

Section 6 – Partecipazione e Movimenti Sociali

Chairs: Gianni Piazza, Massimiliano Andretta

Panel 6.1 The Cultural side of Populism: Politics, Emotions, Subcultures and Music in populist times

The last fifteen years have seen the marked growth of populist movements across Europe, which pose a serious threat to the stability of the European Union. By scapegoating ethnic minorities and reclaiming the restoration of ill-defined forms of popular and national sovereignty, populists are calling into question some of the EU's founding principles. Populism has been the subject of many studies; however, most have concentrated on the political and economic dimensions of populism and overlook or downplay the important dimension of culture (Dunkel 2018). Significantly, practically no studies consider the role of popular culture in the formation and dissemination of populist ideologies. It is all the more surprising that these studies have neglected the importance of music in the increasing success of populist movements, despite the fact that music is ubiquitous and arguably one of Europe's largest cultural outputs (Dunkel et al. 2018). Music has been uniquely tied to concepts of ethnicity, nationality, (collective) identity, self-expression, spatial belonging, and authenticity – ideas that populists emphasize in their rhetoric.

Music has always been an effective medium for the propagation of extreme-right ideologies (e.g. neo-Nazi subcultures), as well as left wing identities. It is also worth noticing the importance of music for progressive politics against the far right (e.g. Rock against racism in the UK or the 'red wedge'). Music has also strongly been associated with left-wing populism and populist messages, as the politics of Latin America above all teaches us. Music and other cultural practices do not only represent concepts like populism; as everyday practices, they have the power to mainstream such concepts as integral parts of a seemingly self-evident cultural reality.

This is linked to another significant lacuna in the analysis of populism thus far: emotion. Scholars have only recently brought emotions back into the analysis of social and political movements, power relations and institutions (Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta 2001; Holmes, 2004; Ost, 2004; Marcus, 2002; Berezin, 2002), yet it is precisely on 'mobilizing' emotions that populist actors and leaders concentrate. As has been recently pointed out, populism can be understood as 'a performance of crisis' (Paxton 2018). Explanations for rising support for populist parties have long pointed to objective, systemic crisis conditions that produce new grievances to which mainstream political actors are unable to respond, leaving the way clear for non-mainstream, new, populist actors (e.g. Bell, 1964; Lipset, 1960; Laclau, 2005; Ramet, 1999). Other scholars have stressed the political, economic and cultural sides of the crisis – whether a crisis of political representation, of economic deprivation or of cultural backlash (Kriesi, 2017). Rather than being a reaction to a pre-existing crisis, according to Moffitt (2015) and following a constructionist approach, populist political actors would construct specific failures that resonate with popular experience, and elevate them to the level of a perceived 'crisis'.

In summary, over the last few years, a number of studies have dealt with the recent rise of European populism in comparative perspectives (Akkerman 2011; Wodak et al. 2013; Rooduijn 2014; Herkman 2015; Akkerman et al. 2016; Aalberg et al. 2017; Engesser et al. 2017). None of these studies, however, have investigated culture and music as significant parts of this development, despite the fact that contemporary populist movements increasingly draw on the

affective power of culture (such as music, subcultures, etc.) and its potential to shape political identities as well as the narratives that sustain them (Duncombe and Bleiker 2015; Hindrichs 2018; Dunkel 2018). Ostiguy (2018) suggests that populism should be understood as a style, which is performed in order to create new ways of “relating with peoples” by exploiting “ways of dressing, accent, levels of languages, gestures, tastes” that are displayed publicly. In this sense, the influence of popular music and culture on the consolidation of the “populist zeitgeist” may not limit to the dissemination of “populist messages”, and may extend to the (re)production of lexicon, aesthetics and “Peoples” that are ready to be exploited by populist entrepreneurs.

We may even speculate over the potential of popular music for mainstreaming, on the one side, the perceptions of social and political exclusion and lack of representation of “ordinary citizens”, and, on the other side, specific “populist diagnoses” (such as the denounce of “economic and political elites” dominating the society, the restoration of “sovereignty” to cope with the perils of post-democracy, or anti-immigration claims) for addressing those problems. This, in turn, could alternatively reinforce some forms of political detachments and apathy, or inspire (implicitly or explicitly) new forms of civic, social and political engagement.

This panel calls for contributions addressing these neglected topics: cultural aspects and emotions in the study of politics and particularly in the study of populism from an interdisciplinary perspective (political science and political sociology, together with cultural and media studies and musicology) and from a standpoint of methodological pluralism. We welcome theoretical contributions focusing on: i. politics (populism) and emotions, ii. socio –cultural approaches to populism, iii. culture and politics, iv. the relation between populist ‘cultural’ productions and practices and their communication via the media. We also welcome contributions that will explore in more depth the relation between populism and culture(s), including music and political ‘subcultures’, possibly with empirical evidence drawn from different case studies in Europe and beyond, both past and present. The broad goal of the panel is to set a critical discussion of potential future directions for ‘populism’ research.

Chairs: Manuela Caiani, Enrico Padoan