



Populism as the Politics of (Mis)Recognition*

Büşra AYTEKİN

Abstract: Society consists of several different groups possessing unique demands, interests, and lifestyles. The power relations among these groups tend to result in inequalities and injustices, causing certain ways of life to degrade despite democracy's ultimate aim of providing equal opportunities for all. The politics of recognition and populism arrive in this context as two forms of politics aiming to fix the problems found in the disadvantaged sections of society. By revolting against society's asymmetrical relations in the constructive social power that brings with it the ability to define the boundaries, relevance, and status of identities, populism presents itself as a significant solution to the claims of recognition. Nevertheless, populism excludes the essential requirements of the politics of recognition such as dialogue, negotiation, and discussion through its antagonistic distinction between the people and the elite. Populism also reflects on its problematic understanding of representation with regard to struggles for recognition and its instrumentalization of feelings of misrecognition. This paper offers a view of populism as a false response to the politics of recognition that uses demands for recognition to shift but not balance the power asymmetry in society.

Keywords: Politics of recognition, populism, identity, misrecognition, constructive social power.

Öz: Toplum birbirinden farklı taleplere, çıkarlara ve hayat tarzlarına sahip çeşitli gruplardan oluşmaktadır. Demokrasinin her birine eşit şartlar sağlama amacına rağmen, gruplar arasındaki güç ilişkileri toplumda çeşitli eşitlik ve adalet sorunlarına sebep olmakta ve bu durum, bazı hayat tarzlarının sosyal değerinin azalmasına yol açmaktadır. Bu bağlamda, tanınma siyaseti ve popülizm toplumun dezavantajlı kesimlerinin sorunlarını çözmek üzere ortaya çıkmış iki siyaset biçimidir. Popülizm, kimliklerin sınırlarını, önemlerini ve statülerini tanımlama imkanı işaret eden yapısal toplumsal iktidara sahip olma eşitsizliğine isyan ederek, kendisini, tanınma taleplerine önemli bir çözüm olarak sunmaktadır. Fakat, aynı zamanda, halk ve elit arasında yaptığı antagonistik ayrım ile tanınma siyaseti için esas olan diyalog, müzakere ve tartışma gibi ihtiyaçları dışlamaktadır. Bu durum, popülizmin, tanınma mücadeleleri için sorun oluşturan temsil anlayışına ve yoksayılma duygularını işlevselleştirme yöntemine de yansımaktadır. Bu çalışma, popülizmi, tanınma taleplerini kullanarak toplumdaki güç eşitsizliğini dengelemeyi değil, bu dengesizliğin yönünü değiştirmeyi amaçlayan ve tanınma siyaseti için yanlış bir cevap olan bir siyaset biçimi olarak tartışmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Tanınma siyaseti, popülizm, kimlik, tanınmama, yapısal toplumsal iktidar.

* I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Ahmet Okumuş, who has always been supportive throughout my studies. Without his brilliant and kind guidance, I would not have written this article.

@ Grad., İstanbul Şehir University. busraaytekin@outlook.com

id <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6610-9795>

© Scientific Studies Association
DOI: 10.12658/M0649
insan & toplum, 2022; 12(1): 167-184.
insanvetoplum.org

Received : 24.05.2021
Revision : 15.08.2021
Accepted : 13.09.2021
Online First : 16.10.2021

Introduction

Democratic societies consist of several different groups that have unique demands, values, interests, and ways of life. Despite the ultimate aim of democracy being to provide equal opportunities for each one of them, the power relations between these groups tend to end up with inequalities and injustices that cause certain ways of life to degrade. It creates disadvantaged groups in society that try to make their demands and interest heard, improve their social worth, and legitimize their lifestyles. In this context, the politics of recognition and populism come into prominence as two political styles that take these inequalities and injustices as the core problem of society.

The politics of recognition refers to any form of policies, struggles, and movements that target acquiring a desired sense of respect for a certain identity in society. The politics of recognition aims to construct a symmetry in the different groups' *constructive social power*, one that brings the ability to define boundaries, relevance, and status for the identities. In this context, misrecognition may be understood as an asymmetry in constructive social power that causes disadvantaged groups to be exposed to an unfavorable definition of their identity. Because people's self-understanding is dependent on their reflections on others, this asymmetry has the potential to harm people by damaging their sense of self-confidence, self-respect, and self-worth. Thus, the experience of misrecognition motivates people to form a struggle for recognition to reach a means of constructive social power in order to redefine the status of their identity to join society as equal interaction partners.

Like the politics of recognition, populism arrives when certain groups in a society feel they are deprived of power, which makes their demands, interests, and voices unheard. In the populist discourse, the groups who hold the majority of constructive social power correspond to the elite, while several different misrecognized groups are referred as "the people." In this sense, populism is a style of politics that offers to give power back to the people, power that these elite groups had illegitimately stolen.

Populism has risen all over the world through its critiques toward these established groups, the lack of representation of ordinary people, and economic inequalities between the groups as a result of unfair distribution policies. In other words, populism opposes the very reasons that make certain identity groups disadvantaged in a society: the asymmetry in constructive social power. In this context, the target audience of populist politics overlaps with those of the politics of recognition. Furthermore, populism appeals not to a certain misrecognized identity as separate movements of recognition do but to every one of them by uniting them under its concept of people against their common other: the elite. Due to the fact that the increase in the number

of identities under the same roof brings more chances to achieve political success because of the nature of modern democracies, populism seems to be one of the most effective solutions for the politics of recognition by providing a level of constructive power to disrespected identities. This situation makes populism a significantly powerful political style in an environment surrounded by claims of recognition.

Nevertheless, populism excludes the possibility of dialogue, negotiation, and discussion between the different parts of society through its sharp distinction between the groups who belong to the people and those that do not. The construction of the elite as *the* source for all the injustices and inequalities people face in society implements an “other” who represents an existential threat instead of an equal partner in society, which the politics of recognition requires. This makes politics a sort of zero-sum game that is only about the victory of one team rather than policy differences and that paves the way for the efforts of the parties to eliminate one another. This understanding essentially contradicts the goals and methods of the politics of recognition, which acknowledges the other as a significant part of one’s own identity. This contradiction reflects on the understanding these two forms of politics have toward the institutions, representations, and power relations between the groups. In this context, despite the fact that populism significantly attracts disadvantaged groups with its promise of giving power back to them, it fails to understand and answer their original need: recognition. This paper offers the view of populism as a successful political strategy that instrumentalizes the demands of recognition to shift the power asymmetry in society that ends up with misrecognition. After discussing the theoretical background of the two forms of politics, this study will address the populist construction of the people against the elite in regard to its self-presentation for disadvantaged groups and its results for these groups’ claims of recognition. Next, the study will examine the reflection of this dualism on the populist understanding of representation as a barrier to the relations of recognition. Lastly, the study will evaluate the populist instrumentalization of social and personal feelings of powerlessness as the basis for the construction of the people’s identity and as a way for fixing misrecognition in society.

Theoretical Background

The Specter Haunting the World: Populism

Populism has increasingly become one of the most popular concepts around the globe. It is used to refer to the governments, policies, and styles of politics found in several regions of the world. Fifty years have passed since Ghita Ionescu and Ernest

Gellner (1970, p. 1) wrote, “A specter is haunting the world: populism.” Nevertheless, emphasizing the vagueness of the term has been almost as popular as populism itself in every attempt to analyze and explain the phenomenon. In the 1960s, populism appeared in discussions on decolonization, peasants, and communism (Müller, 2017, p. 1). During the 1980s and 1990s, populism had been used to refer to a type of irresponsible economic policy that involves too much redistribution of wealth and government spending (Mudde & Kaltwasswer, 2017, p. 4). After the significant rise of populism in the late 2000s, however, more comprehensive analyses have come forward. Two tendencies are visible in this more recent body of works: Some scholars try to identify the characteristics of populism, while others focus on the nature of the relationship between populism and democracy.

The Oxford English Dictionary (Lexico, n.d.) defines populism as a “political approach that strives to appeal to ordinary people who feel that their concerns are disregarded by established elite groups.” Although populism has many faces, it also has several core concepts that allow for governments, discourses, or policies to be categorized as populist. *The people* is the first core concept used in every single populist approach. Despite the vagueness of the term, the consensus in the literature is to acknowledge its imagined character. According to Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017, p.9), the concept is used for a combination of three meanings: the people as sovereign, the people as common people, and the people as nation. The populist claim of speaking and acting in the name of the people as a distinguishing character makes the concept central to populist politics.

The concept of the people can never exist in the populist discourse without its other key conceptual counterpart: the elite/the establishment. *The elite* refers to one homogeneous corrupt group and includes the economic, cultural, and media elites who work against the general will of the people. In other words, they are the holders of significant power positions who not only ignore the demands of the people but also work against the interests of the country (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 12). Furthermore, populism defines those at the bottom of society as another “other” for the people.

Those on the bottom may be represented as parasites or spongers, as addicts or deviants, as disorderly or dangerous, as undeserving of benefits and unworthy of respect, and thus as not belonging to the so-called decent, respectable, normal, hard-working people (Brubaker, 2017, p. 363).

What draws attention here is the fact that the populist discourse always has these people linked to the elite groups, which allows populism to represent others as a uniting front.

This antagonistic relationship between the people and the elite around which populism revolves corresponds to Carl Schmitt's notorious friend-enemy distinction. According to Schmitt (2007), the essence of the political is hidden in this binary distinction. The enemy is the other who represents an existential threat to our substantial identity. The existence of the enemy is necessary to describe "us," because as Schmitt states, the inclusion of what is identical or homogeneous necessarily also requires the exclusion or even destruction of what is non-identical (Schmitt, 2007; Abst & Rummens, 2007, p. 418). Ernest Laclau (1996, 2007) acknowledged the fact that this central dualism of populism between the people and the elite requires the fundamental exclusion of others and equalizes differences, which paves the way for conceiving separate individuals and their demands as a totality. Therefore, the concepts in the populist discourse such as the people and the elite are *empty signifiers* that do not indicate any concrete features of society. By doing so, populism allows for several demands of expanding numbers of identities to be answered instead of particular struggles like class, race, or gender. Similarly, Chantal Mouffe (2018) argued separating the "we" from the "they" that constructs the people in populist discourse to be necessary. Moreover, the construction of the people should be organized around a project that addresses several forms of subordination, including exploitation, domination, and discrimination. According to Mouffe, the concept of the people does not refer to a "mass" as a homogenous unity in which all the differences disappear. In contrast, it indicates the articulation of heterogeneous demands that preserve their internal differentiation of the group. Therefore, the people is more than a simple coalition of different groups.

In this context, populism offers to give power back to the people by changing the values and norms of the cultural horizon that the elite have determined and by making new arrangements in social institutions to improve the people's social status, as this is the main issue in the politics of recognition.

Politics of Recognition

The politics of recognition refers to any form of policies, struggles, or movements that target acquiring a desired sense of respect for a certain identity in society. The contemporary literature on recognition is mostly based on Hegel's (1977) theory of recognition, which suggests freedom as the ultimate goal of human beings. To achieve this goal, namely to be completely free, human agents require realizing the conditions of their existence, which is only possible by interacting with others due to their dialogical human nature.

As one of the contemporary scholars of the literature, Charles Taylor (1992) drew attention to how the significance of recognition has been intensified in the modern era as a democratic need. Taylor distinguished two changes that “together have made the modern preoccupation with identity and recognition inevitable” (p. 26). The first major change is the collapse of the social hierarchies that had provided a given identity to the people through their birth. People from olden times did not have to think and discover who they were or what their purpose in life was because they used to be defined by their social milieu. Nevertheless, the identities of modern individuals do not enjoy this recognition *a priori*. The second change is the emergence of a new understanding of individual identity that emerged at the end of the 18th century: individualized identity. This identity is particular to one’s self and can only be discovered in one’s self. It underlines the ideal of authenticity that is being true to one’s self and one’s own particular way of being.

What makes recognition a vital human need in modern societies becomes clear when the dialogical character of human beings is added into the equation. According to Taylor (1992, p. 33), individuals become full human agents, understand themselves, and define their identity through their acquisition of rich human languages of expression, and this is only possible through exchange with others. Thus, identity is always defined in a dialogue with others or in a struggle against them. Taylor claimed discovering the identity to not mean that individuals work it out in isolation but that they negotiate it through dialogue with others, partly overtly and partly internally. Thus, the idea of an inwardly generated identity makes recognition crucial because the identity of individuals depends on their dialogical relations with others.

Axel Honneth (1995, p. 92) acknowledged Hegel’s and Taylor’s arguments and constructed a social theory by synthesizing Hegel’s early writings with Mead’s social psychology. According to Honneth, Mead’s works provide the theoretical resources for a materialist reformulation of Hegel’s theory of the struggle for recognition. Hegel and Mead share the idea that the reproduction of social life is significantly dependent on mutual recognition. An individual can develop a practical self-relation only when the individual has learned to view oneself from the normative perspective of one’s partners in interaction. For both thinkers, social struggle is a structuring force for society’s moral development. Furthermore, both Hegel and Mead made a three-part division among the forms of recognition. According to Honneth’s interpretation of Hegel, the struggle for recognition happens in three levels: family, civil society, and state. Mead, on the other hand, argued self-relation to develop in three levels, with these three levels of recognition corresponding to the three levels

of self-relation: self-confidence, self-respect, and self-worth. One's relation to the self gradually becomes positive when the three forms of recognition are achieved (Honneth, 1995, p. 94).

Honneth also offered three forms of disrespect corresponding to three forms of recognition. Disrespect or misrecognition refers to a kind of specific vulnerability human beings have that is caused by the absence of recognition. The first form of disrespect includes every act of maltreatment in which one is forcibly deprived of any opportunity to freely dispose of one's body, such as rape and torture. The second form of disrespect emerges when subjects are structurally excluded from the possession of certain rights in society, and the third and final type of disrespect refers to the degradation and denigration of individuals or groups.

Although the literature on recognition has developed for over a century as a comprehensive and consistent theory, populism is a way of politics that may be seen in several different forms. The current literature on populism also has a diverse characteristic, as the differences between the several faces of populism pave the way for a separate explanation of the phenomenon. This presents a challenge in examining the politics of recognition and populism together. The concept of constructive social power may be functional in overcoming this theoretical difficulty as well as in understanding populism through the lenses of politics of recognition.

Anthony Simon Laden (2007, p. 276) explained constructive social power as having the ability to construct an identity:

A group has constructive social power insofar as they have the capacity to set out the boundaries, relevance, and status of certain identities. That is, constructive social power is the power to determine what characteristics are marked as socially significant, and what the social consequences are for finding yourself with those characteristics.

Misrecognition arrives when an asymmetry occurs between different groups' constructive social power, and the ultimate aim of the politics of recognition becomes balancing this inequality. In this context, fighting for equal rights, just distribution policies, and equal respect for identities becomes a struggle against the unjust distribution of constructive social power in society.

Populism may be seen as the result of the same asymmetry. As discussed above, the core idea of populism can be found in the claim that certain groups hold power positions by ignoring the demands and interests of the rest of society. The populist objection not only targets the official power positions in government but also the cultural and economic positions that co-constitute constructive social power. As Canovan (1993, p. 3) stated, "Populist animus is directed not just at the political

and economic establishments but also at opinion-formers in academia and media.” In fact, the need for the construction of “the people” stems from the requirement for addressing the growing number of democratic demands concerning exploitation, domination, or discrimination (Mouffe, 2018) that are caused by the elites who have a significant amount of constructive power on their hands. Therefore, populism can be argued to challenge the asymmetry in this form of power that overlaps with the ultimate aim of politics of recognition.

Due to the fact that this asymmetry of power deprives people of a self-constructed identity, the populist construction of the people against the elite may be viewed as an act of power aimed at fixing this. In other words, organizing society under the concepts of the people and the elite brings a new form of power through new values and norms. This new understanding requires challenging established institutions to extend the representation of the people to actualize this power so as to rescue the people from feelings of powerlessness. The following sections will examine with respect to the politics of recognition the populist construction of the people against the elite, its unique understanding of direct representation, and its results for the feeling of powerlessness.

Construction of the People against the Elite

A critical attitude toward established institutions, norms, and values as the sources of asymmetric constructive power in society constitutes a significant point of juncture between populism and the politics of recognition. In the populist discourse, the elite represent the groups that benefit from society’s established institutions, norms, and values. The established asymmetry in constructive power is not a natural result of group relations but outcome intended by the elites who try to ensure the survival of the current order for their own interests. Nevertheless, the survival of the established order comes with its costs for the several other societal groups that do not belong to the elite. These costs come in many forms, including denigration of group identity and exclusion from the economic order; these correspond to the concept of misrecognition. These misrecognized parts of society mostly exist in separate groups in society through their unique demands and interests (e.g., women, ethnic and religious minorities, economically disadvantaged populations). What they do have in common, however, is the “other” who causes and maintains the power imbalance.

In this context, populism constructs a uniting identity that is *the people*, through which it offers to *include* all these disadvantaged groups against their common other: *the elite*. According to Laclau, the populist concepts of the people and the elite

as mentioned above are *empty signifiers* with a vague, unspecifiable being signified. What the concept of the people provides is the ability to conceive the demands of these separate misrecognized groups as a totality. By doing so, populism fosters the mobilization of excluded parts of society. Mouffe (2018) also acknowledged the task of populism to be to construct the people around these separate demands by taking their increasing fragmentation and diversity into consideration. Meanwhile, the elite are a necessary other for the construction of the people. Hence misrecognized identities seek recognition either by stretching the existing social identities or demanding the creation of new ones (Parekh, 2009, p. 273); populism responds to this demand by constructing the people as a united front for several disrespected groups.

Thus, populism involves a kind of revolt against the established structure in the name of the people. This revolt does not target a specific group of elite or a part of the establishment but conceives of them as a totality. Firstly, it rejects domination of the elite values that downgrade certain ways of life. Populism always constructs the meaning of the people by including a critique of the dominant culture that views the judgments, tastes, and values of ordinary citizens with suspicion (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 10). Because one of the key reasons behind the struggle for recognition is the social hierarchy of values that causes denial of the worth of some forms of life (Honneth, 1995, p. 125), the populist revolt against the elite's values arrives as an important promise for the politics of recognition. The concept of the people also provides a place for disrespected groups to feel valuable. In line with this promise, one common phenomenon in populist politics is for the leaders to adopt the clothing, speech, and dress of misrecognized identities as legitimizing gestures (Moffit, 2017, p. 143).

Secondly, the populist revolt also targets the economic injustices that construct a significant part of the asymmetrical power relations in society. Populism rejects acknowledging economic inequalities in society as a natural result of economic relations. In contrast, the economically disadvantaged population is the victim of the established economic order on behalf of the elite, which results in the economic exclusion of several groups. Two sources of demand are found for material redistribution that have arisen from democratic ethics. On one hand, every citizen in a democratic regime is promised to be treated equally by law. The assurance of social rights is required for citizens to have an equal opportunity for participation in the democratic process. On the other hand, a democratic society needs to give its citizens a chance to be socially esteemed for their achievements (Honneth: 2001, p. 53). Honneth (2001, p. 54) claimed this to correspond to just distribution because "the rules organizing the distribution of material goods derive from the degree of

social esteem enjoyed by social groups, in accordance with institutionalized hierarchies of value.” Therefore, demands for economic justice always include a promise of status recovery. Seen in this light, redistribution demands involve the struggles over established cultural definitions of what activities are socially necessary and valuable. This reveals these struggles to be locked into a struggle for recognition that aims to challenge the established measures of social esteem (Honneth, 2001, p. 54).

In this context, populist attention toward the undemocratic nature of economic injustices corresponds to claims of recognition. Due to the fact that the amount of economic reward in the capitalist economic order is determined by social groups’ positions in the production process (Honneth, 2001), populists’ promise to transform established definitions of what activities are valuable through its construction of the people by drawing attention to the elites as the source of economic injustices once again emerges as a solution to the misrecognition.

Nevertheless, the antagonistic relationship between the people and the elite comes with several negative outcomes for the politics of recognition. Even though the populist conceptualization of the people is argued to be a totality of several co-existing demands (Laclau, 2007; Mouffe, 2018), dividing society into two camps essentially presumes the interests, demands, and benefits of the groups who belong to the same camp to not contradict one another, at least not at the level that prevents them from co-existing. The core reason for this understanding may be found in the idea that every problem in society is somehow related to the elite. If all the problems of the excluded parts of society are caused by the elite, then the conflicts of interest between the groups could not be an essential issue hindering their unity under the title of the people as their real interests lie in the elimination of the establishment. However, by doing so, populism fails to grasp the complexity of the society in which the very values that cause the denigration of one group’s status may be shared by other disadvantaged groups. For instance, the patriarchal values that have resulted in women’s struggle for recognition are also fairly common among ethnic and religious minority groups; likewise, women who want to eliminate patriarchal values may adopt the values of the ethnic and religious majority in society. Therefore, the struggle of one group may target another one that is supposed to belong under the populist discourse’s concept of the people. This puts the populist promises to answer the demands of misrecognized groups into a difficult position and jeopardizes a group’s identification with the people. Similarly, the construction of the elite as the other camp presumes united elite groups who share the same interests without decisive tensions between them even though their interests and benefits may not be necessarily mutually exclusive.

Due to the fact that groups may be disadvantaged over certain aspects while their other values and interests correspond with the established ones, populism faces the difficulty of defining an ideal version of these groups to be included in the definition of the people; this ends up excluding certain individuals from their own group as well as from society. Thus a clear contradiction with the politics of recognition is revealed which requires the inclusion of different identities as equal interaction partners. It also reveals the supply-side of populism that shapes popular demand and interest instead of simply responding to it (Halikiopoulou, 2019; Hirvonen, 2018). Thus, despite populist promises, the people become a homogenous entity that is based on the “imaginary fiction of a closed, collective identity that suppresses individual differences” (Abts & Rummens, 2007, p. 416).

Furthermore, populism’s approach to the other paves the way for other crucial tensions in the politics of recognition. Because the populist conceptualization of the other as an enemy whose annihilation would restore balance and justice, it fails to grasp the real problems of the people (e.g., sexism, racism, poverty, capitalism; Žizek, 2006, p. 555). Apart from failing to address the main causes of misrecognition, predetermining the identity categories as the people and the elite obstructs the possibility of mutual recognition. The struggles for recognition are formed so as to be recognized by *the other*; this is acknowledged as a significant part of the identity and represents a potential recognizer in the literature on recognition. However, the construction of the elite as the other threatening the existence of the people does not leave room for dialogue between the groups, thus limiting the number of potential recognizers. In Hirvonen’s (2018, p. 13) words, “This involves a strange, almost tragic, dynamic where recognition is struggled for and yet the status of a valid recognizer is denied from the others.” As a result, populism becomes a self-fulfilling hypothesis or vicious circle, or it is condemned to a kind of Tantalus punishment.

Therefore, populism also causes the people’s self-understanding to constrict. As discussed earlier, the main reason for the need for recognition is hidden in the dialogical character of human beings; this means that self-realization requires others. As Hegel (1977) indicates, self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness. Therefore, the populist conceptualization of the other also creates negative consequences for the people’s ability to understand the conditions of their self-identity.

The tensions between populism and the politics of recognition further continue through the populist understanding of representation. Hence, populism aims to capture constructive social power; after constructing who the “we” and “they” are, it needs to decide how “we” should participate in politics. In other words, it needs

to offer certain changes in society's institutional arrangements in which the elite's values, interests, and norms are practiced. Populism has a unique solution for this problem that becomes visible in its approach of direct representation, which will be discussed in the next section alongside the results of this form of representation for the politics of recognition.

Direct Representation versus Mediating Institutions

The contemporary crisis of representation constitutes another common problem context for both populist politics and the politics of recognition. The uniqueness of the populist understanding of representation comes from the populist critique of the functioning of democracy in addition to the concept of the people. As M. Canovan (2002, p. 43) stated, the ideology of democracy stresses the sovereignty of people against accommodation and of transparency against intricate procedures. However, populism argues the existing practices of democracy to be full of opaque and intricate procedures and forms accommodating the elites (Abst & Rummens, 2007, p. 411). According to the populist discourse, the only problem is not just the fact that formal and informal institutions of representation such as parliament and media are dominated by the elite but also the crucial matter that the institutions themselves either damage representation because of opaque procedures or retard the expression of the will of the people. In this scope, populism favors forms of direct representation to eliminate the injustices institutions cause. Due to the people being conceived as a homogenous entity with regard to their will, the transparency of the will of the people seems possible to grasp for those who are willing to listen. If so, then no need exists for discussion, party politics, or negotiation. What is needed is just a leader or a party who is able to understand the people and act and speak directly on their behalf (Abst & Rummens, 2007, p. 408). This gives populism a tendency to make contracts with the people through elections and referenda; this is supposed to "issue something like an imperative mandate that tells politicians exactly what they have to do in government" (Müller, 2018, p. 31). This also paves the way for strong leader figures and even cults of personality. In this respect, populism seems to rely on a singular leader who embodies the hopes, desires, and voice of the people. Leaders are more than a simple representative. They are the one who is symbolically tied together with the people and able to embody the sovereign will (Moffit, 2017, p. 146).

Contrarily, the politics of recognition presupposes mediating institutions as a requirement of the relations of recognition. According to Hegel (1977, as cited in Patten, 1999), people can recognize each other as free and capable agents only through

a certain objective institutional structure in which they participate. Representative institutions make deliberation and participation possible and pave the way for the temporary interpretation of the common good in terms of the variety of beliefs and wants of the citizens (Habermas, 1996). Due to changing circumstances, all these interpretations can be challenged based on new arguments. This guarantees the construction of the common good to be an open-ended process (Abst & Rummens, 2007, p. 417). In this respect, this is in tune with the aim of the politics of recognition, as the struggle for recognition involves the efforts to reinterpret the common good by challenging established beliefs and adding new ones to society's cultural horizon. Mediating these efforts requires active citizenship as well as functioning institutions.

Therefore, another clear contradiction arrives between populism and the politics of recognition. Even though the politics of recognition requires changes and improvements in society's institutional arrangements in order to eliminate institutional injustices as a part of constructive power, populism's holistic approach toward institutions themselves ends up eliminating the means of representation. The people being the ones who directly legitimize the populist government without any need for mediation in populist logic (Urbinati, 2014, p. 160) prevents institutions from being able to freely organize themselves. Institutions become ossified, static, or dead as a result of the populist animus against mediation. In line with this understanding, populism does not require active citizenship after citizens have been united under the concept of the people. The elections and referenda that populism glorifies do not refer to an open-ended process of deliberation or participation. Rather, these serve to ratify what the populist leader has already understood to be the real interest of the people. By doing so, populism obstructs the realization of recognition potential that social institutions have built into themselves (Hirvonen, 2018, p. 12). Thus, the populist emphasis on direct representation hampers institutions that stabilize recognition relations and results in nonfunctional institutions. If no institutional function exists for deliberation, the people are unable to challenge the dominant interpretation of the common good. As a result, they are unable to successfully draw attention to their values and interests, which is the objective of the struggle for recognition.

Despite the clear contradictions between the two forms of politics, populism does succeed at drawing the attention of people who feel powerless. Apart from its promise to give power back to the people through inclusion and representation, populism also has the ability to instrumentalize certain social feelings and personal pathologies of powerlessness to consolidate groups around the concept of the people. The next section will discuss how populism answers the feelings caused by misrecognition and the results.

Between Solidarity and Victimhood

Solidarity is another point of juncture between populism and the politics of recognition. In the case of the politics of recognition, the relationship among group members takes the shape of solidarity; this becomes apparent in the experiences of collective resistance. Solidarity emerges as a result of shared experiences of sacrifice and strain in the process (Honneth, 1995, p. 128). In this context, populism seems to provide a sense of solidarity among the members of the people by drawing attention to their common experiences of sacrifice and strain. Even though the category of the people has several different groups with their own unique backgrounds and stories, populism attempts to extend the borders of solidarity beyond group members through its conceptualization of the other. By drawing attention to the elite as the common cause of all these bruises, populism constructs a psychological tie among the members of several groups, paving the way for feelings of solidarity.

Therefore, populism is also related to the feelings of powerlessness such as the alienation, marginalization, and resentment these common experiences create. These feelings also result from a type of misrecognition in which the people's dignity and status get subjected to a kind of humiliation. In fact, these are the very feelings making up the motivational impetus behind the struggle for recognition (Honneth, 1995, p. 137). Thus, populism and the politics of recognition seem to make a common cause in addressing these feelings.

Nevertheless, emphasizing negative experiences and bruises as the social cement among groups results in ossifying misrecognition instead of overcoming it. Following Laclau's (2005) argument where the people and the elite are empty signifiers, Hirvonen (2018, p. 11) drew attention to the fact that "the threat of the other must be stirred up constantly because to do otherwise would be to endanger identification with the empty signifier, i.e. the people." Populism achieves this goal by constructing identities on the basis of the negative feelings toward the other. These feelings may serve as the basis for individuals to join the populist camp, but populism requires keeping these feelings alive to make sure it maintains the identification with the people. Thus, populism does not remove the feelings of alienation and marginalization that the politics of recognition requires. Instead, populism contributes to these feelings. As such, populism negatively fixes and anchors the social feelings that were the sources of the struggle for recognition in the first place.

Moreover, populism also has the ability to address personal pathologies such as sadism and masochism. The first level of recognition relations is acknowledged to happen in early childhood between a child and mother. Infants in the first months

of their lives are unaware of their separate existence from their mothers. As they grow up, mother and child learn to detach themselves from a state of undifferentiated oneness and symbiosis; they then learn to love each other by recognizing their independent personalities. On this level, misrecognition refers to a failed detachment process. Such failures engender disorders in love relationships that are clinically termed masochism and sadism (Honneth, 1995, p. 106). Both masochism and sadism are the result of one-sidedness in a failed recognition relationship.

Erich Fromm's (1969, p. 163) analysis was remarkable in how it showed the relationship between the first level of misrecognition and populism. Accordingly, masochism appears due to feelings of inferiority, powerlessness, and individual insignificance. Sadistic drives, on the other hand, can be seen in the pleasure of domination over another person (Fromm, 1969, p. 179). Despite the two pathologies appearing to be opposite, they are actually two sides of the same coin. Both masochism and sadism result from one basic need, "springing from the inability to bear the isolation and weakness of one's own self" (Fromm, 1969, p. 180). In the case of masochism, the individual can find cultural patterns to satisfy their masochistic cravings. According to Fromm, these individuals may attempt to become a part of a bigger and more powerful whole outside of themselves to overcome the feeling of powerlessness. This may occur in several forms (e.g., institution, leader, or nation). In this regard, masochistic individuals may attempt to lessen their feelings of powerlessness by becoming part of *the people*. Furthermore and as discussed above, the populist understanding of direct representation does not require active citizenship; populists act like the caretakers of the people. This helps masochistic individuals avoid final responsibility. In the case of sadism, on the other hand, individuals lust for power because of their weakness. They aim to dominate others because of their inability to stand and live on their own (Fromm, 1969, p. 184). Thus, they admire authority and want to become the authority so that others submit to them. Identifying with the people on this point allows them to fulfill this need. These individuals may admire the strong leader figures of populism, and sadistic individuals may assume authority through the leader by being a part of the people due to the strong identification the leader has with the people in the populist discourse. Moreover, populist exclusion and denial of the interests of the other may satisfy the sadists' need for domination.

However, similar to negative social feelings, this fails to promise a real solution. In Fromm's (1969, p. 175) words, "The individual succeeds in eliminating the conspicuous suffering but not in removing the underlying conflict and the silent unhappiness." By doing so, populism once again anchors the feelings into the identities of the people instead of helping the people overcome these feelings.

Thus, a *victimhood* discourse mostly accompanies the populism in which all the people are presented as the victims of the establishment. Even if populists succeed at eliminating the elite from important positions of power as stated above, the threat of the elite must continue as a uniting force for the people. By doing so and by constantly being reminded of the former bruises of misrecognition, the populist camp presents itself as the only choice for the disadvantaged groups by keeping the fear of turning back to the old days alive. As such, populism does not permit overcoming misrecognition, which is the main objective of the struggle for recognition; it instead fixes the identities around these negative feelings, which causes the continuity of people's feelings of powerlessness.

Conclusion

In conclusion, populism has come into prominence in the contemporary political landscape dominated by the claims of recognition as a political strategy for organizing the disadvantaged groups of society as the people against a common other. The success of this strategy lies in its promise to eliminate these groups' lack of constructive social power in society; this would bring the disrespected identities their social worth through a shift in society's cultural horizon. In line with its promise, populism constructs a sort of power by creating new identity groups as the people and the elite. Through this process of construction, populism produces a brand-new understanding toward the excluded parts of society by defining new limits for their social status and creating new values and norms. In this context, populism attracts individuals who feel deprived of power due to the embedded injustices in society through culture and institutions. Indeed, populism appears to be the expected savior of powerless groups with its uniting force, its revolutionary approach toward the institutions that are the power-producing elements of society, and its success in making the problems of misrecognized groups heard.

As discussed above, the politics of recognition also requires the elimination of the asymmetry of constructive power in society to make individuals equal in terms of their values, interests, and demands. This is because acknowledging others as equals is a pre-condition for the desired sense of dialogue and negotiation needed to realize the conditions of one's self-existence. The ultimate aim of the struggle for recognition, then, is not to capture power but to balance it in society so as to pave the way for meaningful encounters with others. In other words, the struggle for recognition does not necessarily aim to downgrade other ways of life. Instead, it involves improving the status of one specific group in society.

Nevertheless, what populism does is not remove the asymmetry of power but simply shift the parties who have it in society. Even though populism promises to change the positions of the excluded parties, it never offers to create a balance between different power groups. Instead, it aims to capture all the power in the name of the people. In other words, populism is always compatible with leaving the parts of society powerless who are not categorized as “the people.” Therefore, what populism does is eliminate the establishment from remaining the establishment. In this respect, it forces the relations among different groups to get stuck in a sort of Hegelian master-slave relationship. Populism may be able to change the masters, but it certainly fails to provide recognition; hence, the slave is not capable of being recognized due to the slave’s status. Thus, apart from creating new disrespected groups through the shift of power, populism also robs the chance of recognition from the people to whom it purposes to give power back. As a result, populism creates timeless victims who lack the means of being able to recover their self-image in society.

Therefore, while populism may be a successful political strategy for capturing political power by using the demands, interests, and struggles of disrespected groups, it may succeed in creating new power groups in society. As such, populism may appear to be the easiest way to overcome misrecognition; however, it has actually been just a dead-end for the politics of recognition from the beginning.

References | Kaynakça

- Abts, K., & Rummens, S. (2007). Populism versus democracy. *Political Studies*, 55(2), 405–424. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2007.00657.x>
- Brubaker, R. (2017). Why populism? *Theory and Society*, 46(5), 357–385. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11186-017-9301-7>
- Canovan, M. (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>
- Canovan, M. (2002). Taking politics to the people: Populism as the ideology of democracy. In *Democracies and the Populist Challenge* (pp. 25–44). https://doi.org/10.1057/9781403920072_2
- Fromm, E. (1969). *Escape from freedom*. Adfo Books.
- Habermas, J. (1996). *Between facts and norms: Contributions to a discourse theory of law and democracy*. MIT Press
- Halikiopoulou, D. (2019). Right-wing populism as a nationalist vision of legitimating collective choice: A supply-side perspective. *The International Spectator*, 54(2), 35–49. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2019.1588544>
- Hegel, G. W. F. (1977). *Phenomenology of spirit*. Translated by A. V. Miller. Clarendon Press.
- Hirvonen, O., & Pennanen, J. (2018). Populism as a pathological form of politics of recognition. *European Journal of Social Theory*, 22(1), 27–44. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1368431018766271>

- Honneth, A. (1995). *The struggle for recognition: The moral grammar of social conflicts* (1st ed.). Polity.
- Honneth, A. (2001). Recognition or redistribution? *Theory, Culture & Society*, 18(2-3), 43–55. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02632760122051779>
- Ionescu, G., & Gellner, E. (1970). *Populism: Its meaning and national characteristics*. Weidenfeld & Nicolson.
- Laclau, E. (1996). Why do empty signifiers matter to politics? In *Emancipation(s)* (pp. 36–46). Verso.
- Laclau, E. (2007). *On populist reason*. Verso.
- Laden, A.S. (2007). Reasonable deliberation, constructive power, and the struggle for recognition. In *Recognition and power: Axel Honneth and the tradition of critical social theory* (pp. 270–290). Cambridge University Press.
- Lexico. (n.d.). lexico.com dictionary. Retrieved 2021, September 28 from <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/populism>
- Moffitt, B. (2017). *The global rise of populism: Performance, political style, and representation* (1st ed.). Stanford University Press.
- Mouffe, C. (2018). *For a left populism*. Verso.
- Mudde, C., & Kaltwasser, C. R. (2017). *Populism: A very short introduction*. Oxford University Press.
- Müller, J. (2017). *What is populism?* Penguin.
- Patten, A. (1999). *Hegel's idea of freedom*. Oxford University Press.
- Schmitt, C. (2007). *The concept of the political*. University of Chicago Press.
- Taylor, C. (1992). *Multiculturalism and the politics of recognition*. Princeton University Press.
- Urbinati, N. (2014). *Democracy disfigured: Opinion, truth, and the people*. Harvard University Press.
- Žižek, S. (2006). Against the populist temptation. *Critical Inquiry*, 32(3), 551–574. <https://doi.org/10.1086/505378>