

PATRYCJA PICHNICKA-TRIVEDI (ORCID: 0000-0002-9043-6451)

Populistic Rhetoric: Structures Over Senses

This article makes a comparative study of American and Polish rightist populisms and their ways of operating using structural analysis of their discourses as a main tool of examination. It aims to prove that those are indeed structural similarities that are responsible for the success of populisms in diverse environments. While examining examples of populist rhetorics and noticing the surprising efficacy of similar discourse in different political and social conditions, I expose internal structure of populism(s). I state that populism(s) is constructed mostly by and on empty signifiers. Those signifiers can then be matched in broader structures, of which the most fundamental one is the opposition: “We”—“Them”. Such mythological structures are flexible enough so that any subject or object can be inscribed into them. They are also flexible enough to transgress the borders of one domain and to transgress state borders: to “wander” around the global world.

Keywords: populism, structure, discourse, empty signifier

Introduction

In recent years, we have observed a sudden growth of populist rhetoric in public space and the great success of populist politics and populist politicians all over the world. It is important to discover reasons for this popularity as well as to analyse how populism operates. As extraordinary as it can seem, although most scientists agree about the triumph of populism in contemporary democracies, there is no clear definition of populism.¹ Mostly, this is due to the confusion engendered by the fact that there is no classical program of populism such as it is in conservative, liberal, socialist, anarchist movements. Thus, for some commentators, populism seems a form of politics (taken by very diverse formations) rather than a political orientation itself. In this article, I will prove that, at least in the case of populism, the form, or rather the structure, is *the ideology*. I agree here with Margaret Canovan: “Clarification can, I believe, be achieved if we shift our attention from the ideology and policy content of populist movements and concentrate instead on structural considerations. (...) structural feature (...) dictates populism’s characteristic legitimating framework, political style and mood” (Canovan 1981, 3); or Benjamin Moffit who affirms “taking stylistic characteristics seriously” (Moffit 2019, 1397). For him, political style embraces discourse, rhetoric and aesthetics joined together by performance. When Ruth Wodak writes about “content” of rightist populisms, which differentiates them from other ideologies (Wodak 2015, 1), she means affective (and structural) content, not the content of senses, logics or program: she means the content of fear as fundamental for populism. It is important to note here that structure is not reduced to a form: it is indeed dangerous to think of populism as purely formal (*ibid.*, 3). Populism contains both form and content, only its content is rather structural than significant (in a sense of referring to any Real outside of populist discourse space).

Populism is the ideology of structures over senses; it is pure rhetoric, but rhetoric is pure politics in this case. This becomes evident in the light of reports, both from the West and East Europe: Daniel Oesch analyses data from Austria, Belgium, France, Norway and Switzerland to show that the only common reasons for voting for Right Populist Parties are cultural ones, support for the role of “values” (economical reasons and alienation—distrust in other political leaders and institu-

1 This situation persists since Peter Wiles made his famous enumeration (Wiles 1969).

tions—are not that common; Oesch 2008) and so shows the report of Maciej Gdula (2017), who even points at the very discursive character of the support for RPP: Political identification erases real life experiences of voters and political discourse makes them see their own lives as variations of narrations of populist politics.

In this article, I am planning to make discursive analysis and present a comparative case study of central (American) and semi-peripheral (mostly Polish) populism. I will analyse populist discourses in those countries in their social, political, cultural and economical environments, tracing the similarities and differences between them. I will be mostly interested in specific discursive structures of populism: their construction and ways of operating. My focus is on rightist populism, which I consider as “populism.” Herbert Kitschelt defines it: “In the case of the new radical right, the winning formula is a combination of neo-liberal market policies” (as opposed to welfare state policies) and a “socially and politically authoritarian and xenophobic agenda” (Kitschelt 2002, 180). I consider so-called “leftist populism” as a variation of popularised socialist ideology.²

For my purposes, the most interesting theories regarding populism were made by Margaret Canovan, Paolo Cossarini, Benjamin Moffit and Nicolas Demertzis as well as Robert Matyja and Marcin Napiórkowski. I am also using the theory of ideology of Pierre Ansart (1977). For Ansart, ideology is composed of discourse, form and medium (material, virtual and institutional), broadcaster and recipient; it is not the content but the form which decides the meaning and efficiency (ibid., 15). For Ansart, ideology rather than the interest of particular groups, as Karl Marx wanted, is the key factor of all and each politics, and ideologies are rather symbolic rather than rational or practical. Ideology is

2 About the leftist populism and the differences (even oppositions) with rightist one, see: Chantal Mouffe (2008). Similar opinion is shared by Paulina Tambakiki (2019), Óskar Garcia Augustin (2019), Simon Tormey (2019), Marco d'Eramo (2013), Jason Glynos and Aurelien Mondon (2019). Mouffe proves that rightist populism has more in common with political liberalism than with leftist populism (Mouffe 2020). She quotes Peter Mair (2013) statement about liberal “ruling the void”: liberal void and rightist populist emptiness (as in empty signifier) seem related, with the difference that liberal post-political void is deprived of emotions and populist empty signifiers are fulfilled with them. Mouffe blames liberalist system for the emergence of rightist populisms (and sees the only solution in leftist populisms). Panayota Gounari is even more severe: she writes that rightist populisms and fascisms are actually the product of capitalism, the real ruler of the world, who uses fascisms to sustain the domination of capital in the times of crisis, when usual bourgeois ways are no longer efficient (Gounari 2018).

efficient and functional because it has material consequences, but it is not practical in a sense that it realises material interests of its supporters.³ Nicolas Demertzis formulates this a little differently, as for him, political orientations usually work in the name of interests of particular groups, and only populism is different as it operates in the name of passions and emotions, expressed through the symbolic ideology.⁴ That is why populism is so successful, as emotions (thus, ideologies and identities built up on them) are most efficient, and mostly mobilising is the emotion of resentment, feeling of injustice, adequate or not (Demertzis 2006, 103–122).

I will also use the operational notion of the empty signifier. This was recently broadly exploited by Emmy Eklundh (2019) in her analysis of populism. She refers to Ernesto Laclau, who in his turn based on Lacanian conception of subject formation. According to this conception, subject is never fully constituted but always in the middle of being formed, always trying to realise itself through symbolic order (subjectification), through language. Laclau transposed this idea onto collective identities. Thus, no signifier has a value and content on its own; it is empty by itself, constantly being remade and re-signified. That is exactly why they can function as a unifying factor for a whole range of people

3 For Marx ideology functions precisely because it is a system that realises the interests of certain political groups (Marx 2001). For Ansart realisation of material interests of a political group is not a necessary condition of existence and efficiency of political ideology.

4 If all politics uses emotions, populism is specific: it operates in the name of affects of a political group. It does not only appeal to passions and emotions to serve particular group interests. It incites passions and emotions which sometimes even stand in opposition with material interests of a group, as report of Maciej Gdula seems to prove (Gdula 2017). Thus it seems that if theory of Marx, as mentioned above, can apply to most political ideologies, it does not apply well to populism: on the contrary Ansart's theory seems perfectly fit to analyse the phenomenon of populism.

In the view of Ansart, populism would be a political ideology par excellence, not something ontologically distinct form other political ideologies, but rather a perfect realisation of what political ideology indeed is. This opinion seems to be shared by such contemporary researchers as Ernest Laclau: "Populism is (...) a way of constructing the political" and "there is no political intervention that is not to some extent populist" (Laclau 2005, IX). Populism for Laclau is a spectrum on which range all political phenomenons who very often share and dispute the same empty signifiers.

In this article I do not claim to decide whatever difference between populism and other political ideologies is ontological or gradual, but I rather focus on the nature of this difference i.e. specific nature of populism that is almost purely discursive.

and represent a wide range of demands. There is a desire for fullness which cannot be achieved and creates false universals. Populist “people” are unifying yet highly symbolic constructs.

Eklundh admits that meaning, and thus social identities, are formed linguistically. Signifiers get their meaning with affective/emotional investment. She focuses mostly on the affective dimensions (therefore, Lacanian and Laclau’s approach, with their focus on empty signifiers as expression of desire). I will, however, focus more on linguistic, structural dimension (therefore, a more Lévi-Straussian approach, close to the one used by Paolo Cossarini; 2019).⁵ Another very interesting remark she made concerns the figure of the populist leader as a signifier of identity. I would say the leader is signifier of the signifier (identity itself is a signifier), creating a double mirroring.

In the first part of this article, I will briefly recapitulate some contexts and reasons of the rise of populisms in such different parts of the world as the USA and Poland. In the second part of this article, I am going to examine some examples of populist speech. I am going to focus on the surprising similarities between the language of both (Polish and American) populist political environments.⁶ Finally, I will try to bring the light on reasons of the efficacy of the same discourse in different political and social conditions. I will search for this reason in the structure(s) of populist discourse(s) it(them)self(ves).

The analysis of particular enunciations will lead to broader discursive structures created by populism, of which the most important is semiotic division on “we” (“the people”) and “the enemy.” The last part of this article will be devoted to populist strategies/techniques, which in the case of populism are per-formative. The characteristics that make populist rhetoric logically weak decide its political strength. Semiotic notions reflect basic human ways of thinking and basic emotional needs, like the need to alienate the unacceptable and purify oneself by defining

5 However Lacanian approach is linguistic and structural just like Levi-Strauss’ approach, there are important differences between theories of those two researchers: while Lévi-Strauss is mostly (post)structuralist, Jacques Lacan’s approach is strongly rooted in psychoanalysis (Lévi-Strauss refers to psychoanalysis frequently but rather as to an object of study than as to a methodological tool). (See: Simonis 2010. However author focuses on another aspect of the researchers’ work, he resumes differences between them quite exhaustively).

6 In order to gather analytical material, I read newspapers, watched TV programs (newspapers and TV programs known for supporting populists as well as those known for sharpest critics of populists) but above all I followed social medias, choosing populists enunciations which had most fervent reactions (both supportive and/or critical).

Mythological notions are created and become empty signifiers in which any subject or object can be inscribed.

clear boundaries between oneself and the rejected. Mythological notions are created and become empty signifiers in which any subject or object can be inscribed. Emotive discursive signifiers can transmit freely from one category onto another (e.g. from economics to racial issues) and from one subject to another (e.g. from Jewish to LGBTQ+ people) as well as from one place to another (e.g. from the USA to Poland). Notions are freely matched like pieces of puzzle. That is why in the populist discourse, different issues converge to create such surprising statements as: Black Jewish people will change our children into gays. The populist discourse does not operate on senses but on structures, which reproduce the internal structures of human psyche and basic mechanisms of society forming.

This article purposely does not contain any predictions about the future of populism as populism and its development are unpredictable. Lack of final positive statements also depicts the very essence of populism, whose empty signifying rhetoric goes around an endless hermeneutic circle.

Conditions of Populisms

In the global order, countries are grouped in what Irvin C. Schick called archipelagos of dominance (Schick 1999).⁷ Central/core (Western/North), semi-peripheral and peripheral (East/South) countries and regions (forming a kind of minority in the global world) are all organised in a network of mutual relations, either in a proto/quasi/postcolonial relations of imitation and/or submission, in relations of oppression-resistance, or in relations of complicated mixtures of both. This forms what Arjun Appadurai called skeleton of the world in opposition to a trans-border cellular system (Appadurai 2006).

Nations category is not the only category of domination but also categories of race, ethnicity, gender, sex; they intersect with each other

⁷ Conception has some similarities with the Wallerstein's world system theory, the latter one being used to analyse marginal, peripheral and semi-peripheral populisms by Jeremiah Morelock and Felipe Ziotti Narita (2018). This is of course not the only work concerning populisms in non-core countries, eg. whole Special Issue of *Journal of Language and Politics*, edited by Ruth Wodak and Michał Krzyżanowski, has been dedicated to the subject of populisms in diverse countries of America and Europe (Wodak and Krzyżanowski 2017). However the question of systematic difference between Western core countries and other countries was not flaunted in there.

(Collins 1993), clash and compete. Even in the most powerful countries, there are still local minorities, oppressed, discriminated or marginalised groups. They compete with each other through categories (e.g. low class whites vs. marginalised races) inside them (e.g. black people vs. Hispanic people). The same rivalry happens in global relations (which leads e.g. to hate and fear of local working class towards immigrant working class). Intersections also further complicate the relations of power and domination locally (who are dominating in relationships of black male and white woman?) as well as globally (who is in position of power: black American or white Ukrainian?). This raises not only the rivalry of groups but also the competition of systems of discrimination. A skeleton world-system competes with a cellular one. The latter one creates a new kind global, transnational minorities, such as Muslims, objects in marginalisation in many regions.⁸ Again, this can be seen as part of a colonial symbolic influence of global powers on peripheral and semi-peripheral countries who imitate the hate and fears of the most powerful global actors.

Rivalry also concerns two general orientations, which Napiórkowski calls “turbo” and “soft patriotism” (Napiórkowski 2019). Tension between these two is even greater than tension between patriotism and non-patriotism; anyways, for turbo patriotism every other attitude is anti-patriotic. Soft patriotism is the patriotism of liberals and some leftists. It is open, inclusive, aiming for modernisation and targeting future (utopian orientation). In the West, it means focusing on the individual (liberal) or on the minorities (leftist) in internal as well as in global dimension. In non-Western countries, soft patriotism is openly pro-Western: in Poland’s case, mostly pro-European. Polish soft patriotism constructs its West, seeing it as secular, tolerant, progressive, open for the Others; Polish soft patriots try to follow the example of such a West, preaching openness on internal and external Others (including immigrants from the least privileged countries). Soft patriots are critical towards their own country’s history and social life, hunting down xenophobia, misogyny or homophobia.

In Western countries, emancipative politics and loss of privileges of gender or race brings frustration of those who used to have those privileges and who now complain about being discriminated on their turn. Also, many people who are racially or sexually privileged are indeed

8 In Poland there was a very interesting case of Appadurai’s global minorities issues: relatively little amount of Muslims and relatively big Islamophobia. However, this also seems specifically Polish regarding the fact that there are almost no more Jews in Poland, but anti-semitism remains. See: Buchowski 2016.

structurally marginalised in the realm of class. Moreover, it does happen that they are discriminated by middle class soft patriots with the aid of accusations of misogyny. Whether those accusations are just or unjust, for some middle class and urban people, they serve mostly to highlight their superiority over lower classes or provincial people.⁹ Populists use feelings of resentment and frustration. In non-Western countries like Poland, there is an additional factor in class relations: westernisation. Lower classes and provinces are generally less westernised than middle class and cities. The pro-Western orientation of middle classes can seem and sometimes indeed be a symbolic colonisation. A rightist populist exploits the feeling of marginalisation of lower classes on a country scale and of Poles on a global scale, using a turbo patriot stance. They transpose global marginalisation onto all internal relations claiming that Poles are marginalised in their own country. The ethnically dominating group is thus rhetorically constructed as discriminated. They claim all accusations of xenophobia, homophobia, anti-semitism and others are attacks on their countries (indeed, such accusations from the core countries happen to be not only an advocacy for the weakest, but also a tool of domination: showing off backwardness of non-Western countries). But they gladly use the same accusations to discriminate further Others (mostly Muslims, but also generally Africans or Asians, who are supposed to oppress their women); of course, populists do not see their own politics as including chauvinist ideas (Wodak 2015, 22).

It is worth noticing here the hidden relations between populism and capitalism and neo-liberalism (or neoliberal capitalism). Populism is not only, as Chantal Mouffe (2018; 2020) wanted a response to the liberalism (liberal capitalism), but also its result. Capitalism enables emergence of populism not only in a sense that populism is a reaction to liberal (capitalist) “lack of politics,” an escape into the conservative dream about political solidarity of the nation. Capitalism also creates economical, material conditions for the development of populist parties. It creates class inequalities which can be used by populists: social anger can be incited and then projected from the object that caused it (capitalism) to objectified subjects (minority groups, migrants etc). But capitalism does even more for populism: it is its hidden core. Populists exploit capitalist inequalities, criticising them and perpetuating the capitalist system. They project the blame onto some groups (treacherous elites, immigrants, foreign forces, minority groups), but they never blame the

9 On how populism appeal to those who feel deprived and cheated, see Gounari 2018.

system itself. They also never tend to reform it: so-called social reforms (like the ones gladly flaunted by PiS in Poland) are rather a cosmetic move of social distribution instead of in-depth structural reformations of the economic system. On the contrary, populism enters into an alliance with capitalism, shockingly joining advocacy for “people” with cooperation with highest class; it is only the “treacherous” middle class who is the enemy. The most flagrant contemporary example of such a cooperation is, of course, the figure of Donald Trump as a populist leader.

Populistic turbo patriotism is a patriotism of conservative right built on the sensation of threat, be it real or imagined. It is exclusive, traditional, cherishing history and memory, oriented towards the past (retrotopia¹⁰). It affirms purity and strict borders between “us” and “Others”; it is obsessed with defined identity and focuses on community. Again, in the West there are internal “Others” (sexual, gender, race ones) and external ones (immigrants from semi-peripheral and peripheral countries). In semi-peripheral countries, things are more complex: apart from internal “Others” and immigrants from peripheral countries, there can be immigrants from core countries of the West. Turbo patriotism’s attitude towards the West is complicated: there is a need to resist global hegemony but also an aspiration to be part of it, there is imitation and rejection. Here Napiórkowski’s analysis needs to be completed: in fact, turbo patriots/populists in semi-peripheral countries such as Poland, construct two Wests, two figures, bad one and good one. There is “good” West: an inspiration, an ally, a leader on the path of conservatism. And there is “bad” West: West-enemy or West-victim of its own faults. “Good” West is rightist: it is exemplary (source of discursive munitions, as calls it Napiórkowski (2019, 134)). “Bad” West is liberal and leftist: this is either the hegemonic one, imposing its rules and its political correctness, or the spoiled degenerated weak West, destroyed by enemies it had let in, in need of protection from its own mistakes. And sometimes the image of “bad” West contains both features. In the Polish nationalist imagination, these two symbolic West have their geopolitical *lieux*.

In fact, turbo patriots/
populists in semi-peri-
pheral countries such as
Poland, construct two
Wests, two figures, bad
one and good one.

10 As Zygmunt Bauman wrote in his book *Retrotopia*, the distinctive division between “us” and “them,” “Other(s),” is linked to nostalgia for the past: for in the past finding an “Other” was a main factor of social progress (progress is understood as building institutions containing more people): each time the term of “us” was widened (ex. from tribes/regions/villages to nations) it was due to finding a new, common Other. However this process reached its edge in the times of globalisation. Thus othering is a part of retrotopia (an anachronistic process) and retrotopia bases on othering.

The good one is the USA (or even Anglo-Saxon countries), whereas the bad one is European Union, especially Germany. Analogically, Poland is and is not West. In relation to the Good West, she is one, or aspires to be one, performing symbolically colonial Bhabian imitation. In relation to the bad West, either she is not Western or she is more Western than the degenerate old West, who has forgotten its “real” values, who needs to be protected from itself and protected by truly “Western” Poland.

The excess of populism is also the excess of ideology. As Pierre Ansart noticed, at the end of 20th century, many scientists announced the end of ideologies and the rise of an era of pure economism. However, people need ideologies, and pure economism can be highly frustrating, especially for less privileged individuals, social groups and whole countries that are in relationships of dependency towards global capitalistic powers (states and corporations).¹¹ Those frustrations are used by populism(s), whose relationships with capitalism remain obscure: rightist populists support the system, but they gain popularity on exploiting and re-directing the feelings of resentment caused by capitalist inequalities.

In Eastern European countries, after decommunization, the idea of so-called non-ideological liberal economism and progressivism was linked to westernisation. It failed because of the weakness of liberal democracy itself (Krastev and Holmes 2019) and because of the specificity of transformation. Initial enthusiasm for the liberal market and democracy was finally replaced by deception with inequities and with etatism, which survived the fall of communism. The state as institution is weak. There is no state theory. In fact, in most of post communist countries, the reformers thought it was enough to correct communist institutions. They neglected building the administrative core of the country, and in fact, they have left the previous system of ruling the state intact: clientelism, treating state administration and national companies as property of ruling party.

Poland has its nationalist populism for four types of reasons (Matyja 2018): global (paradoxically, nationalism, claiming national pride against liberal and leftist servile Western imitating is itself inspired by global, means mostly Western, movements¹²); specific for (semi) peripheral

11 See: Ansart 1977; Matyja 2018; Krastev and Holmes 2019.

12 For analysis of the impact of globalisation in general for populisms all around the world, see Fuchs and Klingemann 2019. If in non-western countries globalisation engenders fears of West and of further non-West-than-we-are, then West isn't free of fear either (as was mentioned in this article there is fear of all coming from non-West). Also, globalisation causes important challenges for

countries; specific for post communist countries; and finally specific for Poland only. The latter being mostly conditioned by Polish history, the long history of fighting for survival: a lack of what Matyja calls a political nation due to a historical lack of state (the only existing nation in Poland is a cultural one, a community of one culture, of one language or even of one ethnicity), obsession of independence, as Napiórkowski calls it, or romantic paradigm that doesn't want to die, as Maria Janion described it (Janion 2000).

Populist Discourse

Populists are reputed to make unrealistic promises, summed up by this demiurge statement: "Only I/we [the party] can do this" (Snyder 2017, 68). But there are far more techniques they use. Another mostly associated with populism is adulation of recipients. This, however, doesn't come to simple cajoling. Usually, it is based on references to their identity—not to the real strength or prestige of the country or the nation, but to the sensation of power and importance. That is why the statement about "rising from the knees" became one of the key factors of success of the Polish ruling party.

The identity of the target group is built in opposition to others. The identities are built on general levels: "Semitic element," "Muslim element," and "Teutonic element." They are even further generalised in identities "us"—"not us" (like "Poland"—"not Poland"; Napiórkowski 2019, 258), where the latter can be every- and anyone: German, Russian, Jew, Ukrainian, immigrant-Muslim-terrorist, (neo)Marxist, Feminist, LGBT person, member of degenerate elites - traitor who serves enemy). "We" are the good element; "We" represent the realm of order, hierarchy, tradition, "normalcy," while outside "us" there is chaos, monstrosity, degeneration. "Non us" are othered not only in a way described by the classical book of Edward Said (1978) but in a way that evokes Julia Kristeva's conception of abject (Kristeva 1980), for populism seems to be obsessed with the image of the dangerous Other: within this obsession a passionate hatred neighbours a strange fasciation, creating a mixture of repulsion and libidinous obsession.

Such a construction of Other is also necessary to construct the figure of a hero and the image of heroic struggle. "We" need to protect ourse-

democracy (Fuchs and Klingemann 2019).

lves (and “ours”: families, women, lands...) ¹³ from “invasion,” “flood” (Napiórkowski 2019, 37, 202, 206, 212, 217). Fear (inducing the felt necessity of defence) is central to populism (Wodak 2015). That is why favourite rhetorical figures are those of armour, fortresses, and walls. Finally, the figure of the knight/hussar in armour, protecting Poland from the Bolshevik/LGBT invasion was used on posters of the Independence March. Wall was one of the beloved fantasies of Donald Trump: building a wall on the Mexican border, dreaming about putting crocodiles there... (Dunn 2019). The image of a wall, a rampart, is historically one of Polish nationalists’ favourite ones. ¹⁴ However, Napiórkowski shows that even an image of an umbrella can be used (an umbrella protecting Polish families from LGBT and gender propaganda): every artefact that is hard, stiff and protective.

Those perceptions of reality in categories of general elements are linked to a populist view on history in terms of historical analogies: thus, surprising analogies between Leonidas-Sobieski-Piłsudski, Persians-Huns-bolsheviks-nazis-feminists/LGBT-immigrants etc. (Napiórkowski 2019, 239). The vision of history is a vision of constant fighting of good (our country) against evil (the enemies), and history becomes eschatology, as all historical references give to actual events clear moral meaning. In this fight, “We” have always been heroes or noble victims, ¹⁵ which guarantees us the right to eternal gratitude, recognition or recompense from the rest of world and monopoly for being morally right.

Knowledge of this mythology is perfectly known by populists: their diagnosis is always right because they create and perform the world rather than simply describing it. With a simple phrase—“Those who are not standing at the side of Poles, but at the side of those, who are not Poles”—Jarosław Kaczyński (2018), leader of PiS, the ruling party in Poland, incites pride, reminds us about historical roots and traces the shadow of an enemy, another reincarnation of the eternal foe. This permits him to make a paradoxical and irrational association between Germans taking revenge and going back for lands in Mazury and judges who protest against the reform of courts. He makes a sharp and

13 “Normalcy” is usually male, heterosexual and white (and in countries of colour, in South Asia, South America, Africa: fair-skinned) and has some religion (like Christianity in the USA, even more exclusively catholic Christianity in Poland).

14 In the moment of publishing of this article the vision of wall built on the border (this time a Polish-Belarussian border) is closer to the realisation than ever.

15 About the status of victim as a kind of capital for revindications, see Chaumont 2017.

clear yet undefined division between “us” and “them,” so that every recipient can identify with the good ones (Poles) if only they¹⁶ support PiS and inscribes himself into the symbolic domain: which is easy as there are no specific conditions or definitions. The statement unites and mobilises, does not irritate with clarifications and does not permit to disagree. It is a perfect example of an empty signifier: deprived of sense, yet meaningful. It raises strong emotions which are used to induce (or amplify) the feeling of crisis and/or threat. Populism aims to induce crisis through passionate dramatization and performance (Moffit 2019, 1345).

The basic populist structure is opposition between “people” and “not people,” which contains the (opponent) elite, minorities, opponents and/or other groups. “First, they attempt to create a homogeneous, essentially undifferentiated community which deliberately excludes those not belonging, the other” (Deiwiks 2009, 2–3). Ruth Wodak notices that “people” in populism (through reference to its etymology and the Latin word *populus*) designs the community as a whole, as one entity, not as a group of individuals (Wodak 2015, 8). Populism usually proposes a scapegoat(s): although populism is an anti-elitist movement, usually violence is catalysed towards the weak minorities, be it immigrants (USA, Poland), LGBT (Poland), women (“gender ideology” fear in Poland, misogynous behavior of Trump), other races or religions. In 2015, populists focused on immigration issues, mostly in connection with Islamophobia (Forchtner, Krzyżanowski and Wodak 2013) and refugee crisis, but also spreading the reluctance of other types of migrations and immigrants (Mexicans in the USA, Ukrainians in Poland; Krzyżanowska and Krzyżanowski 2018). In fact, the notion of “people” and “the other” are very fluent and undefined. “»People« can refer to the whole population of a country but also to a fraction of it, those individuals with a particular nationality or culture” (Deiwiks 2009, 2). It is discursively constructed by every populist movement and then performed in every speech: it is being constructed and reconstructed even within one populist movement. “People” is in fact not only the main subject of populism (as populists loudly claim), but also an object of continuous negotiations and dispute about the right to represent it

16 In my article I use neutral “they” to denote 3rd person singular, except in few cases, notably when referring to a populist leader and “Little Man ideology.” In both maleness is a conjectural feature of the denoted person [sometimes despite the actual gender of the leader, which can be explained by Ernst Kantorowicz theory of symbolic body (Kantorowicz 2016); however not in the case of Poland or the USA, where leaders are males].

(thus, the right to govern over it) as well as an audience of political performance.

The creation of “people” happens through ideological integration: the individual internalises and reproduces ideology. Ansart enumerates three elements: “make believe,” “make love,” “make act” (Ansart 1977, 211–220). “Make believe” is more than to make individuals surrender to an imposed sense, it is to make them internalise this sense and then reproduce it and conduct themselves accordingly. Ideology satisfies the basic human needs of identity and social connections. “Make believe” is doubled by “make love.” Ideology proclaims values that are worthy of love, respect and effort tells what is wrong and what is right, making the subject’s world simpler and thus controllable. The individual also finds in the ideology the way of expression of their own hatred and injuries, and projects their own libido onto their group.¹⁷ Ideologies “transpose the everyday banality into the dramatic grandeur (...) noblesse of the tragedy where the heroes confront” (ibid., 216). A subject, by embracing ideology, embraces idealised identification and magnifies themselves. Thus, Adorno wrote about the important narcissistic component of ideological identification (Adorno 1981).

This way, through internalisation, ideology controls the subject and enters all sectors of private and social life. Maciej Gdula, analysing motivations of right populist supporters, noticed a very interesting fact: political narration erases real biography. Among PiS supporters, even people who managed really well in their lives complain about poverty, social injustice and the bad life of the Polish nation during the previous liberal government, letting their own personal experience be marginalised by their political identification (Gdula 2017, 37). The feeling of community, feeling of power, dignity and importance are the main reasons for support towards PiS (ibid.).

Those feelings are confirmed in moments of collective exaltations, participation and sharing of affects: massive chanting, singing. Ansart points out that the sense is less important than affective communion. Such moments are introduced by a leader who also assures communion by turning aggressive impulses outside the group, onto external objects. “Make believe” and “make love” join to create “make act.” Goals are described and one common will is created—it exists by the act of being

17 On the libidinal aspect of ideological mass formation and the stages of ideological identification through libidinal bond, see also Adorno 1981. However, although Adorno wrote about the fascist movement, fascist ideology and fascist leaders, his remarks apply as well to ideological formation and identification in general (and populist identification especially).

proclaimed. Ideology becomes a force of production in every sense (production of power, economical production), but it can also become legitimised violence. Every subject of the group feels like a depositary of the justice and law, supporter of the good, active and extremely mobilised, representing universal truth and morality. Opposition is seen as irrational, harmful, even sacrilege. For Theodor Adorno, it has again a libidinal, narcissistic dimension: the followers magnify themselves through othering the non-followers and the different.

Anti-elitism—regardless of the fact that by taking part in political life and competing for state power, they do aspire to create their own elites—usually takes the form of what Niels Bjerre-Poulsen calls “the worship of the Little Man,” of his quiet heroism, his common sense and his uncorrupted nature. To politicians, the concept has the obvious advantage that it doesn’t require any class definition. The “Little Man” can be a small manufacturer as well as a worker. This figure, such as the communal figure of “the people,” remains vague. He is only defined in his antagonism towards the elite. In the same manner that the concept of “the Little Man” can unite supporters in their antagonism towards the elite, it can also legitimise the populist leader who obviously is a “great Little Man” himself. Theodor Adorno explained this auto-creation as a flattering of supporters narcissistic libido (Adorno 1981): a leader is a superman and an ordinary man together. Therefore, the narcissistic aspirations of supporters can be projected onto him (because he seems so similar to ordinary men), and in his person they are accomplished. Thus, Donald Trump poses for an ordinary American who succeeded, flattering ambitions of the “Little Man” he represents. As a spokesman for all “Little Men,” his political leadership almost achieves the dimensions of a direct democracy (Bjerre-Poulsen 1986, 32). The “Little Man” image also helps to show the populist leader as an outsider, a non-elite person—a rebel.

Although (or rather because?) rightist populism feeds on inequities and judges them quite well, it does not propose to really reform a liberal economical system. Rather than changing the realm of the Real, populists prefer to change the realm of the Symbolic (Demertzis 2006). They “manage real problems with symbolic means”: pride and right to expression, “they create symbolic space in which the unsatisfied have the right to express themselves but cannot change their condition” (Napiórkowski 2019, 48). The image of a castle surrounded by enemies also drives attention away from reforms (ibid., 217). Every frustration is catalysed towards the enemy—in fantasies about war or in real violence, usually towards minorities. That is why populists attack political correctness. That is also what finally erases class differences: both reports

of Daniel Oesch and Maciej Gdula show that the support for right populists is not reduced to lower classes, but exists in major parts of middle class, on the cultural, usually national basis.

However, despite the actual embracement of populist ideologies by the middle class people, the middle class city-resident (best represented by populist discourse in the figure of the hipster) remains the symbolic enemy. It is a target of populist reluctance while upper class and even millionaires (Donald Trump) can become populist leaders. This is fundamental difference between Left and Populist Right: although both denounce inequities, Left places conflict between the richest and the big corporations on the one side, and the rest of the population on the other and blames capitalism as a system. Populistic Right places conflict between the middle class (easier reachable enemy) on the one side and the working class on the other, and sees big capitalism as the ally of the working class in the fight with liberal institutions that promote “false” victims of “non-existing” discrimination at the expense of the “normal” people (Napiórkowski 2019, 147–148). Trump is “normal people” far more than any working class supporter of the Left; he is what every “normal people” would be, if not for state protection of “false” unprivileged (ibid., 149). The same goes for Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, former president of one of the greatest banks. Populism at the same time builds bridges over class differences thanks to the idea of national (ethnic) unanimity, but it also exploits them to redirect animosities towards those of middle and upper class who are culturally, ideologically different.

Perhaps this unexpected alliance between the upper and working classes is due to retrospective tendencies of rightist populisms: middle class is a product of modernity. This can be best observed in non-Western countries such as India,¹⁸ in which old social structure (caste) and modern social structure (class) intersect and not always meet. Few of the old elite (upper castes) have lost their position due to economical changes induced by liberal (global) capitalism. Those changes have not been particularly beneficial for the lowest castes either, those who didn't have enough social, educational and cultural capital to use. However, the new middle

18 India has become my second motherland since the time of marriage. However I do not claim any competence yet in the matters of India and my few notes have character of rather loose observations. I owe them to my husband, Bhavin Trivedi, with whom I always disagreed, to my friend and scholar Shreemoyee Chattopadhyay, with whom I mostly agreed and to most inspiring meeting with Natalia Bloch during PhD Candidate Summer School “Migracje przymusowe – interwencje antropologiczne”, Instytut Etnologii i Antropologii Kulturowej, Warszawa, September–October 2019.

class has risen. Indian nationalism somehow re-groups upper and lower classes, upper and lower castes against liberals of middle class. In Poland, the revolution which declassed old aristocracy and noblesse took place many years ago, after the Second World War, but, as written by Andrzej Leder, it was slept over (Leder 2014), not noticed in the symbolic national imagery. Thus, the nationalistic image operates with representations of noblesse, presenting populists and their supporters (even those from working class) as heirs of knights and noblemen, while liberalism is seen as the ideology of middle class, materialistic un-romantic *bourgeois*.

One of the key resources to create a populist world is vocabulary: its use and its creation. Vocabulary changes the world and imposes the frame of discourse over everyone on the political scene; it forces populists' opponents to speak populists' language, a domain in which they always win (Lakoff 2004). In Poland, it means constant arguments about which party's members (PiS or opposition PO) were more involved (considered compromised) in the communist past. Populistic vocabulary is coherent and convincing even if illogical: words refer to each other, and their primary lack of significance is unnoticed (Napiórkowski 2019, 57). Also thanks to such *démarches* as "plaiting" or repetition. The first one

Permits to speak very fluently, making enunciations which seem very coherent and dense. The secret lies in consequent use of few carefully selected and frequently repeated notions and (...) simple trick consisting on beginning each sentence with a key word with which previous sentence ended. (ibid., 59)

The later one happens not only within one speech, but within total discourse, and as noticed by Timothy Snyder (2017, 65–71), serves many purposes. It makes believable what is false, gives opponents Homeric epithets ("Hillary Swindler," "Ted Liar" in Trump's politics, "Tusk Traitor" in PiS rhetorics), and helps to draw attention away from populists' own incompetence.

Napiórkowski particularly analyses the invention/use of two words: oikophobia and antipolonism. The first notion was introduced by Roger Scruton (1993; example of the use of "good" West rhetorical munition) to describe the phenomenon in Great Britain and the USA. Scruton stated that multicultural politics lead white majority members to restrict the rights of their own groups; speaking in populist terms: to hate their own. The adaptation of the notion of "oikophobia" is very interesting: it symbolically associates Poles with Western (of course, conservative) majorities, although, in reality, Polish immigrants in the West can

instead be regarded as one of discriminated minorities who do need protection of multicultural politics. Oikophobia is a term used by Polish nationalists to describe those who “hate their own country.” However few of the nationalistic allegations are justified, in nationalistic agenda, the notion of oikophobia serves mostly to hide xenophobia, nationalism or even fascism, to reverse every accusation of intolerance and to make the accused one a victim of oikophobic attack. “Antipolonism” is used in the same goal.

Both notions permit populists to present majority as marginalised, discriminated and in need of emancipation and to present themselves as rebels against the system, fighting for this emancipation (independently from the fact that populists legitimise themselves by this system, claiming to represent democratic will of people (Canovan 1999, 15). Ruth Wodak writes about the strategy of victim-perpetrator reversal (Wodak 2015): populists show majority as attacked by minorities (and elites who support minorities instead of their “own”) and populist leaders show themselves as being representative victims of such attacks, suffering attacks in the name of “people” and truth. They use strategy of denial: they deny any discriminative attitudes from their part and present those accusations as an aggression of which they are victims.

Rightists somehow stole leftists’ optics and strategies. They are now using alternative and vernacular medias; they have turned mediatisation of politics for their benefit.¹⁹ They have taken leftist discursive structures and philosophical insights. They use the post-modern view that there are many truths to lance their own truth, as opposed to “official” truth. At the same time, they declare that there is only one truth: the populist one (Thomlinson 2018; Kokutani 2018). It is worth noting that the face of populist truth is changing according to circumstances (Bryant 2019).

One of the most widely spread populist strategies is to present “alternative facts” (frequently being just lies or conspiracy theories) and claim that opposite media show “fake news.” As pointed out by Fernando Vallespin and Máriam M. Bascuñán (2019, 3931–4471) populists create a world in which reality is irrelevant. This results in the loss of trust in experts. Populists present every question as simple and every complicated expertise as a tool of fooling or dominating “normal” people; “they denounce backroom deals, shady compromises, complicated procedures, secret treaties, and technicalities that only experts can understand”

19 About the role of new media in the rise of populism writes e.g. Paolo Cossarini (2019) or Fernando Vallespin and Máriam M. Bascuñán (2019).

(Canovan 1999, 16). Populists reject expert knowledge in the name of “common sense” or of knowledge, frequently pseudo-science, which is supposed to be science on “our” side. Timothy Snyder notices that lack of reality and magical thinking paradoxically leads to closer contact with the recipient (Snyder 2017, 67). None of this means that populists tell only falsehoods. As wrote Pierre Ansart, to be successful, ideology has to match with the experience of its target group, refer to their situation, interest, perceived threats. It will totalise and correct this experience, underline some and hide some other aspects (Ansart 1977, 81, 181). Ideological truth is composed of three elements: definition of the group, explanation of its situation and expression of its goals (ibid., 188). It is performative: the community truth is expressed and created while being expressed.

Populists pride themselves in directness. “Bad manners” against “good manners” are supposed to prove passion and sincerity. Populists use slang, swearing, being overly demonstrative and “colourful,” even offensiveness towards opponents. Populists flaunt disregard for others and “studied ignorance of that which does not interest him” (Moffit 2019, 1371), all this in opposition to “high” behavior of rigidity, rationality, composure, technocratic language. Populists claim to tell what everyone—the “silent minority”—thinks. This again permits populist leaders to position themselves out of the elite (the more criticised they get, the more distanced they appear) and to appear more “authentic” (ibid., 1368–1565).

Populists usually claim to restore a great past. Paul Taggart explains populism with the reference to the heartland which “represents an idealised conception of the community” and a “[retrospective] construction of an ideal world” (Taggart 2002, 67). This past, as Timothy Snyder shows, leads to a (mythical) eternity of a great nation, constantly threatened by the enemy. Similar reflections were developed by Marcin Napiórkowski. He writes about retrotopia, nostalgia for the past, “political philosophy recognising primacy of celebration and re-actualisation of history over the march to the future” (Napiórkowski 2019, 231). It’s a fantasy about “returning of the past which will save us from suffering, dangers and choices of the present,” a fantasy born from the fear of future in times of fast progress. “With all its defects, past is however a domain of stability and control” (ibid., 234). Retrotopia is a populist promise of plain security (ibid., 235). When new liberal ideology transmitted the utopia from the realm of social to the realm of personal, putting the whole frightening responsibility for their life on the individual and depriving them from the sense of belonging to a group, con-

servative populisms repair those damages with the idea of retrotopia (Bauman 2017). Moreover, retrotopia creates an image of an idealised past: heroic, ordered and full of traditional values, a world which was difficult, but in which everything was simpler, and good and evil were clearly distinct and easy to recognise (Napiórkowski 2019, 252).

Snyder notices a very interesting fact: one of the favourite times of all populists, whatever in the USA, the UK, France, Russia, Poland or Hungary, were 1930s, which in the rightist optics, were times of great national politics (and indeed it was a time known for the rise of fascisms in rather multinational countries of the era; Snyder 2017, 124–126). The 1930s were also a decade of the leader's cult blooming. The leader's cult is, of course, a dreamt phenomenon for every political leader, but in many populisms, it is a part of political program and political ideology. This happens because of the importance of structures, and particularly of structural element called the empty signifier, within populism.

Empty Signifiers and Wandering Structures (Instead of Conclusion)

Crucial discursive phenomenon in populism is an empty signifier: it is more than a technique or a strategy. It is, as observed by Paolo Cassarini (2019, 3280–3599), the nodal point around which political actors attempt to dominate the field of discursivity and establish hegemonic political views. It is a *lieu* in Pierre Nora's sense. In discursive theory, an empty signifier is also known as a floating signifier. It is a signifier without a referent in semiotics, a word that points to no actual object and has no agreed meaning. It has central political value and becomes the means of political articulation. Empty signifiers, such as “nation,” “people,” “struggle,” “triumph,” make legal resistance almost impossible (Snyder 2017, 60): they impose themselves on the populists' opponents and usually lead to compromising all the oppositions as betrayals of those great notions.

The notion of “people,” consisting of the center, the very core of populism, is an empty signifier itself. Cassarini draws from Laclau the idea of “the people” as an empty signifier, ready to be filled according to needs or demands.

Emily Eklundh (2019) defines the figure of the populist leader as a signifier of identity (this can be said for any significant political leader with strong ideology, but it applies particularly to populist leaders). The leader becomes an empty signifier, expressing desires and emotions of

its supporters. They identify with him, projecting onto him their personal (sometimes very diverse) desires and passions. As wrote Sergio Benvenuto (2012) in his critical reading of Ernesto Laclau's *On Populist Reason*, the leader is important by who he is: he can embrace a whole range of meanings and signify a whole range of things for a whole range of people. The leader is not only a representative of a political group, of his supporters, but also a representation: an empty signifier of their identity. Thus, if identity, per Lacan and Laclau, is itself an empty, never constituted, signifier, a leader, especially a populist leader, who becomes a signifier of the signifier, creates a double mirroring of representation (or maybe Baudrillard's simulacrum) and (empty) signification. Therefore, a leader—as a second empty signifier next to “people”—becomes the central figure of populism.²⁰

Empty signifiers can be used as pieces of puzzles and quite arbitrarily matched into combinations to create (empty) signifying structures. The most popular structure is the opposition “we”—“others/enemy,” which can be constructed, reconstructed, re-signified over and over again. Empty signifiers can cross and re-cross the border of one domain (e.g. link economics subjects, like capitalists, with racial ones, like Jews; or gender ones, like women, with national ones, like Germans; the latter one happened during “women strikes” in Poland). In that way, non-related objects can be joined together, so that Germany, Jews, LGBT converge in one figure of a threat. On the opposite side, notions considered positive are also linked together, even if they are non-related. This is particularly true for the figure of the populist leader who embraces symbolic realm of positivity, frequently in paradox opposition to his material human reality. Therefore, a millionaire becomes a simple man, a male misogynic leader a protector (if not embodiment) of femininity (of “true femininity,” understood as pureness, gentleness, motherhood; both Trump and Kaczyński are known for supporting “pro-life” movements and “traditional families”).

General structures have a tendency to wander around the world, or perhaps to be produced in the West and spread around the world, thanks

Thus, if identity, per Lacan and Laclau, is itself an empty, never constituted, signifier, a leader, especially a populist leader, who becomes a signifier of the signifier, creates a double mirroring of representation (or maybe Baudrillard's simulacrum) and (empty) signification. (...) Empty signifiers can be used as pieces of puzzles and quite arbitrarily matched into combinations to create (empty) signifying structures.

20 For more specific, personal, “material” characteristics of populist reader see still valid, and indeed prophetic, texts of Theodor Adorno (1981) or Leo Löwenthal and Norbert Guterman (1949), written in 40s and 50s. Although some thesis (like Adorno's chauvinistic repetition of Hitler's statement about feminine (or crypto-homosexual) character of masses—as if the political mass leader was conjecturally male—can seem controversial or obsolete nowadays, most of the remarks remain surprisingly up-to-date and the works are being returned to: see Gordon 2017.

to the system of global domination. In the peripheral countries, they are re-adapted and used in local context, but they still remain recognisable. It seems that the “clash of ideologies” observed by Arjun Appadurai when he was describing the phenomenon of global minorities, especially global Islamophobia, has even broader dimensions: like free neutrons, free empty signifier structures circulate in the global world, intercepted, adapted, fulfilled with affective meaning and released again into the global communicative space.

Conclusion

Populism has grown in strength in recent years in many countries, both core and semi-peripheral or peripheral. It had diverse conditions of development and, thus, different faces in particular situations and environments, but it had a similar structure and similar character—a character in which structure dominates over sense. In this article, I analysed discursive samples of populisms from the USA and from Poland to discover basic populist structure: structure of fear (Wodak 2015), division onto “we” and “Other(s).” I used the theory of ideology of Pierre Ansart and the structuralist category of empty signifier to expose operationalist modes of populism. I claim that an empty signifier is a crucial discursive phenomenon in populism, its nodal point. The notion of “people,” yet another empty signifier, is fundamental for populism, and so is the figure of a populist leader [who is a double (empty) signifier: he is a signifier of group identity, which is an (empty) signifier itself].

Empty signifiers can be used as pieces of puzzles and are quite arbitrarily matched into combinations to create (empty) signifying structures. They cross and re-cross diverse domains and geopolitical borders. They have a tendency to wander around the world: empty signifier structures circulate in the global world, intercepted, adapted, fulfilled with affective meaning and released again into the global communicative space. They can indeed go around in an endless hermeneutic circle. They will always be present in the global discursive space, ready to be taken by, ready to fuel and to constitute yet another emerging populist movement.

They have a tendency to wander around the world: empty signifier structures circulate in the global world, intercepted, adapted, fulfilled with affective meaning and released again into the global communicative space.

References

- Adorno, Theodor. 1981. "Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda." In *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, edited by Theodor Adorno and Jay M. Bernstein. London: Routledge.
- Ansart, Pierre. 1977. *Idéologies, conflits et pouvoir*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Appadurai, Arjun. 2006. *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Augustin, Óscar García. 2019. "Emotions and the Left in Denmark: Towards Left-Wing and Mainstream Populism." In *Populism and Passions: Democratic Legitimacy after Austerity*, edited by Paolo Cosarini and Fernando Vallespin. New York: Routledge.
- Bauman, Zygmunt. 2017. *Retrotopia*. London: Polity Press.
- Benvenuto, Sergio. 2012. "On Populist Reason by Ernesto Laclau." https://www.researchgate.net/publication/291092189_On_Populist_Reason_by_Ernesto_Laclau.
- Betz, Hans-Georg. 2002. "Conditions Favoring the Success and Failure of Radical Right-Wing Populist Parties in Contemporary Democracies." In *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*, edited by Yves Mény and Yves Surel. New York: Palgrave.
- Bhabha, Homi K. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Bjerre-Poulsen, Niels. 1986. "Populism: A Brief Introduction to a Baffling Notion." *American Studies in Scandinavia* 18(1): 27–36. <https://doi.org/10.22439/asca.v18i1.1190>
- Bryant, Nick. 2019. "How Will History Judge President Trump?" *BBC News*, January 17. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-46895634>.
- Buchowski, Michał. 2016. "Making Anthropology Matter in the Heyday of Islamophobia and the 'Refugee Crisis': The Case of Poland." *Český lid: Etnologický časopis* 103(1): 51–67. <https://doi.org/10.21104/CL.2016.1.03>.
- Canovan, Margaret. 1981. *Populism*. London: Junction Books.
- . 1999. "Trust the People! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy." *Political Studies* 47(1): 2–16. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9248.00184>.
- Chaumont, Jean-Michel. 2017. *La concurrence des victimes: Génocide, identité, reconnaissance*. Paris: La Découverte.
- Chimombo, Moira P.F., and Robert L. Roseberry. 1998. *The Power of Discourse: An Introduction to Discourse Analysis*. London: Routledge.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. 1993. "Toward a New Vision: Race, Class, and

- Gender as Categories of Analysis and Connection.” *Race, Sex & Class* 1(1): 25–45.
- Cossarini, Paolo. 2019. “Filling the Vacuum? Passion, ‘The People,’ and Affective Communities.” In *Populism and Passions: Democratic Legitimacy after Austerity*, edited by Paolo Cossarini and Fernando Vallespin. New York: Routledge.
- Deiwiks, Christa. 2009. “Populism.” *Living Reviews in Democracy*. https://ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/cis-dam/CIS_DAM_2015/WorkingPapers/Living_Reviews_Democracy/Deiwiks.PDF.
- Demertzis, Nicolas. 2006. “Emotions and Populism.” In *Emotion, Politics and Society*, edited by Simon Clarke, Paul Hoggett and Simon Thompson. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- D’Eramo, Marco. 2013. “Populism and the New Oligarchy.” Translated by Gregory Elliott. *New Left Review* 82: 5–28.
- Dunn, Elisabeth. 2019. *Predatory Humanitarianism: Refugees, Asylum Seekers, and the Manhunt. Reflection on migration on the US-Mexico border*. Lecture in IEiAK UW, Warszawa, October 26.
- Eklundh, Emmy. 2019. “Our Damned Weakness: Tensions Between Reason and Emotions in Podemos.” In *Populism and Passions: Democratic Legitimacy after Austerity*, edited by Paolo Cossarini and Fernando Vallespin. New York: Routledge.
- Forchtner, Bernhard, Michał Krzyżanowski, and Ruth Wodak. 2013. “Mediatization, Right-Wing Populism and Political Campaigning: The Case of the Austrian Freedom Party.” In *Media Talk and Political Elections in Europe and America*, edited by Mats Ekström and Andrew Tolson. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Fuchs, Dieter, and Hans-Dieter Klingemann. 2019. “Globalization, Populism and Legitimacy in Contemporary Democracy.” In *Democracy under Threat: A Crisis of Legitimacy?*, edited by Ursula van Beek. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gdula, Maciej. 2017. *Dobra zmiana w miastku. Neoautorytaryzm w Polskiej Polityce z Perspektywy Małego Miasta*. With collaboration of Katarzyna Dębska and Kamil Trepka. Warszawa: Instytut Studiów Zaawansowanych.
- Glynos, Jason, and Aurelien Mondon. 2019. “The Political Logic of Populist Hype: The Case of Right-Wing Populism’s ‘Meteor Rise’ and Its Relation to the Status Quo.” In *Populism and Passions: Democratic Legitimacy after Austerity*, edited by Paolo Cossarini and Fernando Vallespin. New York: Routledge.
- Gordon, Peter E. 2017. “The Authoritarian Personality Revisited:

- Reading Adorno in the Age of Trump.” *Boundary 2* 44(2): 31–56. <https://doi.org/10.1215/01903659-3826618>.
- Gounari, Panayota. 2018. “Authoritarianism, Discourse and Social Media: Trump as the ‘American Agitator.’” In *Critical Theory and Authoritarian Populism*, edited by Jeremiah Morelock, 207–227. London: University of Westminster Press.
- Janion, Maria. 2000. *Czy będziesz wiedział, co przeżyłeś*. Gdańsk: Sic!
- Kaczyński, Jarosław. 2018. *Enunciation during electoral convent in Olsztyn*. September 21. youtube.com, bit.ly/2Jo8xv4.
- Kantorowicz, Ernst. 2016. *The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Kitschelt, Herbert. 2002. “Popular Dissatisfaction with Democracy: Populism and Party Systems.” In *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*, edited by Yves Mény and Yves Surel. New York: Palgrave.
- Kokutani, Michiko. 2018. “The Death of Truth: How We Gave Up on Facts and Ended Up with Trump.” *The Guardian*, June 14. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/jul/14/the-death-of-truth-how-we-gave-up-on-facts-and-ended-up-with-trump>.
- Krastev, Ivan, and Stephen Holmes. 2019. *The Light that Failed: A Reckoning*. London: Penguin Books.
- Kristeva, Julia. 1980. *Pouvoirs de l’horreur: Essai sur l’abjection*. Paris: Le Seuil.
- Krzyżanowska, Natalia, and Michał Krzyżanowski. 2018. “‘Crisis’ and Migration in Poland: Discursive Shifts, Anti-Pluralism and the Politicisation of Exclusion.” *Sociology* 52(3): 612–618. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038518757952>.
- Laclau, Ernesto. 2005. *On Populist Reason*. New York: Verso.
- Lakoff, George. 2004. *Don’t Think of An Elephant! Know Your Values and Frame the Debate*. Carlton North: Scribe Publications.
- Leder, Andrzej. 2014. *Prześlona rewolucja*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej.
- Mair, Peter. 2013. *Ruling the Void: The Hollowing-out of Western Democracy*. London: Verso.
- Marx, Karl, and Frederick Engels. 2001. *The German Ideology Part One, with Selections from Parts Two and Three, together with Marx’s “Introduction to a Critique of Political Economy”*, edited by C.J. Arthur. New York: International Publishers.
- Matyja, Rafał. 2018. *Wyjście awaryjne: O zmianie wyobraźni politycznej*. Kraków: Karakter.
- Moffitt, Benjamin. 2019. “Populism versus Technocracy: Performance, Passions, and Aesthetics.” In *Populism and Passions: Democratic Legi-*

- timacy after Austerity*, edited by Paolo Cossarini and Fernando Vallespin. New York: Routledge.
- Mouffe, Chantal. 2018. *For a Left Populism*. London: Verso.
- . 2020. “The Controversy over Left-Wing Populism.” *Le Monde Diplomatique*, May. <https://mondediplo.com/2020/05/14populism>.
- Napiórkowski, Marcin. 2014. *Władza wyobraźni*. Warszawa: WUW.
- . 2019. *Turbopatriotyzm*. Wołowiec: Wydawnictwo Czarne.
- Oesch, Daniel. 2008. “Explaining Workers’ Support for Right-Wing Populist Parties in Western Europe: Evidence from Austria, Belgium, France, Norway, and Switzerland.” *International Political Science Review* 29(3): 349–373. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512107088390>.
- Richardson, John E. 2007. *Analysing Newspapers: An Approach from Critical Discourse Analysis*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Said, Edward. 1978. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Schick, Irvin C. 1999. *The Erotic Margin: Sexuality and Spatiality in Alteristic Discourse*. New York: Verso.
- Scruton, Roger. 1993. “Oikophobia.” *Journal of Education* 175(2): 93–98. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002205749317500207>.
- Simonis, Yvan. 2010. “A Way of Comparing Levi-Strauss and Lacan.” *Konturen* 3(1): 149–161. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5399/uo/konturen.3.1.1406>.
- Snyder, Timothy. 2017. *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century*. New York: The Duggan Books.
- Taggart, Paul. 2002. „Populism and the Pathology of Representative Politics.” In *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*, edited by Yves Mény and Yves Surel. New York: Palgrave.
- Tambakaki, Paulina. 2019. “Populism and the Use of Tropes.” In *Populism and Passions: Democratic Legitimacy after Austerity*, edited by Paolo Cossarini and Fernando Vallespin. New York: Routledge.
- Thomlinson, Harvey. 2018. “After Burroughs and Beckett: Opening up Experimental Fiction Beyond Old White Men.” *The Guardian*, October 8.
- Tormey, Simon. 2019. “Passion, Excess, and Fear of the Mob: Populism as Ideology.” In *Populism and Passions: Democratic Legitimacy after Austerity*, edited by Paolo Cossarini and Fernando Vallespin. New York: Routledge.
- Vallespin, Fernando, and Mária M. Bascuñán. 2019. “Populism and the Restructuring of the Public Sphere.” In *Populism and Passions: Democratic Legitimacy after Austerity*, edited by Paolo Cossarini and Fernando Vallespin. New York: Rutledge.
- Van Dijk, Teun A. 1993. *Elite Discourse and Racism*. Newbury Park: Sage.

- Weyland, Kurt. 1999. "Neoliberal Populism in Latin America and Eastern Europe." *Comparative Politics* 31(4): 379–401.
- Wiles, Peter. 1969. "Syndrome, Not a Doctrine: Some Elementary Theses on populism." In *Populism: Its Meaning and National Characteristics*, edited by Ghița Ionescu and Ernest Gellner. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.
- Wodak, Ruth. 2015. *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean*. London: Sage.
- , and Michał Krzyżanowski, eds. 2017. *Journal of Language and Politics* 16(4).

PATRYCJA PICHNICKA-TRIVEDI – is a Ph.D. Candidate at the University of Warsaw (Poland). She holds a Master’s Degree in Cultural Studies with *Summa Cum Laude*. She is also a graduate of Kolegium MISH, Bachelor of History of Art. Last year, she was chosen as a finalist in the Professor Jerzy Buzek competition for Scientific Debut 2019. She is writing a thesis on the representations of Otherness in popular culture. She is interested in intersectional studies, biomedical anthropology, posthuman studies and postcolonial studies.

Address:

University of Warsaw
Institute of Polish Culture
Krakowskie Przedmieście St, 26/28
00-927 Warsaw – Poland
email: patrycjapichnicka@uw.edu.pl

Citation:

Pichnicka-Trivedi, Patrycja. 2021. “Populistic Rhetoric: Structures Over Senses.” *Praktyka Teoretyczna* 42(4): 65–92.

DOI: 10.14746/prt2021.4.3

Autor: Patrycja Pichnicka-Trivedi

Tytuł: Retoryka populizmu: struktura ponad sensem

Abstrakt: Artykuł stanowi porównawcze studium polskiego i amerykańskiego prawnicowego populizmu oraz sposobów ich funkcjonowania. Studium wykorzystuje analizę strukturalną jako główne narzędzie badawcze. Jego celem jest wykazanie, że w istocie to właśnie strukturalne podobieństwo odpowiada za sukces populizmów w różnych środowiskach. Badając przykłady populistycznej retoryki i zauważając zaskakującą skuteczność podobnych dyskursów w różnych politycznych i społecznych warunkach, eksponuję wewnętrzną strukturę populizmu(ów). Zauważam, że populizm(y) zbudowany(e) jest(są) przede wszystkim z pustych znaczących. Te znaczące mogą być następnie łączone w większe struktury. Wśród nich fundamentalna dla populizmu jest przede wszystkim struktura opozycji: “my” — “oni”. Takie mityczne struktury są wystarczająco elastyczne, by móc w nie wpisać dowolny podmiot lub przedmiot. Są też wystarczająco elastyczne, by przekraczać granice dziedzin i granice geopolityczne, by „wędrować” po globalnym świecie.

Słowa kluczowe: populizm, struktura, dyskurs, puste znaczące