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## BOOK REVIEWS

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Manuel Anselmi, *Populism. An introduction, New York, London: Routledge, 2017. ISBN 978-1-138-28175-0, pp. 130*

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Populism and studies about this phenomenon are trend topics of many contemporary researches in political science and sociology. This growing interest and production on such a slippery term on one hand helps to understand the real meaning of it, on the other enlarges a yet vast and confused bibliography in this field. *Populism. An introduction* by Manuel Anselmi is an attempt to give an order to this bibliography while proposing ways to categorize populism, such as chronologic, or based on definitions and it helps choosing the main authors to take into consideration approaching to these studies. The declared aim of this book is “to be a useful instrument for all those who are interested in forming an initial idea of the subject” and mostly referred to “undergraduate students who are willing to approach the understanding of this problem in an analytical and value-free manner”. In my opinion this book can also be helpful for researchers who are studying populism from a specific point of view and want to explore other perspectives starting from the essential authors with different ideas on populism.

The book is divided into three parts (theorists, major cases and other typologies of problem) and an introduction: the book starts from a general presentation of the scien-

tific discussions on the concept of populism circumscribing it, getting more and more specific listing the main authors and their approaches, the populist parties that can be considered the terms of comparison for the contemporary examples of populism and the “populist families” as the author labelled the different ways in which are seen changes in a populist direction, apart from politics. The book ends suggesting five ways to study populism, in the “concluding remarks” the author indicates the necessity to link populism studies with studies on the democracy and he recommends which are the best ways, in his opinion, to understand and analyze populism.

The brief introduction titled “the populist option” shows the aim, the addressee and a general idea of populism. This introduction is completed by the first chapter “preliminary elements of the concept of populism” which is divided into three paragraphs that circumscribe the general idea presented before. The first of these three paragraphs explains the importance of understanding the ambiguity of the concept which Anselmi will unravel introducing some scholars and issues considered in the following chapters. In the second paragraph the author defines one of the best ways to consider populism: namely as a “social expression of sovereignty”. The chapter concludes providing “a minimum definition of the concept”. Starting from Elias’s idea of configuration of political power, Anselmi defines three main points of the configuration that create the basic definition of populism: “an interclass homogenous community-people who perceives itself as the holder of popular sovereignty, a leader connected with the community-people and a Manichean communication style which is aimed at creating political polarization”.

After the presentation of populism, the first chapter (“Theorists”) is about the authors that can be considered the milestones of populism studies, listed into a chronological order of the “waves of studies on populisms” showing the main aspects of different approaches on populism.

The first author presented is Gino Germani, an Italian sociologist. Germani studied populism related to modernization and social changes in Argentina during Peronism and in Italy during fascism, comparing these two populisms of the countries where he had lived. The approach of Gino Germani to populism is introduced to underline the importance of social change in relation to populism and also to suggest the possibility to use his interpretative scheme for contemporary examples of populism too. The second author presented is Edward Shils, an American sociologist who studied populism in relation to public opinion, conspiracy theories and the U.S. political culture. The importance of his point of view lies in the idea of relating the cultural background of individualism, justice and distrust in institutions’ truths, with populism in the U.S. The third is a couple of authors: Ghita Ionescu and Ernst Gellner who collected some lectures

from the conference organized by the Journal Government and Opposition in 1976 in their book "Populism, its meaning and National Characteristics", that can be considered the first attempt to give some order to the definition of what populism is. Anselmi provides a short presentation of the authors listed in Ionescu and Gelner's book stressing the importance of this first consultation about populism for future researches. The next author considered is Margaret Canovan, known for his definition of populism as the "shadow of democracy", title of her most influential book. Margaret Canovan importance can be found in her first attempt to classify populisms in families (through the Wittgenstein's notion of "family resemblance") and the idea to study populism as "a sociological category rather than an historical one". The description of Margaret Canovan's works is more specific than others because of the importance of the categories of populism she gave and because of the general idea of the strict connection between populism and democracy. The fifth fundamental author analyzed by Anselmi is Ernesto Laclau identified, along with Canovan, as "the scholar that in the last few years has contributed more than anybody else to a re-conceptualization of populism". According to Laclau populism is a modality used by political power to shape collective identity. He takes Lacanian idea of "empty signifier" according to which is possible to articulate "social demands" generated into some groups of people. Laclau importance stands in his idea of populism as a possibility for new parties to create a social basis, underlining the importance of a neutral approach to populism. As explained by Anselmi, this author thoughts are the basis of some new parties labelled as neo-populists. The last authors to whom Anselmi dedicates a chapter are Yv s M ny and Yv s Surel, two French political scientist that studied the relationships between european populisms risen in the last decade of the twentieth century and the globalization process. Their approach is an important example of an interdisciplinary attitude: they provide two main elements concurring the spread of populism that are party's transformations, linked to the subsequent snatch with the electorate, and the spread of new values from the last part of the century.

The first part of the book ends with the chapter "the recent debate" introducing some of the newest proposals of research on populism, quoting authors that wrote about populism in the new millennium. The selection of authors included is subjective but still the only criticism that can be moved to Anselmi is that he could have added more "new authors". I agree with the choice of Anselmi because the selection he made is in line with his previous choices; he gives more importance to authors who emphasize the social dimension of populism. The first question investigated in this chapter is the difference between neo-populism and "classical populism", the authors quoted are: Taggart, Woods, Wejnert, Kramer, Kesselman, Krieger, Terry Linn, Diamond,

O'Donnell. In the second part of this chapter Anselmi, basing on Gidron and Bonikowsky's classifying framework to define approaches to populism, identifies three different doctrinal trends to consider populism: as an ideology, as a communicative style and as a strategy. In the first group Mudde, Freedman, Kalwasser and Van Dijk are mentioned. The group of authors which consider populism as a discursive style, the most of them building up their theories on Laclau's work, is composed by Moffitt, Tormey, Aslanidis, Panizza and Dematteo. The last group, authors considering populism as a strategy, is composed by Jansen and Weyland. The chapter ends with a list of some of the possible critiques that can be moved to the three approaches.

The second part of the book shows the major cases of populism in history. This part is also quite subjective and the cases could be more, for instance the contemporary cases before called neo-populisms aren't present. The populist party analyzed are: Russian Narodniki (the first populist party), Latin American populisms (Peronism and the successive left wing populisms) and the Italian case of Berlusconi's tele-populism. The three are well introduced in the way to provide guidelines to include them as a comparison in the recent debate, or to develop a basic idea of the different kind of populisms.

The third and last part of the book is composed of six chapters in which are mentioned four other typologies of populism studies, the suggested ways to study it and the concluding remarks. The first typology is "Penal populism" that "primarily relates to the realm of justice and the rule of law, the proper application of laws and the social conditioning that arises from improper applications". In this regard the chapter is divided into four paragraphs, an introduction plus the three specificities in which Pratt identifies the contextualization of the penal populism. The first paragraph is about "glamourization" that means the over-spectacularization of crimes in order to produce a sense of fear into the public opinion, encouraging emotional attitudes. The second trait of penal populism is "destatisticalization". Connected with the glamourization, this term refers to the de-legitimization of institutional statements and the tendency to discuss security issues without supporting evidence, only in an emotional way. The last aspect of penal populism is labelled as "restorative and reparative penalties" that means, the willingness to overcome the reintegrative and rehabilitative aim of the punishment to emphasize a reparative character in the regards of the "community-people" betrayed. It is a way to legitimize actions against transgressors in a more proportional way between the violation and the public humiliation. The second typology named "cultural populism", as stressed throughout the book, needs to be at the basis of the comprehension of populism, that is not a merely political issue. Here the focus of the research is on the clash between an elitist character of culture and "ordinary people".

This idea is based on the formulations of McGuigan but the basis of this kind of research is Habermas' masterpiece "The structural transformation of the Public Sphere: inquiry into a category of Bourgeois society". The contextualization of a populist culture takes place in some typical traits listed and explained by Anselmi: the cultural polarization, the delegitimization of cultural institutions, the glamourization of intellectuals, the "infotainment", and the "post-truth". Afterwards he highlights how all the characters are an expression of "a social disintermediation of institutional cultural mechanisms".

The third chapter is "media populism". This kind of populism is identified as the most common type of populism among contemporary neo-populisms. The basis of this kind of study lays primarily on Kramer's 2004 book "Media Populism: A conceptual Clarification and Some Theses on Its Effects" and then shaped on his definition of it as "a technological structure which influences political participation and social consensus modalities". The chapter is developed also with the contributions of some Italian researchers as Eco, Mazzoleni and Saldini because of the leading role of Silvio Berlusconi in this kind of populism. "Tele-populism", categorized by Taguieff, is the first of the two kinds of media populism presented and it precedes the "web-populism". The latter studies are quite young, but the basis for the sociological approach proposed are Castells' research on "Network society" and the empirical examples evoked are the "Arab spring's movements" and the Italian party "MoVimento 5 stelle". The last typology of populism presented is "constitutional populism" and regards the constitutional reforms made by populist leaders who gain the presidency of the parliament. Empirical cases of study are for example Chavez's Venezuela, Morales' Bolivia or Orban's Hungary. The chapter, bearing in mind the conceptual opposition between constitutionalism and populism highlighted by Mény, Surel and Muller, analyzes the reforms of the constitutions in a populist direction. Changes in this direction are aimed to reduce the intermediation between rulers and ruled, the leader and the base, re-articulating in a hierarchical way liberal constitutions. In particular, the chapter examines the four analytical aspects that regulate constitutional populism described by Blokker, that are: popular will, majoritarianism, legal resentment and constitutional instrumentalism. The first aspect, the popular will, also described by Urbinati, is related to an idealized vision of people in a manichean sense in order to substitute the liberal architecture of the previous constitution. The second aspect, majoritarianism, that could be also called the "tyranny of the majority", for example is expressed in the limitation of the opposition's action space. The "legal resentment" is the refusal of the basic principles of modern constitutional liberalism, also called, as quoted in the book, "illiberal constitutionalism" by Thio, or "counter constitutionalism" by Scheppele. The last aspect is the "constitutional instrumental-

ism” that is also the most institutionalized phase of populism and means the use of the constitutional reforms as instruments to control the whole state system, like described by Muller. The next chapter of the third part embodies the aim of the book, as a matter of fact it is titled “How to study populism. Analytical prospects for social research”. As said before, in the whole book the importance of the social dimension for those who want to start a research about populism is emphasized, and this importance is remarked in the introduction of the chapter. Afterwards Anselmi gives his own definition of populism in which he highlights four main aspects of populism corresponding four possible guidelines to study it. Every single possibility is developed in one of the four paragraphs that compose the chapter. The first paragraph “Community-people, social mobilization and inclusion” similarly to the approaches of Jansen and Laclau is about the possibility to use populism as a strategy for a political re-socialization. The aim of these studies is to understand correlations between social backgrounds, social changes and the possibility to use the populist strategy to build up a new community people and with which traits this will be done. The second paragraph “Direct social expression of sovereignty and social disintermediation” stresses the necessity to analyze the social mechanisms of mediation and representation of power, to understand why populism message of direct social expression works. For this course of studies is mentioned the work of De Rita and Bonomi about the disintegration of what they called “society in the middle” and its function of intermediation between people and the state. The third paragraph “Manichean discourse, social polarization and political polarization” is about the radicalization of the social cleavages in politics and also in the society. Examples for this kind of researches are Ellner and Helleinger’s that show the correlation between drastic reduction of the middle class and populism in Venezuela, and the corresponding manichean exaltation of the lower class fundamental for Chavez victory. The last paragraph “Cultural backlash, cosmopolitanism, nationalism and racism” is based on a recent study of Norris and Inglehart that focuses on the connections between anti-cosmopolitanism and the racist and nationalist deviations of right-wing populisms. According to the authors, following the traces of Mudde’s work, contemporary populisms need to be watched under a long term analysis of the changes of the value system. This point of view allows to see populism as a social reaction to the values proposed by the “cosmopolitan liberalism” culture, labelling them as elitists.

The last chapter titled “Concluding remarks. Democracy and populism” is composed of five paragraphs in which Anselmi remarks the aim of the book and the importance to study the correlation between populism and democracy.

The first introductory paragraph, “which perspectives” explains the choice of the structure of the book to overcome the reductionist analysis of populism. This brings

the author to feel the need to conclude the book with some of the most important themes in relation to the link between populism and democracy. The next four paragraphs are about these themes. The following paragraph “Systemic crisis, popular sovereignty and the rise of populism” explains the double role that populism could have in relation to democracies; it could increase or diminish the quality of democracy. To understand if the rise of populist movement could be seen as a moment of democratization or not, the first fundamental step is to provide the idea of democracy to which we are referring to. The emphasis of the author is on the function of liberal democracy as a mechanism of intermediation of popular sovereignty and social power. As a matter of fact this paragraph underlines the importance to analyze the condition of social expressions of popular sovereignty in each democratic system to better understand the rise of populism in specific contexts. The third paragraph titled “Elite-populism, democracy and mass society” allows Anselmi to stress the importance to connect studies about elitism to populism studies. In the first part of the paragraph some of the classical author speaking about elitism are presented: Machiavelli, Mosca, Gramsci, Pareto to arrive to Kornhauser, who focuses on the relationship between elites, mass society and the democratic functioning of the state. Stressing the importance to investigate the accessibility to the elite, Kornhauser underlines the opposition between a pluralist liberal democracy and populist democracy in order to highlight that this gap is created by the diminishing role of intermediation of democracy and the manichean polarization shaped by populisms in history. The fourth paragraph of this chapter “Quality of democracy, populism and evaluation of democracy” provides the reader with some instruments to evaluate the functioning of democracy in specific contexts. Anselmi, basing on Morlino’s eight dimensions of quality of a democracy, suggests five points to understand if populism has increased or diminished the quality of a certain democratic system. The examined points are: the role of law, the electoral accountability, the interinstitutional accountability, the participation and the responsiveness. In the author’s opinion those points could help in a first evaluation of the democratic system and in underlining the dynamic aspects of populisms. The last paragraph “Globalization, populism and change in democratic paradigms at global scale” represents, with the author’s words, “the true challenge of research on populism”. Basing on the recent works of Moffit in this paragraph the role played by globalization in the process of change in the paradigms of the democratic system is emphasized. Overcoming the national borders the main idea is that there has been a “revolution of democratic paradigms”, as Khun defines the changes started from the Sixties, that could be seen as affirmed in what Crouch described as Post-Democracy. These changes of democracy play an essential role in understanding the impact and the rise of contemporary populisms.

To conclude, this book can be considered as a useful handbook for students or for researchers that want to take their first steps into the growing literature on populism. Remarking during the whole book the importance to have a sociological and political approach, the author also gives an important direction to this “new comers” helping them not to fall in the trap of the famous “Cinderella complex” stated by Isaiah Berlin after the 1967 conference on populism.