

mostly refrain from engaging in the recent academic debate about the nature of right-wing populism. Another downside is the structure of the book. The order of the chapters can be confusing since the analysis goes from focusing on PEGIDA and its characteristics into examining the broader context of right-wing populism in Germany, only to focus again on PEGIDA in the next chapter. The current layout obstructs for the reader to follow the author's argument more clearly. As such alternating the structure of the chapters would revoke this issue.

Despite the fact that there are some negative aspects, the book remains a valuable addition to the study of PEGIDA and right-wing populism in Germany. The analysis on the movement is the product of thorough and original research and is also an important example of the research that is conducted in the country on right-wing populism. Not only that, but the book manages to provide substantial information about PEGIDA's connection with other major right-wing populist party of Germany at the moment, mainly the AfD, thus creating thought-provoking questions about their state in the country.

JAN-WERNER MÜLLER. WHAT IS POPULISM?

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The beginning of the 21st century has been characterized by the eruption of many and multi-level crises, which have directly affected the political and economic developments worldwide. One significant change in the European and American political landscape is the radical re-emergence of populism, a phenomenon that exceeds the left-right ideological continuum and presents notably characteristics in each case. The rise of populism has long attracted the attention of numerous of scholars and, as a result, gave a great impetus to the study of the phenomenon with plenty of new books, articles, seminars, and conferences.

In this context, a new publication about populism was released by Jan-Werner Müller, which tries to explore the features of populism. Even from the beginning of the book, it becomes evident that this work has a clearly polemic character, as one of its main goals is the immediate confrontation of the *populist danger*. In the first chapter, Müller, without the conduction of any particular literature review of populism, begins with the conceptualization of the phenomenon. According to him, “populists are always *anti-pluralists*”, “claim that they, and they alone, represent the people”, while populism tends to pose a real danger to democracy

(Müller, 2016: 3). Aside from that, Müller suggests that populism is surely a moralistic notion, for the reason that a populist leader proclaims the moral supremacy of its people. As he argues: “populism [...] is a particular *moralistic imagination of politics*” (Müller, 2016: 19). An important aspect of Müller’s research attempt is that his approach rejects the equation between populism, nationalism or ethnic chauvinism (Müller, 2016: 24–5), following (in a sense) the theoretical paths of Mudde and Kaltwasser (2013) who divide populism between two distinct manifestations, *inclusionary* and *exclusionary* populism.

In the second chapter of the book, Müller examines populism in power. The examination of *governmental populism* is an important contribution to the study of populism, as there are numerous researchers who see it as an opposition phenomenon. According to the author, populists “can govern as populists” (Müller, 2016: 4), but they do not have as much to offer to politics and society. In addition to that, populists create more problems on politics, because they “continue to behave like victims”, “moralize political conflict” and polarize and prepare the people for nothing else than what is conjured up as a kind of apocalyptic confrontation” (Müller, 2016: 41). Furthermore, Müller connects populism with other phenomena and issues, such as clientelism. As he argues, populists tend to “colonize or occupy the state”, “engage in mass clientelism” and follow a form of “discriminatory legalism” (“for my friends, everything; for my enemies, the law”) (Müller, 2016: 44-47). Beyond that, the author believes that populists intimidate their political opponents, do not care about the constitution (they revision it according to their aspirations) and threaten the democratic political procedures.

Finally, in the third chapter of his work, Müller reveals again his strong anti-populist attitude, focusing on how to deal with the populist danger. However, this kind of perspective is not that surprising. In recent years, a large number of (mainly liberal) scholars, mainstream forums and conferences have dealt with the populist threat in Europe and America. The book concludes with seven positions on populism, underlying the main ideas of Müller’s approach.

What are the main points of the book that should be criticized? As have been mentioned previously, Müller’s point of view has a distinctly polemic character, which is developed through a strong anti-populist argumentation that follows the paths of earlier liberal studies on populism. First of all, the author begins his analysis by arguing that “we simply do not have anything like a theory of populism” (Müller, 2016: 2). But, how can someone support an opinion like this, especially since there are plenty of alternative theories and approaches around populism? What about the theory and methodology of Laclau, Mouffe, Canovan, Taggart, Mudde and Kaltwasser? Moreover, Müller defines populism as an anti-pluralist phenomenon. Anti-pluralism is, for him, an essential part of every populist instance. However, it has been proven in many cases that populists in

power continue to follow “liberal paths”, accepting representative democracy, political pluralism and liberal institutions (e.g. SYRIZA in Greece, Kirchner in Argentina). Furthermore, the author considers that populists imagine and constructs a homogeneous people. This theoretical position seems to ignore the different social groups and social demands that are raised through a populist movement. In fact, left-wing populist parties (most of the times) call upon different social classes and groups (workers, farmers, unemployed people, low-paid employees, youth, migrants, gay and lesbians), thus constructing a heterogeneous popular subject.

Besides the above, Müller provides populism with an anti-democratic character, equating it with authoritarianism, clientelism, the control of the state and the promotion of specific interests. Nonetheless, as it has been argued by many scholars, the exclusive equation between populism, clientelism or authoritarianism has no substantial effect on research, since they are phenomena that can be found both in populist, non-populist or anti-populist parties or leaders (for clientelism, see: Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017: 8). For example, in Europe, there are some cases of anti-populist liberal or social democratic parties that have been occupied the state, created clientelist networks and guaranteed better “treatment” for members and voters (e.g. Greece). In addition, there are non-authoritarian populists, such as Nestor Kirchner (Argentina) and Evo Morales (Bolivia) who promoted democratic ideas and values.

Müller’s anti-populist logic seems to accept uncritically that populism is the only democratic ideology, an argument that has been challenged by a number of studies that question the association of liberalism and democracy (MacPherson, 1977; Mouffe, 2000). It is not difficult to understand the difficulties of coexistence between liberalism and democracy, especially in our post-democratic age, in which liberal democracy has completely failed in its mission, leading societies to an oligarchic type of technocratic government.

Finally, the author, such as other well-known scholars of populism (see: Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2012), recognizes a *moralization* in populist discourse, which divides the pure people and a corrupt elite. However, the questions that arise here are: Can we not find this kind of moralized perspective in every political or social confrontation? Why is it bad or dangerous to adopt a moralized perspective of politics? (Stavrakakis and Jäger, 2017).

Müller’s book could be more easily described as a polemic effort against populism, rather than an essential research effort which aims at clarifying the misty landscape around this concept. However, despite the shortcomings in Müller’s argument, this book is important to be read by anyone who studies populism, political discourse and political ideologies, in order to examine the “mainstream” anti-populist ideas on populism and analyze their consequences on democratic politics and society.

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