

Title: Populism on local grounds?

Paper Project Workgroup 5b 'The Characteristics of Populism and New Political Movements'

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This article provides an overview of the concept populism. It will answer the questions how populism can be defined and if the LST, a local political party in Tilburg, can be defined as a populist party. The purpose of this article is presenting the theoretical concepts on populism and putting them in context as well as applying them practically by translating the outcomes to the LST party. By giving an overview on the theoretical notions on populism and so called populist parties, it will become clear what the weak and strong points are in the populist debate and what my own independent position is in it.

Preface

Populism, what is it? Does it mean that one is popular? And if that is so, how does it reveal itself? In literature, there are some notions about the communication style of populist parties. One of those notions is that populist parties use a typical style of political rhetoric that shows a very direct and simplistic language (Abts & Rummens, 2007: 407). In first approach, it seems that a local party, which is being a 'suspect' of populism, uses that kind of language. A first impression of the website of that local party (called the LST: <http://www.lijstsmolders.nl/>), intensifies the sense that the LST is a bit populist in their way of thinking and presenting themselves. Using words like 'whores' instead of the more neat word 'prostitutes' is an example¹:

- Emotional NO against whores' shelter next primary school. (8 November 2007)
- Citizens rush out of their houses by politics! (14 April 2007)
- List Smolders is fed up with empty-headed misgovernment and bans the pretence democracy. (20 December 2007)

The LST seems to be doing exactly what Abts and Rummens point out about what distinctive is about populist parties. Namely, that populist parties and leaders appeal to the power of the common people, in order to challenge the legitimacy of the current political establishment (Abts & Rummens, 2007: 407). The latter, comes forward in the way the LST attacks the Labour Party in Tilburg, which is the biggest political party in the city and has also delivered the mayor. An example, are the questions the LST raised lately about the journeys of the mayor (*Do we have a jaunting mayor?: LST, 2009 and Brabants Dagblad,*

¹ All LST quotes are paraphrased and translated by the author of this article.

28 March 2009). This article will focus on these first impressions, which have been an invitation for further investigation. Not only, is it important to get familiar with the concept populism, but more important is translating a sense for populism in a scientific checklist for populism. This because of the vagueness of the populist debate. The scientific relevance is then, clarify the concept. The social relevance of this article is clarifying the role of the LST by combining scientific knowledge with practical cases. In order to do that, the following central question needs to be answered:

What is populism and in what way does the LST fits in this populist picture?

To present a definition of populism, different authors will be quoted to give an overview of the populism debate about the characteristics of populism and populist parties. Afterwards, there will be a sort of concluding chapter which answers what populism, in my opinion, exactly is and what kind of features should be seen as the most important ones. Finally, the results of this will be combined in the last chapter 'Populism and the LST'. This chapter will start by presenting some background information about the LST in order to put everything in context. The central question in this chapter is how these characteristics can be translated to the LST. In other words, this chapter will give the verdict if the LST can be defined as a populist party. That is, in a nutshell, the construction of this article. The method of working will be literature study and observation. The concept populism will be discussed by the literature of the work group and some additional literature. The LST case will be discussed by the party policy, their website and observations in media and committee- and council meetings. The language of the paper is English. As a result of that, I want to ask the reader patience and grace, because it is the first time I write a paper in English. Hopefully, this will not be a barrier for, or distraction of, the content and message of this paper.

1 Introduction on populism and populist parties

In this chapter the characteristics of populism and populist parties will be attend to the matter. There are several opinions, visions, etc on what populism is, what feature is typically populist or not and so on. The reason that there are so many opinions and articles about populism is because of the vagueness in the definition of populism (Mudde, 2007: 11). This chapter will give an overview of the different angels.

Mudde, mentioned that authors who write about populist parties seldom agree on terminology. In his case he refers to populist radical right parties, which brings up the assumption that there are different kind of populist parties. Jagers and Walgrave use a definition of populism as a political communication style in which they use a thin and a thick conceptualization (Jagers & Walgrave, 2006: 321-325). The thin part has no political colour and can be of the left and of the right. Populism is then strictly a strategy to mobilize support. Jagers and Walgrave call it a communication technique to reach out to the constituency and using populism as a device to connect to the voters (2006: 323). Specifically, they understand thin populism as displaying closeness to the people by talking about the people (2006: 323). The thick part is the thin definition in combination with the anti-establishment element and

homogeneity and/ or exclusion: “When political actors talk about the people and combine this with an explicit anti-establishment position and an exclusion of certain population categories, one can speak of thick populism.” (Jagers & Walgrave, 2006: 323). Also Jagers and Walgrave use different streamlets of populism. Where Mudde talks about the populist radical right parties, Jagers and Walgrave mention the agrarian populism, Latin-American populism and new-right populism. In this article the focus will lay on the new-right populism which is a streamlet that focuses on issues such as immigration, taxes, crime and nationalism (Jagers & Walgrave, 2006: 322). Specifically, new-right wing movements in western-Europe.

Taggart defines populism as a feature of representative politics (2003: 2). Also Abts and Rummens mention that populism and democracy both contain a central reference to the sovereign rule of the people (2007: 405). Some authors have hailed populism as the purest form of democracy, others have denounced it as potentially tyrannical and disruptive of some of the core elements of a democratic regime (Abts & Rummens, 2007: 405). There is a slight contradiction between it which could be explained, according to Abts and Rummens, by the ambiguity of the concept of democracy (2007: 405). They also mention that advocates of populism conceptualize democracy as the direct rule of the people and, therefore, tend to identify populism with democracy. Opponents of populism, on the other hand, hold a more constitutional conception of democracy, emphasizing the importance of representation, individual rights and the balancing of powers and interests (2007: 405). Reybrouck points out, that a typical characteristic of populism is that populists willingly plead for more direct forms of democracy (2008: 1). Examples of those forms are plebiscites (referenda) and internet opinion polls. Reysbrouck thinks that it shows the feeling of suspicion populists have towards the momentum representative democracy (2008: 1).

Abts and Rummens (2007: 407) summarise the populism debate briefly in their article. In short they describe that a first approach of populism suggest that populism is “a strategy of political mobilization using a typical style of political rhetoric”. They refer to well-know authors on populism as Betz and Canovan. In this strategy the leaders of populist parties, and the parties self, appeal to the power of the people. In that way the labour union FNV in the Netherlands has a populist approach to recruit new members, in their advertising they use the slogan: ‘Power to the people’. But, back to the subject. The populist parties and their leaders appeal to the power of the common people in order to challenge the rightfulness (legitimacy is the exact word Abts and Rummens use) of the present political establishment. Other members of the debate (like Taggart; which will be discussed later in this chapter), analyze populism as a type of organization and a style of politics (Abts & Rummens, 2007: 407). The explanation of that notion is as follows:

“Populism refers to a mobilization characterized by a politics of personality centered on a charismatic leader who is said to embody the will of the common people and who is able to speak on their behalf. Thereby, this populist mobilization is characterized by a particular style of communication (Taggart, 2000; Tarchi, 2002, pp. 126–30). Populists offer simplistic solutions to complex political problems in a very direct language, appealing to the common sense of the people and denouncing the intellectualism of the established elites.”

However, Abts and Rummens do not agree totally with these outcomes of the populism debate. They recognize that political mobilization, charismatic leadership and simplistic language are typical and important characteristics of populism, but criticise if that is representing the core of populism (2007: 407-408). In their opinion these features are symptoms or expressions of an underlying populist ideology. They refer to Canovan, which developed the approach that populism needs to be understood as a thin-centered ideology and that populism does not provide a comprehensive vision of society (Abts & Rummens, 2007: 408). Additionally, Abts and Rummens suggest that populism should be seen as a streamlet that provides a thin-centred ideology concerning the structure of the power in society (2007: 408). This because of the fact that populism mainly focuses on concepts such as ‘the people’, ‘democracy’ and ‘sovereignty’. This ideology contains, according to several literatures, three elements (Abts & Rummens, 2007: 408-409):

- **Populism revolves around a central antagonistic relationship between ‘the people’ and ‘the elite’.** This means nothing more than a hostile/ opponent position towards the other side. Mostly, the people against the elite, whereby the current political establishment (and its rank and file) is attacked for its alleged privileges, its embezzlement and, moreover, their lack of accountability to the people. These because they are said to only represent their own interest and not the interests, values and opinions of the common man.
- **Populism tries to give power back to the people and restore popular sovereignty.** Politics should be based on the will of the people. Therefore, populist ideology, advocate more direct forms of democracy like majority rules, referenda, etc. The will of the people is, in populist opinion, accessible if only you are willing to listen to the “vox populi”. Populism emphasizes the need for a politics of will and decision.
- **Populism conceptualizes the people as a homogeneous unity.** The transparency of the will of the people is possible because of this. In populist opinion, the people are united and share an identity. They form a collective group, which is capable of having a common will and a single interest and which is able to express this will and to take decisions: “In populist ideology, ‘the people’ function as a central signifier which receives a fundamentally monolithic interpretation. The people are united and indivisible, fully formed, self-aware and identifiable by the majority of numbers.”

Some critique that comes from Abts and Rummens on the latter feature is that populist ideology only implicate that the people are homogeneous. However, its ideology does not fill in what this identity is or should be (2007: 409). I myself, question if that is a feature of populist parties or political parties in general. Not one political party describes exactly what kind of rank and file they have. It just happens and changes through time. Abts and Rummens also disagree with the definition of Cas Mudde who defined populism as “an ideology that considers society ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, the ‘pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* of the people” (Abts & Rummens, 2007: 409). They do not only disagree, but also provide a proposal to define populism more plainness (or ‘frugally’ as they

had called it their self) as “a thin-centered ideology which advocates the sovereign rule of the people as a homogeneous body” (2007: 409).

Earlier in this article, it has been implied that there are different kinds of populist parties or streamlets within populism. Abts and Rummens suggest two variants (Abts & Rummens 2007: 409):

- a leftist version of populism that identifies the people in socioeconomic terms as the working class exploited by a bourgeois elite;
- or a rightwing populist movement that refers to ethno national characteristics to identify the people with the (ethnic) nation.

Besides it, Abts and Rummens distinguish not only streamlets but also the image of the people that populist parties have. The latter could include the fitting in of, for example, cultural and economic elites, foreigners, minorities, welfare recipients or others, in the homogeneity (2007: 409). Abts and Rummens already referred to a publication of Cas Mudde, in another publication Mudde describes these different streamlets (Mudde, 2007). He starts by pointing out that it is hard to define what, often called, the ‘extreme right’ party family is. One solution for that could be to adopt the concept of family resemblance, which means that no party is exactly the same, but each family member will have some features in common with all other members (Mudde, 2007: 13). The assignment is thus, to find the similarities and then score a political party on those similarities. Additionally, Weber’s famous ideal typical model could be used. This means that no family members resemble fully, but all will look like in one way or another (Mudde, 2007: 13). At the end of this chapter, a global ideal type and the common similarities will be painted, because a detailed one is impossible to sketch (Mudde, 2007: 13).

Mudde’s uses a minimal and a maximum definition which shows that Mudde has used two different approaches (2007: 15-23). The minimal definition is based on what the features are that all individual members of the populist family have in common. The maximum definition is defined by using the approach on the ideal type in the populist family. Mudde calls it looking for the greatest common denominator (2007: 14). Mudde mentions, that both definitions have to be seen as different and that the maximum group is a subgroup of the minimum group. He likes it to see it as individually shaped coat hangers on which additional concepts may draped. Both definitions are core concepts in that way. According to Mudde, the core concept of populist parties is ‘nation’ (Mudde, 2007: 16). The core goal of the nationalist is to achieve a monocultural state, it is because of that, that nationalism has not been used often to describe populist parties. Mudde interpretation of populism is nationalism combined with internal homogenization and external exclusiveness (Mudde, 2007: 17). Another component which is mentioned by Mudde is nativism. This means “the return of the power of the natives of a colonized area and the resurgence of native culture, along with the decline of the colonizers.” (Mudde, 2007: 18). These kind of populist parties are also known as anti-immigrant parties and anti-alien movements (Mudde, 2007: 18). Mudde, calls out that nativisme is a suitable term for the larger party family and he uses it as a minimum definition (Mudde, 2007: 19). In comparison to the broad term nationalism, nativism has the advantage of excluding liberal forms of nationalism. Nativism could include racist arguments, but can also be nonracist. Another argument Mudde gives for the these that nativism is a core minimum

definition of new-right populist parties, is that, while acknowledging the tremendous importance of xenophobia and opposition to immigration to the parties in question, nativism does not reduce the parties to mere single-issue parties, such as the term anti-immigrant does (Mudde, 2007: 19). The maximum definition of Mudde has come into existence after analyzing five parties who are known as populist: the Flemish Block in Belgium, the German people's Union, The republicans in Germany, and the Center Democrats and the Center Party '86 in the Netherlands. The central concept of these parties should be revised into a combination of three core ideological features (Mudde, 2007: 22):

1. Nativism

“An ideology which holds that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group ('the nation') and that non-native elements (personal and ideas) are fundamentally threatening to the homogeneous nation-state. The nativist dimension includes a combination of nationalism and xenophobia.”

2. Authoritarianism

“This term usually refers to nondemocratic regimes, often distinguished from the even more restrictive totalitarian regimes. In this study authoritarianism is interpreted as: A general disposition to glorify, to be subservient to, and remain uncritical toward, authoritative figures of the ingroup and to take an attitude of punishing outgroups figures in the name of some moral authority.”

3. Populism

“Populism is understood as a thin-centred ideology that considers society to ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, the 'pure people' and the 'corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the 'volonté générale' of the people. Populist ideology reveres the 'common sense' of the people and the 'heartland'. In populist democracy, nothing is more important than the 'general will' of the people, not even human rights or constitutional guarantees.”

In the latter definition of populism, there is referred to the heartland. A feature Paul Taggart introduced. Additionally, and finally, I want to refer to Paul Taggart and also Paul Adams. Both authors whom we did not discussed in the course. Paul Adams (2003), points out that right-wing populist parties ran and continue to run on platforms built primarily upon issues related to anti-immigration, Euroskepticism, national sovereignty, and protection of cultural identity (Adams, 2003: 1). They do not fulfill a role of a single-issue party, but most parties seem to distinguish themselves from center-right and other rightist parties by focusing upon a narrow range of national sovereignty and cultural issues (Adams, 2003: 1). He also points out, that, besides those right-wing populist parties, there are other forms of populism. He refers to Al Gore, which was accused of populism during the electoral campaigns of 2000 (Adams, 2003: 1). Therefore, Adams has the opinion, that the term populist and right-wing populist is quite misapplied sometimes. In his opinion, the term 'nationalist' is more in its place. However, that has been avoided due to historical associations of nationalist parties with fascism (Adams, 2003: 1). The other author, Paul Taggart, explains populism more intensively. I already

mentioned that Taggart defines populism as a feature of representative politics, but Taggart also thinks that populism, as an ideal type, can be identified by having certain universal features. Specifically, six characteristic features (2003: 6-8):

- **Populism is hostile towards representative politics.**

This feature speaks for itself and has already been explained by other authors in this article. Paul Taggart does not deviate from those earlier described explanations.

- **Populists tend to identify themselves with a 'heartland' which represents an idealised conception of the community they serve.**

This is a feature that asks for explanation (these quote is also retrieved from Taggart, 2003: 6-8): "It is from this territory of the imagination, that populists construct 'the people' as the object of their politics. (...) The heartland is a construction of an ideal world but unlike utopian conceptions, it is constructed retrospectively from the past – it is in essence a past-derived vision projected onto the present as that which has been lost. (...) The term heartland is used because heartlands are something which are felt rather than reasoned, and something which are shrouded in imprecision. "

- **Populism lacks core values.**

Because of the variety of versions of the heartland, there are no top three core values or something. Populism is attached to some very different ideological positions from the left to the right, because of those different versions: "Populists have been revolutionary, reactionary, left-wing, right-wing, authoritarian and libertarian. This is not indicative of the emptiness of populism as a concept, but it does reveal the empty heart of populism that gives it both weakness and potential ubiquity."

- **Populism is, in a sense, a reaction of extreme crises.**

"Populism is not the politics of the stable, ordered polity but comes as an accompaniment to change, crisis challenge. This crisis may well stem from a sense of moral decay but it always spills over into a critique of politics and into a sense that politics as usual cannot deal with the usual conditions of crisis." This is remarkable, because a colleague student, J. Hoogbergen concluded earlier in our course that there does not seem to be a relation between the electoral success of a populist party and the economical condition of a country. Most of the crises, even the current one, have something to do with economics. However, a crisis can contain different elements.

- **Populism has a self-limiting quality.**

"As populists only mobilise when they are overcome with a sense of crisis, we can see that they are reluctantly political. This explains why they tend to try to adopt new and different forms of politics but it also explains why it becomes very difficult to sustain populist movements in the long term, because these new forms of politics are often difficult to develop over a long period of time. (...) Populists have often relied on charismatic leaders. This means that in the very form

of authority, they are expressing a rejection of more bureaucratised, regularised and constrained forms of leadership. This gives populist leaders momentum in the short term, but it also presents difficulties because the issue of succession, in the long term, becomes fundamentally problematic. Personalising leadership works while the same person is in command but creates problems in transferring authority to new leaders.”

- **Populists tend to be highly chameleonic.**

“The attributes of the context in which populism occurs will spill into the form that populism takes. This is not to say that the contextual attributes hide the ‘real’ nature of populism, but is simply to observe that populism is de facto substantially contextual-contingent. ”

2 Definition and features of populism

Having read all the different visions and opinions of several authors, I questioned myself: What could be the balanced definition for populism? Well, the answer is: none. However, the overview of literature makes it possible to combine the different views and do a proposal on a definition and a populism profile. In this chapter, I will share my analyses and give a global definition of populism. There will also be given an overview of what aspects, in my opinion, can be defined, in short, as a characteristic of populism.

A useable definition of populism could be that populism is a style of politics. In my opinion, populism is, moreover, a way of thinking. Like social-democracy is also a way of thinking; a vision how society should look like. This becomes clear in the ideology of populist parties which is often based on, what Taggart calls, the identification with a ‘heartland’. This heartland represents an idealised conception of the community they serve or live in. Most of the issues of populist parties are focussed on national sovereignty and cultural issues, like Adams (2008) said. This also matches the idea of Mudde (2007) about nativism. Instead of socialism, it is the nativism that is the basis of these kinds of political populist parties. The citizens, who are sensitive for this kind of politics, are more or less, the less well development people. Reysbrouck (2008) calls them the working-class in his article about the diploma democracy, which is a term I would like to use also. Because most of the populist voters are less educated (Brug, 2003: 2; Lubbers et al., 2002: 370-373, Reysbrouck, 2008: 23-24), there is a demand for a different communication style without the common professional and technical language (the so called jargon). In order to get through to those citizens, there is no need for long sentences full of ‘expensive’ words. Besides, most of the populist parties are parties which members and leaders have a background that does not include a communication style like the, in political arena’s, common used. Most of them are manual workers with a low education that have worked one’s way up. They are not used to use that kind of language, are not in want of it, and stick with their familiar words. These kinds of citizens are less footloose than the ones that have studied at Universities here and abroad, which have been able to meet other people and cultures and, often, have the amount of money to be able to move to another city if they want. The populist voters and politician, are often born in the same city they are political active in and are expected to die in that city too. These people have lived for quite a time in that city and

are, therefore, more aware of changes in their city. It is because of that, that they are able to develop a vision of heartland. The populism feature 'simplistic and direct language', has also something to do with the fact that the working-class asks just wants to know where they stand. The same with simplistic solutions. Most of the populist voters, do not want to know how politician are planning to solve a problem, they just want to see the problem solved and preferably yesterday. The working-class is often quite a big group and does not always come to elections. This means that they do not vote on a regular basis. This is a result of the feeling they have that citizens, especially citizens like them, do not have a voice. So, why bother to vote? Not surprisingly, the polling rate during local elections is below the 60% (Boogers, 2007: 28). Nationally, the rating is around the 80% (Boogers, 2007: 28). The working-class is the biggest non-voting group (Reysbrouck, 2008: 23) and it is therefore, that the SP (a socialistic party which is sometimes accused of being a populist party, and in my opinion: they fit the profile) used the slogan: 'Every voice counts'. Not to even speak about European elections, for the most people, the gap between what is happening in their own city and 'over there' is too big. The same counts for 'The Hague'. A common notice of some manual workers is "The Hague does whatever she wants, so it is worthless to even try and make noise"². Reysbrouck (2008: 23), also points out that lower educated people have the feeling that they are not noticed and heard. When a populist political party pleads for them, they are very sensitive to support such a political party.

Lubbers et al. (2002: 370), mention that it is not only the less well educated that are more likely to vote for extreme right-wing parties or populist parties, but also the unemployed, non-religious people, younger voters and men. That is quite a big group and it is this group that also votes more often on populist parties (Lubbers et al., 2002: 370). Other parties, those without the nativism aspect/ basis, want to have a piece of the pie to. Especially, when they have lost some seats or are eager to gain more. Because the group, which listens to this communication style, is the biggest group non-voters, it is attractive for those parties to use the same communication style in order to gain extra votes from this group. There is a great chance that they win some votes by adapting (use/ borrow/ copy) the same communication style. Unfortunately for them, it is, mostly, a nice try but nothing more than that. Authors who advocate that populism is a political communication style, in my opinion, refer to this kind of parties. Yes, populist parties use an extraordinary style comparing to the already existing establishments, however, it is authentic. Used, strategically, it does not come across the same and does not obtain the same effect. For that reason, I think that populism is a way of thinking, a way of looking at the world and seeing if this world matches what you, as a person, would like to see. Right or left populism has nothing to do with that. I think you just have populism, and just like Taggart (2003) said: it does not have core values and is always different because of the variety in visions of heartland. However, I would like to give some attention to what Abts and Rummens (2007) call the leftist and right-wing version of populism.

Populism is never the same, because everyone has their own vision of heartland like Taggart (2003) said. However, the suggestion that there are different forms of populism is not right in my

² I did some own research about voting behaviour of manual workers in Tilburg after a big group, who always voted on the PvdA, had gone over to the SP.

opinion. According to Abts and Rummens (2007), there is a leftist version of populism that identifies the people in socioeconomic terms as the working class exploited by the bourgeois elite. In my opinion, every real populist party does that. A 'fake' populist party, is a political party which does not share a heartland in a nativism way, but borrows the communication style populist parties use to gain votes. The opposite of the leftist version, is a rightwing populist movement, according to Abts and Rummens (2007). This version refers to ethno national characteristics to identify the people with the (ethnic) nation. I admit that there are some parties which are more extreme in that matter. However, the origin of citizens is not important for populist parties (which ideology is based on their heartland) as long as they adjust their self to the traditional values of their city. Respect and manners are important for them. A hard working allochthonous has never been subject of discussion for populist voters. Some examples of core tradition values of the working-class in Tilburg are³:

- no loud talking or music in trains, buses and public areas;
- work hard and do not take advantage of the welfare system;
- have respect for others, especially the elderly and women;
- be nice to your neighbours, have some small talks or at least say hello;
- try to be quiet between 22.00 pm to 08.00 am;
- take care of your house front and front garden.

Populist parties represent these kinds of thoughts, and that has been necessary since the appearance of other cultures. This sounds racists, but is logically because of the cultural differences and the language barrier. If one does not know what is 'normal' here, it is hard to get familiar with what 'normal' is, if there is no or minor contact between those groups. Populist parties are the link between these groups and show the needs of a native group while other parties are scared to speak for a specific group because of the constitution. It is like Abts and Rummens said (2007: 408): "(...) populism opts for the idea of popular sovereignty, if necessary at the expense of constitutional guarantees." Also, Papadopoulos said the same in a way (2000?: 16): "Populism does not embarrass itself too much with burdens like formal rules or constitutions, often portrayed as obstacles deliberately crafted by the establishment to counteract the popular will that finds its uncontested expression in the leader's words.". However, it seems that most populist parties try to be the link, or the representative of a native group in a certain area, I suspect some of the parties to kick on being in power. It is a question if that is a feature of populist parties only, or it is a general feature of those who want to get a lot of seats. Most leaders of populist parties, for instance Berlusconi, Fortuyn and Wilders, are a bit extraordinary. Especially Berlusconi is known for his urge for authority. It should not be the deal that wanting to have authority is more important than bringing the voice of the working class in to attention, but sometimes it seems to look that way. However, if those two values do not collide it could be just a win-win situation.

Some right-wing parties are populist parties as well, but some of them could better be called nationalist or localists. An example is the NVU (but also the Flemish Block in my opinion), the Dutch

³ Again: retrieved from my own research done in 2008 to map out what the Tilburg working-class wants, thinks and expects from/ about/ of local politics.

People's Union, which joined the local elections in 2006 but did not gain seats. The NVU is against alienation/ estrangement of the Dutch society and culture, the influence of the American culture on the Netherlands, the liberal short term policy, and the fact that not every school teaches their scholars the Dutch national anthem (NVU, 2006: 2). They even suggest introducing a course 'Dutch nationalism' where scholars can learn about the Dutch language, culture, tradition and history (NVU, 2006: 4). These kinds of parties that take it a step further are, in my opinion, xenophobic nationalists. That has nothing to do with the concept populism as it is described in this chapter. In a very basic way they try to achieve the same. For that reason, there is a thin line between wanting to live in a city (or country) that matches your ideas about living standards and circumstances, and blaming those who seem to attack those standards and wanting that group to be sending out of the area. Because of the education level of populist voters, it is easy to convince them that it is the fault of all the allochthonous people, for example.

In order to score if a certain political party is a populist party; it is needed to have some kind of scorings card. Therefore, more usefully and practically than just handing out a definition, is calling out the characteristics of the concept. Overall, the following aspects can be defined as a feature of populism (I agree on the whole with the features Taggart (2003) has pointed out):

- 1) Charismatic leadership.
- 2) The use of simplistic language and solutions.
- 3) The use of sound bites; a short phrase or sentence used as a key moment in a speech or dialogue, often repeated a lot.
- 4) Stressing the not representativeness of politics. Populist parties are hostile towards representative politics and current establishments. Populism wants to give power back to 'the people' which means that they aim for the 'common men'.
- 5) Attacking current political establishment.
- 6) Referring to the people as a homogeneous body and separates society into two groups: the '(pure) people' versus the '(corrupt) elite'/ current establishment.
- 7) Populists try to protect the native cultural identity. This can be identified with a heartland which represents an idealised conception of 'their' community. In other words: populists have a certain nativism as an underlying ideology (the return of the dominancy of the culture and traditions of native's citizens of the area).
- 8) Demanding for more direct democracy forms as referenda and internet polls.
- 9) Reacting on crisis. This crisis may well stem from a sense of moral decay but it always spills over into a critique politics and into a sense that politics as usual cannot deal with the usual conditions of crisis.
- 10) Problems in transferring authority to new leaders.

The first three can also be discovered at not populist parties. Those who use the same communication style, will try to stake on a charismatic leader who uses more direct language and sound bites. The last six are typical populist. In my opinion, these are the core features of populism and can be used to score if one's is populist. Again, this is in my opinion so it is open for discussion.

3 Populism and the LST⁴

The LST, List Smolders Tilburg, is a political party that has come into existence in the year 2003, but it really gained success from the end of 2005. The leader of the LST is Hans Smolders, which has been the chauffeur of the well-known politician Pim Fortuyn. In that period, Smolders has been promoted to member of the LPF (List Pim Fortuyn), but after the murder on Pim, which was known as a populist, on the 6th of May in 2002, Smolders took some distance of the LPF, politics and the media. Smolders' membership of the LPF was very briefly. He joined the LPF in 2002 and shortly after the murder, he went back home (with a nice amount of tide over allowance). At the end of the year 2003, Hans Smolders decided to start his own local party of that tide over allowance: the LST. Medium 2004, he stopped with his LST activities because of an incident where he was threatened with a gun at his home (Openbaar Ministerie, 2004). The end of 2004, he decided to join the Tilburg Elderly Party (TOP) and a year later he was thinking of going further with his own party. And so he did. He joined the local elections of Tilburg on 7 March 2006 and won 5 seats.⁵

Putting those 5 seats in context, the biggest party in Tilburg has 11 seats at the moment (Municipal Councillors PvdA: <http://www.tilburg.nl/>). That party is the Labour Party, PvdA, and has been victimized by the LST. A first analyse on the website of the LST shows that the PvdA has been mentioned negative for 21 times on the first page, in contrast with the SP or the CDA, which are mentioned respectively 9 and 8 times. The first page of the website is reserved for items which the LST has given attention to. In other words, the most important subjects for the LST chronologically added on their page and that are just the first sentences of a whole article that is behind it. The CDA (christen-democrats) is the second biggest party in the coalition (7 seats) and the SP (Socialistic Party) is the biggest opposition party with the LST (5 seats). D'66 (democrats), TVP (Tilburg People's Party), VSP (Elderly Party) and Algemeen Belang (Common Meaning) are the smallest parties with one seat per party, they are called zero to two times. The feature 'attacking the establishment' becomes even more perceptible if you count the times that the mayor is mentioned in a negative way. The mayor, Ruud Vreeman, is from the Labour Party and thus a member of the biggest political establishment. On the webpage, his name is called negatively for 23 times. On top of that, the LST has recently asked for a referendum because the mayor has decided to stand for re-election, and they really do not approve that. The LST's opinion is that the citizens of Tilburg do not want him to be re-elected. Speaking of attacking the establishment.

The preface of the policy program of the LST shows directly the existence of the first six features of populism. Hereby, some examples (LST, 2005-2006: 1-3)⁶:

⁴ All the information in this chapter has been retrieved from the Smolders website, the municipal website, a local media website, analyses of the policy program, e-mail from other political parties and observations in the media and council- and committee meetings.

⁵ All information about the origin of the Smolders party and the LPF is retrieved of <http://www.pimfortuyn.com/> and <http://www.smolderstilburg.nl/>

⁶ All LST quotes are paraphrased and translated by the author of this article.

- The party seems to be centred on one, and one only, leader. The first sentence of the policy programme starts with: "At first, I want to make clear, that I, Hans Smolders, as founder of List Smolders Tilburg, never felt the need to join politics or become a politician. Moreover, I will never be a politician and do not feel the need to look like it!". A lot of 'I', if you ask me. The charisma of Hans Smolders is perceptible in media pictures where he is always neatly dressed, with a nice pleasant smile. He always gets it done, to be exactly there where the working-class would like him to see. An example is the removal of asbestos at the MIDI theatre in the centre of Tilburg. Besides that, he knows his language. It is hard to put exactly in words what makes him charismatic. Just like the concept populism, it is a bit of a feeling.
- The use of simplistic language is shown in words like 'spuugzat', 'spreekbuis', 'werkvloer', 'klootjesvolk'. In English those words means: sick/ nauseous/ queasy, mouth-piece, shop floor and populace/ bourgeois/ common folk.
- There are also some outshining sound bites: "Back to the human cup/ dimension!!!", "The normal man gets squeezed like a lemon", "The grapes will turn sour for these political mess arounds, they are not done with me!", "The the Hague's politics makes me sick, but here in Tilburg they is not very satisfying as well!".
- LST also stress the not representativeness of politics in their policy program: "incompetent and untrustworthy politician", "vicious, arrogant and high-and-mighty politician". The next sentence is a really great example: "Look at their extremely out of proportion high salaries, golden handshake, tide over allowances, ridiculous settlements for early retirement pensions, premiums, and so on. Not to even start about giving each other jobs with golden edges."
- An example of the feature 'attacking the current political establishment': "(..) the repulsive political elite and establishment".
- Referring to the people as a homogeneous body: "We want to do the talking for the common people, that can do nothing else than undergo the increasing prices, the governmental mismanagement, and the asocial consequences of that." Also the members of the LST are seen as the common citizens "The biggest part of the people on my list are common Tilburg people".

Offering simplistic solutions comes perceptible on the last two pages of the policy program (LST, 2005-2006: 8-9): "The Art and Culture budget needs to be narrowed down with 50 per cent. The allowance terror of these elite clubs is really absurd.", "The high priced and stupid City ring-project needs to be stopped immediately and reconsidered.", and "The money eating prestige plaything of our governors 'Spoor zone' needs to be stopped directly and be reconsidered.". One does not need to be smart to know, or be able to imagine, that big town and country planning projects cannot be stopped in an impulse moment. Well, it can be stopped, but the question is why should we? These subjects have already been a discussed and the citizens have given their opinion. Giving a signal is ok, but just dropping some percentages without any intelligible arguments is a bit odd and not very professional.

The feature 'demanding for more direct forms' has been mentioned earlier, in the demand for the referenda for the re-election of the current mayor. Besides that, Smolders always asks for internet polls and better use of the media. The latter example is the importance LST gives toward an internet

poll. Before they asked for a referendum, there was a poll on the website of the local newspaper *Brabants Dagblad*, which asked if the mayor does his work well enough. The results were dissatisfying. However, we do not know who voted, because everybody can vote, even from other cities, and more than one time. When a week later (14 March 2009), turned out that the LST has plead fraud with an internet poll on if the LST runs good opposition, most people doubted about the accurateness of the results of the mayor poll. It is a bit strange if you demand for more direct forms that you commit fraud and get caught as well.

A last example of ‘attacking the establishment’, which seems the biggest activity of most populist parties, are the questions (from 26 March 2009) in the council about the travelling of the mayor. The question was if we, in Tilburg, have a jaunting mayor? The mayor had just turned back from Tunisia and left for another trip within a few days. LST thought this was a nice moment to use and make it seem that the mayor does not work but only jaunts. The thing is that a year before these questions the council, including the LST, had agreed that the mayor gives clear insight into his travelling behaviour. What trips he had made and why. Besides, every decision that includes financial payments has to be taken jointly by the local government (mayor and municipal councillors; not the representative councillors). There was an agreement, and despite of it, the LST asks question in order to bring the mayor negatively in the media. Most citizens, do not know about this agreement and just think that the mayor is a big spender. And that is just what the LST wanted to achieve.

The most current example is showing the hostility towards the ‘corrupt elite’, the second group and opponent in ‘World Populism’. In the city paper *Stadsnieuws* from the 26th of April, the LST calls attention for the way the Tilburg Theatre seem to favour the ‘elites’ more than the ‘common people’ (*Stadsnieuws*, 2009: 4). The Tilburg Theatre has plans to scratch the raffle for entrance cards and replace it by giving way to so called ‘friends’ of the theatre. Those ‘friends’ are contributors that donate 45 euro. LST asks attention for this, because certain target groups, like minima and elderly, will be excluded if they set this through. This example is a good one that shows that populism is not always a bad phenomenon.

All together, it can be said that the LST shows the following features:

- Charismatic leadership. 😊
- The use of simplistic language and solutions. 😊
- The use of sound bites. 😊
- Stressing the not representativeness of politics. / Power back to ‘the people’ (=the ‘common men’). 😊
- Attacking current political establishment. 😊
- Referring to the people as a homogeneous body. 😊
- Populists try to protect the native cultural identity. ?
- Demanding for more direct democracy forms as referenda and internet polls. 😊
- Reacting on crisis. ?
- Problems in transferring authority to new leaders. ?

The ones that have question marks at the end are features that have not (yet) been noticed. To be able to score those kinds of features, more investigation is necessary. From what I have seen so far, it would not surprise me if those features end up with smileys too. In other words, I dare to say that the LST is a populist party for sure. They do not tend to be nationalist like the NVU. They even say in their policy program: 'We, normal, good willing people, native or not native, are sick of it.' (LST, 2005-2006: 2). They simply have a vision of society and, especially, current politics, and just want change.

Conclusion

The main question of this article was what populism is and in what way the LST fits in this populist picture. The purpose of this article was presenting the theoretical concepts on populism and putting them in context as well as applying them practically by translating the outcomes to the LST party. I think I managed to do this. Although, it was not easy to sketch a global definition of the concept populism, the result is, in my opinion, that populism is nothing more or else than social democracy is a base for some political parties. Despite of some authors who claim that populism is a political communication style, my opinion is that populism is a way of thinking and acting that is bringing along a certain communication style. But only, because the people who are members or leaders of a populist parties have that way of speaking. It is, or was at a point, their authentic character. If a certain political party copies this way of communicating with a certain group (mostly, the working-class), they only do that in order to gain votes. Populism, therefore, is a vision of how society should look like and can be used as an ideology which bases mostly, has to do with nativism. The characteristics of populism are varying from having a charismatic leader to attacking current political establishment and referring to the people as a unity. The attacking feature could also be perceptible with opposition parties. However, populist parties seem to attack the biggest one the most. They use all kind of forms to do that, and do not always matter about past agreements of constitutions. Other features are, using simplistic language and solutions, sound bites, direct forms of democracy and demanding extremely often for those kinds of forms. Last four features are that populist parties tend to react on crisis, so they are more reactive than proactive, they try to protect the native cultural identity, distrusting the representativeness of politics and they seem to have problems when they need to transfer authority to new leaders. The latter because populist parties are centred on one important charismatic leader who calls the shots. Does the LST fit the populist profile? Yes, it does. However, not all features have been investigated evenly intensive, the first impression says yes. Some of the features are left open because that asks for deeper investigation. The existing information, retrieved from the LST website, policy program, media presents, and statements and reaction in local chambers show no doubt. LST is populist without being to nationalistic. Therefore, they could not be called extreme-right. As well because, they refer to non-native citizens in their policy program and point out that they do not have problems with that group at all. LST can be compared with the no longer existing LPF, and the SP. Which are also called populist and both plead for the 'common men and women'.

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