulation. It relies on the notion of language performativity to further explore the meaning of relational structures and the construction of discursive meaning within such political speeches and debates. Documentary evidence could potentially include: (i) a representative sample of speeches and debates from the various political parties and social movements, looking specifically on whether, when, and how the articulation of the logic of resentment works, and the degree to which it shapes the agents' political arguments and proposals into populist narratives and populist approaches to democratic politics; (ii) the Constitutional Court's rulings; and (iii) the news coverage in the leading Portuguese daily press of the most important political actors and debates on these issues.

Analysing information from these different types of sources allows taking into account both mediated and unmediated dimensions of political discourse. We include the analysis of how mainstream news media cover these issues and the political actors involved in these debates, which refers to the mediated dimension. We also consider unmediated political discourse by political parties, social movements, and the Constitutional Court's statements and documents. Both dimensions are crucial in our analysis of populism, as political actors need the media (both mainstream and social media) to convey their messages to the wider population, while populist strategies often entail direct, unmediated communication and links with the people. Our approach also involves, at a later stage, the comparison between mediated and unmediated content to analyse the mainstream media conditions and check for any potential impact of journalists or the medium itself on political discourses.

DISCUSSION

Our discussion and research question suppose the failure of populism (populist rhetoric and populist strategies) in Portugal. This is, of course, a claim rather than a self-evident fact. The performative failure of populism in Portugal in this period derives from the observation that, whilst it partly shaped the political debate regarding welfare retrenchment (the Troika was often framed

within the "us" vs. "them" argument and invoked as the visible face of the forces of economic globalization and capitalist accumulation and its measures presented as an undeserved punitive measure over the Portuguese hard-working people), populism seemingly paid less electoral dividends in Portugal than in other comparable countries. Whereas in Spain the *Podemos* party nearly tripled its share of the national vote between mid-2014 and late 2015, not to mention the electoral victories of the Syriza in Greece in September 2015, Brexit in the UK in June 2016, and Trump in the United States in November 2016, in Portugal the share of votes for the political parties one would expect to be more associated with a populist type of political discourse, including those using arguments that are similar to Podemos' kind of populism, rose only moderately between the general elections of 2011 and of 2015, and the overall appeal of the Portuguese populist far right continues to be marginal (National Renewal Party-PNR). Notwithstanding the record-high levels of unemployment and deep popular discontent with the Troika-imposed austerity measures, the Communist vote remained virtually unchanged – from 441,000 in 2011 to 445,000 in 2015 – and overall left-wing protest parties secured only 12 more seats in Parliament. Significantly, the incumbent centre-right coalition remained the political force with the most votes. In addition, the popular demonstrations against the Troika, which in Spain were at the origin of a populist political party (Podemos), in Portugal did not produce a similar result. In fact, the attempts to create a new political party from these social movements were unsuccessful in Portugal and even the newly created PDR (Democratic Republican Party) by António Marinho e Pinto was, in the 2015 national election, very far behind (1.14%) the success of its leader's election in the European Parliamentary Election, when Marinho e Pinto ran as an MPT (The Earth Party Movement) candidate (7.14%) (for a more detailed discussion about populist political actors in Portugal, see Salgado and Zúquete 2017).

As a "negative case", Portugal can serve as a comparative case enabling further explanations about what populism is and what it is not, thereby helping to identify its conceptual boundaries. It can also enable researchers to extend or modify the original concept in the future, possibly adding to its explanatory power, which would have a considerable impact on the understanding not only of populist phenomena, but also of contemporary democratic politics. The "negative case" of Portugal can also lend an extra degree of validity to the study by demonstrating our willingness to consider alternatives and that we

have indeed searched for other possible explanations (Miles and Huberman 1994).

In addition, we selected the case of Portugal according to the Possibility Principle, which advises researchers to select only negative cases in which the outcome of interest is possible. As Mahoney and Goertz point out (2004, 656), Seymour Martin Lipset's famous query – *Why no socialism in the United States?* – made sense because social democracy was possible during earlier periods of US history. Likewise, the rise of populism in Portugal in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis was eminently possible, and indeed was seen as inevitable in certain political circles. Yet it did not occur.

In what follows we offer a preliminary (and arguably speculative) explanation of why populism has failed to take hold in Portugal while it flourished in neighbouring Spain during the financial and economic crisis of 2011-2015 that affected both Iberian countries. We do this by reference to four issues: health care; retirement pensions; unemployment benefit; and public servants' salary cuts. Rather than presenting the findings of past research, what we offer here is the opposite: how would future research on populist politics look if it were to follow the model proposed here.

HEALTH CARE

Briefly, the issue at stake here can be described as follows. In early 2014 the Portuguese political parties' public discourse focussed on the topic of health care reform. The topic of discussion was the Portuguese civil servants' health care insurance scheme, ADSE (originally, "Assistência na Doença aos Servidores Civis do Estado", nowadays "Direção-Geral de Proteção Social aos Trabalhadores em Funções Públicas"). At stake was the increase of the beneficiaries' contributions from 1.5% to 3.5% in order to make the system financially sustainable and totally self-supporting. The contending parties were, on the one hand, the Troika and the government, and, on the other hand, the left-wing opposition parties and CGTP-IN, a trade union confederation traditionally associated with the Communist Party. A working hypothesis could be that it was the former, not the latter, to resort to a resentful logic in that it stressed the unfairness of treatment between the scheme's beneficiaries (civil servants) and taxpayers, thus pitting one part of the people against another part in the name of "the people". This particular debate could be analysed within the broader discussion of the universality of the National Health Care system,

and the universalist character of the legal consciousness of the Portuguese in this respect. If proven, this hypothesis would help us demonstrate that, *contra* ontic approaches, populism is not an exclusive feature of pre-defined "populist" leaders, movements, or parties; in fact, mainstream political parties and official authorities too (including international organizations) can in principle engage in populist strategies.

More generally, a line of empirical enquiry of this sort points to the possibility of exploring the complex relationship between populism and technocracy. It is commonly thought that populism feeds on a resentment of loss of control over one's destiny, and the corresponding desire to assert domestic democratic sovereignty; that it represents a reaction to the technocratic logics of democratic politics, especially when conducted from a far distance, at a super-national level. The recent rise of populism coincides, in many cases, with the increase of external intervention from institutions like the IMF and the EU. What is the relationship between the two phenomena and what relation does it bear with different developments in terms of populist politics in Portugal and Spain? More generally, are there any hidden affinities concealed behind the open antagonisms between populists and technocrats? If so, what dangers do they represent for the logic and workings of our democracies?

RETIREMENT PENSIONS

Our proposed second topic of investigation is the debate around welfare retrenchment regarding retirement pensions. These were, alongside with civil servants' salaries, one of the Troika's main targets in terms of fiscal consolidation in the 2010-2014 period. This topic, like the next one (unemployment benefit), can be studied in comparison with Spain given the central position of retirement pensions to the so-called "dualization thesis": given their long contributory careers, labour market insiders are hypothesized to be particularly keen in defending retirement pensions from cuts. In the Portuguese case, the debate involved not only political parties (the government *vs.* the opposition parties), but also the Constitutional Court, whose rulings acted as the last line of defence of higher levels of insider protection. The working hypothesis is that the Court's intervention (whose rulings were expressed in a language of individual rights and universal guarantees) made the debate in Portugal to be framed less as a form of "structural violence" inflicted by neo-liberalism (Engels 2015) than in Spain, where political parties, such as *Podemos*,

were freer to depict cuts to retirement pensions as an undeserved result of economic globalization and neoliberal forces, thus unleashing sentiments of resentment and anger against the establishment. If confirmed, this hypothesis would help illuminate the reasons for the performative success of populism in Spain and its failure in Portugal.

UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFIT

A third topic of research is welfare retrenchment regarding the unemployment benefit. As the previous one, this topic would also allow for a meaningful, direct comparison with Spain. Briefly, what was at stake here can be described as follows. Active labour market policies, conciliating changes to unemployment benefits (such as making it more mean-tested dependent), training schemes (such as making these compulsory for beneficiaries), and public employment services (such as more efficient job centres), were a central feature of the Troika's Memorandum of Understanding and were duly applied by the government. According to the dualization thesis, labour market outsiders are hypothesized to favour needs-based policies such as unemployment benefit at the expense of policies dependent on contributions. A plausible working hypothesis could be that in Spain the cleavage between outsiders (unemployed) and insiders was framed in more clearly populist terms than in Portugal, where an "unnatural" alliance between organizations representative of the interests of pensioners and outsiders was visible at the height of the crisis. If confirmed, this hypothesis would help illuminate the reasons for the performative success of populism in Spain and its failure in Portugal.

SALARY CUTS

A fourth topic of research is related to the fiscal consolidation imposed by the Troika. One of the most politically contested decisions of the Troika years was the salary cuts of civil servants. Originally introduced in Portugal before the bailout in 2011 by the Socialist government to salaries over 1,500 Euros, later the centre-right coalition government would expand the cuts to salaries below that threshold. In August 2014, the Constitutional Court imposed a return to their original formulation and ruled the prorogation of any cuts beyond 2015 unconstitutional. One working hypothesis would be that while opposition parties did mobilize a resentful rhetoric by blaming the forces of economic global-

ization and their institutional representatives – the Troika and the government – for cuts deemed unnecessary and unjust, the technical-juridical language and the universalist logic of the Court's ruling contributed to taming the resentment and anger felt by the Portuguese affected by the cuts. If proven, this hypothesis would further help account for absence of populism in Portugal.

CONCLUSION

The four topics briefly discussed above offer a realistic framework to assess our theoretical and methodological claims regarding how populism should be studied today. As a whole, they form what one could call a prospective research programme of populist politics. Our primary motivation in designing such a programme is two-fold. First, and more immediately, our aim has been to answer the question of why populism was not successful and did not emerge in Portugal in the aftermath of the global financial and economic crisis of 2008-2010, compared to what happened in other countries also affected by the crisis. It is our belief that an answer to this important question requires an interpretive methodological approach. As we try to show by reference to four key welfare retrenchment issues, the reasons for the relative absence of populism in Portugal have less to do with objective socio-economic causes (which were similar in Spain and in many aspects even worse in Portugal), than with the performation of these causes, their nature, and consequences, by different political agents. Such performation is to some extent a matter of language, i. e., the investigation of how populist rhetoric is used by political and social actors to achieve political ends. But it is also a matter of the political culture, the policies, the technologies, and all sorts of material things to which that language necessarily refers to.

Second our aim has been to make clearer to the reader the nature and scope of our claims about the nature and functioning of populism. We do not reduce populism to empirical contents: resentment is here understood not as an emotion or feeling, but as an underlying logic, i. e. the way in which such sentiments are socially and politically organized. This signifies that populism seen as resentment is not to be studied through survey items connoting specific emotions such as envy, indignation, rage, or hatred. Yet we do not reduce it to a purely discursive logic either. Our pragmatic understanding of the populist logic of resentment means, to put it in slightly different terms, that it should

be studied relationally and as a matter of performativity. The meaning of populism is therefore not something that inheres somewhere in the innermost essence of populists' discourses, style, modes of organization, or ideology. Instead, the meaning of populism depends on the relations between the different elements animated by the logic of resentment.

Exploring further the examples of Portugal and Spain (a negative case versus a positive case experiencing a similar crisis) adds to our understanding of populism, in this case as construction that is sensitive to political context, political culture, interplays of political actors and narratives, and to power relations. The interpretive nature of our approach stresses the relational nature of politics, with the potential to produce dissimilar outcomes, even in apparently similar situations.

Trump's populism, and likeminded phenomena, point to the unconstructive nature of populism. One thing is to criticize democracy for failing to live up to its promises of equality – quite another is to do this by mobilizing resentment. While the latter can function as the beginning of a positive political project for progressive social change, the former can only do so with great difficulty. The logic of resentment, we argue, can be deeply unconstructive: I envy you just because you have what I don't. But the logic of resentment can also mobilize sentiments of righteous indignation. It is here that populism's ethical promise to which Sheldon Wolin alludes seems to reside. Interestingly, in Portugal, the "right to indignation" was used as a slogan in the popular demonstrations against the austerity measures that were implemented as a consequence of the 2011 bailout.

In fact, with the exception of the liberal anti-populist tradition (Hofstadter 1955), the understanding of populism as democracy's worst enemy is fairly recent. Until as late as the early 1990s most were of the view that populism was good for democracy. For populist scholars such as Peter Worsley (1969), Margaret Canovan (1981), and many others, populism's value resided in its aspirational qualities. It originated mobilizing political projects with the capacity for incorporating previously disenfranchised classes into the political community. This authentic, bottom-up popular impulse was seen as the much needed key to reenergize democracy: both old democracies stifled by their elitist tendencies and pragmatic or instrumental practices and less developed democracies seeking to expand the *demos* that counts and to which institutions and leaders must be responsive. Separating such disparate evaluations of populism is, of course, the underlying normative ideal of democracy – liberal pluralist

democracy, in one case, participatory democracy, in the other. This suggests yet another difficulty in finding something intrinsic to populism, which sets its apart: populism tends rather to be defined *in* and *by* its relationship to democracy, a relationship which is variously defined as extrinsic or intrinsic.

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