# Populist Rhetorics
## Case Studies and a Minimalist Definition

*Edited by*
Christian Kock
Lisa Villadsen

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**Christian Kock** is an Emeritus Professor of Rhetoric at the University of Copenhagen's Department of Communication. His research interests include political argumentation and debate, the history of rhetoric, credibility, journalism, literary and musical aesthetics, linguistics, and writing pedagogy. Han has been a Visiting Professor at Indiana University, Bloomington, and is author, editor, co-author, or co-editor of a number of books in rhetoric, linguistics, argumentation, journalism, political debate, aesthetics, and literature, as well as book chapters and articles for scholarly journals including *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, *Argumentation*, *Political Communication*, *Informal Logic*, *Cogency*, *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, *Paradigmi*, *Deutsche Jahrbuch Philosophie*, *PTL: Poetics and Theory of Literature*, *Studies in Short Fiction* and *KB: The Journal of the Kenneth Burke Society*. A recent article is "Evaluating Public Deliberation: Including the Audience Perspective" in *Journal of Deliberative Democracy* https://doi.org/10.16997/10.16997/jdd.945. He has written extensively for general audiences. With Lisa Villadsen, he has published on the notion of rhetorical citizenship.

**Olaf Kramer** is a Professor of Rhetoric and Knowledge Communication at Tübingen University. He studied Rhetoric, Philosophy, Communication Studies, and Psychology in Tübingen, Frankfurt/Main, and Chapel Hill, USA. Kramer is head of the Presentation Research Center and Editor of "Science Notes Magazin." His main research fields are presentations as a rhetorical format, communicative competence, political rhetoric, and science communication. Latest publication: Kramer, Olaf and Markus Gottschling, eds., *Recontextualized Knowledge. Rhetoric—Situation—Science Communication*. Berlin/Boston 2021.

**Pierre Ostiguy** is a Professor at the Escuela de Administración Pública of the Universidad de Valparaiso, in Chile. He is Co-Editor of *Populism in Global Perspective: A Performative and Discursive Approach* (Routledge 2021) and of *The Oxford Handbook of Populism* (OUP 2017), in

which he is one of three authors featured in the Concepts section. He has authored several chapters of these and other books, as well as many articles and working papers on populism. Holding a Ph.D. in political science from the University of California, Berkeley, where he specialized in Latin American politics, he has served as a regular faculty member in Canada, the United States, Chile, and Argentina. Best known for his socio-cultural approach to populism, as well as his previous work on Peronism in Argentina, his long-standing interests have also included Venezuela, where he conducted research in the 2000s, and on which he has commented regularly in Chile's national news media.

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Visiting Scholar at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. He has held central positions in the Rhetoric Society of Europe and the International Society for the History of Rhetoric. He is Co-Editor of the Cambridge History of Rhetoric (to appear in 2023) and, with Olaf Kramer, co-editor of the series *neue rhetoric* at DeGruyter.

**Anne Ulrich** is an "Akademische Rätin" in the Department of Media Studies at the University of Tübingen. She is interested in the interrelations between media theory, journalism, and rhetoric, in particular in the context of current changes in the media landscape and in the functions of journalism. Currently, she studies rhetoric and media theory in relation to the threat from Jihadic terrorism. Among her research interests are also the theory of TV, visual communication, political rhetoric, and propaganda.

**Lisa Villadsen** is a Professor of Rhetoric and Head of the Section of Rhetoric at the Department of Communication at the University of Copenhagen, Denmark. She holds a Ph.D. in Communication Studies from Northwestern University, USA. Her research interests are in rhetorical criticism and theory related to contemporary political rhetoric. Together with Christian Kock, Villadsen has developed the concept of rhetorical citizenship and edited two volumes on the topic: *Rhetorical Citizenship and Public Deliberation*. Penn State University Press, 2012 and *Contemporary Rhetorical Citizenship: Purposes, Practices, and Perspectives*. Leiden University Press, 2014. She has published in journals such as *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, *Argumentation*, and *Citizenship Studies*. A recent article discusses populist rhetoric in Denmark: "Emotions in Politics: Populism's Win?" *WCSAJ* online journal 1(1), 2020 (https://www.wcsaglobal.org/volume-1-issue-1-2020/emotions-in-politics-populisms-win/).

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# Introduction

## *Lisa Villadsen and Christian Kock*

On January 6, 2021, having attended a rally with Donald Trump, who repeated his claim of having had the Presidential election "stolen" from him and told his supporters, "If you don't fight like hell, you're not going to have a country anymore," a crowd of several thousand people stormed the US Capitol, vandalizing and looting it for several hours in what to many was the capping event of the perverse and erosive influence of Donald Trump on the US political climate in general and political discourse in particular. While "populism" to many Americans rings of a nineteenth-century rural political movement, to most observers around the world this event symbolized the alarming success of populism in contemporary American politics: an angry crowd feeling ignored and cheated by a self-serving bureaucratic and political elite and eager to

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follow a charismatic leader to the point of erecting a mock gallows and shouting "Hang Mike Pence" as retaliation against the Vice President for not overturning the election results (which, of course, he had no power to do).

## The Problem(s) of Populism

Populism is, it is generally agreed, on the rise in many regions of the world, and populist leaders and movements are in power or highly visible and are influential on the public agenda setting in multiple democracies. In response to this development, "populism" has emerged as a key term in political rhetoric, journalism, and scholarship in recent years. Typically, it is discussed as a topic that is as important as it is vexing due to its unwieldy, norm-defying forms and rapid spread.

In academia, too, attention to populism has grown in significance over the past ten years across a broad range of disciplines. Major themes have concerned its definition, scope, and significance. Recurring key questions have concerned populism's political grounding, i.e., whether it is ideologically informed in any one direction, and if it is, then to what extent. In so far as populism has been considered both a left- and a right-wing phenomenon and therefore seems to evade a simple ideological characterization, the question has been raised if populism is a "thin ideology" in the sense that it cannot be associated with left- or right-leaning views but is seen on both sides of the political spectrum as well as in versions that "politicize an orthogonal dimension of sociopolitical difference" (Ostiguy and Roberts 2016, 26). In all versions, it is widely agreed, it is characterized by being driven by the assumption of a deep divide (in terms of interests, power, and moral integrity) between "the people" and "the elite"—often in combination with a strong political leader who is considered the true voice of the people. Another question is whether populism is best considered a more or less neutral categorizing label or in fact carries a negative valorization. To some, populism is associated with authenticity and a truly democratic attitude, and "populist" is thus a badge of honor, whereas to others it suggests an illiberal and undemocratic stance characterized by irresponsible pandering to particular groups at the expense of other societal groups and entailing an exclusionary approach to politics.

Another ongoing discussion concerns the relation between populism as a set of particular substantive ideas and its presentation. In other words, the issue is whether populist rhetoric is to be considered as a particular

rhetoric, i.e., a particular and recognizable way of communicating that may be separated from what might be considered its political/ideological agenda. This latter issue, the relation between form and content, as it were, is what this book aspires to address and provide reflections on. To that end, each chapter considers a particular case or example of political populism with a focus on the way it communicates to its audiences.

## Approaches

This book brings together scholars who work in a range of relevant academic fields, including political science, social theory, media studies, and rhetoric. Differences notwithstanding, the contributors' work is joined by a shared interest in what can best be called a rhetorical approach to the subject. This approach implies a concern with understanding situated discourse in its particularity and involves an interest in how the discourse and its specific traits and qualities build a relation with its intended auditors, and how that relation may be characterized. What is the persuasive appeal and what kind of reaction from the audience does it invite?

In putting together a volume of studies of populist rhetorics we hope to accomplish two things: The first is to make clear for a wider academic audience the relevance and usefulness of close rhetorical readings of populist discourse as a supplement to the already rich literature on populism in fields such as political science and philosophy (e.g., Mudde 2004; Laclau 2005; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2012; Moffitt and Tormey 2014; Kaltwasser et al. 2017; Müller 2016; Eatwell and Goodwin 2018). Scholars in neighboring disciplines have extensively studied the discourses of populism, especially of the right-wing sort, and leading political scholars have explicitly suggested that populism in part, or even best, is characterized as a particular kind of rhetoric. Even when they do not use the term *rhetoric*, many find the distinctive features of populism in the communication practices or political "style" of populist figures and in the "rapport" that it helps create between them and their followers. Most prominent among the several scholars who do this are Laclau (2005), Moffitt (2016), and Ostiguy (2017). Their approaches come close to assuming that populism is a rhetorical notion. Laclau's view of populism as a political "logic" is thus based on the way populists rhetorically interpellate their conception of the people; rhetorical devices, he notes, "become instruments of an expanded social rationality, and we are no

longer able to dismiss an ideological interpellation as *merely* rhetorical" [emphasis in original]. He mentions as an example how the early American populists "through rhetorical operations […] managed to constitute broad popular identities which cut across many sectors of the population, [and thereby] *they actually constituted populist subjects*" [emphasis in original] (2005, 12). Too, Moffitt criticizes definitions of populism as ideology, strategy, and political logic and argues instead for a definition of populism as a political style and for the populist leader as a performer embodying such a style. He mentions Canovan (1981, 1982) as a forerunner of the approach to populism that sees it as a style of discourse, and he recognizes Laclau's emphasis on what he calls "the process of naming, performance or articulation" (Moffitt 2016, 24)—in other words, the way Laclau sees the key to populist political logic in a certain rhetorical behavior. Moffitt's approach resembles that of Ostiguy, who has recently presented it in *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*—an approach emphasizing the typical populist's predilection for performing "the low," as exemplified in this volume in his analysis of Venezuela's former President, Hugo Chávez.

## Untapped Interdisciplinary Opportunities

To us, it is striking that these prominent scholars in political science and theory come so close to defining populism in terms of rhetoric and to applying notions that rhetorical scholars have also developed and used for years. With this volume we hope to foster a more direct and fruitful interaction between disciplinary traditions that have much to contribute to each other. It is, however, equally striking how rhetoricians have had relatively little to say about a concept of the first international importance that scholars in neighboring disciplines have, as it were, placed on their doorstep. Our second hope for this volume is thus to highlight the theme of populism as a pressing area of inquiry for rhetorical scholars. In discourse studies, populism has been a key term for years with the work of Wodak (Wodak and Weiss 2007; Wodak 2015) as a prominent example, but while related topics have interested rhetoricians, e.g., demagoguery (Roberts-Miller 2019), fake news (Cloud 2018), and political resentment (Engels 2015), it strikes us that in the field of rhetoric surprisingly little attention has been dedicated to populism so far (with Lee 2006; Maddux 2013; van der Geest et al. 2020 among the exceptions). It seems obvious that scholars in rhetoric, media studies, and political science and theory

do work that is potentially of mutual interest and enriching, and with this book we hope to begin that conversation.

It is clear that if political scholars are increasingly agreeing to find the hallmarks of populism in discourse, style, or rhetoric (whichever term is used), then the methods, concepts, and theories that rhetoricians have developed from antiquity until the present for analyzing discourse, style, and rhetoric should be applied professionally and to their full capacity. Laclau (2005) made extensive references to ancient rhetorical thought and concepts, but contemporary rhetorical theory, such as Black's work on the second persona or Charland's work on constitutive rhetoric and Conley's, Miller's and others' work on genre has gone largely unnoticed by Laclau as well as other political theorists. Similarly, rhetoricians may benefit from drawing on political scientists' knowledge of political substance and ideology formations past and present. It is time, then, for scholars in rhetoric as well as in neighboring disciplines to investigate the theory and practice of populism under the heading of rhetoric.

Another particular feature of this collection is that in addition to its interdisciplinary design, it brings together scholars who hail from countries in the Western hemisphere as different as Canada, Germany, Greece, Italy, UK, and USA to offer case studies from what are in most instances their countries of origin. In this way, it provides not only a cross-disciplinary look at the phenomenon of populist communication, but also an international overview of manifestations of populist rhetorics. The following case studies in this book consider instances of populism across a political spectrum, from socialist Hugo Chávez in Venezuela to German right-wing politicians Björn Höcke and Alice Weidel, and it looks at populist rhetoric as it unfolds in a range of genres and media, including speeches at rallies and political meetings, party platforms, YouTube videos, tweets, and interviews.

## What We Mean by "Rhetoric"

The term "rhetoric" itself can be tricky, and we therefore offer a few comments on how we understand and use it in this book. To some, "rhetoric" is a word that connotes empty, overly ornamental, or deliberately manipulative communication. In such an understanding, the title of this book might almost seem pleonastic, at least if one subscribes to a skeptical view of populism: What populists say or write must *ipso facto* be "mere rhetoric," i.e., empty and manipulative discourse.

We think of the term rhetoric differently, namely as a *politically unmarked* term used to describe public discourse in the political realm. Moreover, we refer to rhetoric as an academic tradition with roots in the ancient world and alive in many university settings to this day. More on this comprehensive understanding of rhetoric—as distinct from the narrow use of the term found in some contemporary scholars and fields—will be said in the concluding chapter. Suffice it here to say that our understanding of what "rhetoric" means aligns with the way the term was used and defined by the leading thinkers in the rhetorical tradition itself, from Aristotle, over Cicero, Quintilian, and Erasmus to the present day. We thus use the term rhetoric to refer to *everything* a rhetor does communicatively with the aim of securing others' adherence to a position: The topics covered and how they are ordered, the claims made, the argumentation and appeals to reason and emotion, the vocabulary, the speaker's self-presentation, and the delivery are all based on rhetorical decisions. It is not as though one separable component of a politician's statement is "content" or "ideology," while the remaining, more superficial features make up the rhetorical part. Rhetoric on this view is thus not a matter of stylistics, nor a presentational technique, but a comprehensive approach to communication that begins with the adaptation of a message (understood in its totality of ideas, appeals, and form) to a particular audience in order to influence their understanding, views, feelings and actions about the matter in question.

The chapters in the book represent a range of assessments of populism. While no common definition of populism or populist rhetoric immediately emerges from the chapters when seen collectively, they still partake in a shared approach to populism that sees it as a primarily rhetorical concept. In this it could be said to at least not run into the same problem that vexes most conceptions of populism, namely that they tend to posit a set or bundle of features assumed to characterize populisms generally— only to discover that while many of the phenomena that observers agree to call populism do exhibit a given set of features, there are others that don't. And while these probably share a somewhat different set of features with other alleged populisms, attempts to find a set of defining features shared by all tend to return empty-handed. In the concluding chapter we make an attempt to avoid this problem while still suggesting a unifying thread in this handful of highly diverse populist rhetorics—a thread that becomes visible under close rhetorical scrutiny, and which we suggest may provide a way of seeing a conceptual unity in phenomena that have so far

proved quite recalcitrant to such attempts. We also offer some thoughts on the feasibility of talking about populism as a rhetorical phenomenon that is neither substantive (in the sense of relying on particular ideological agendas and values) nor normatively inscribed (that is, not in itself ethically based) but rather a descriptor for a cumulative communicative activity.

The present collection illustrates the problem indicated in the previous paragraph: In it, we find certain significant features that recur in many of the versions of populism studied here, but not in all. An example of such a theme is the significance of *the medium*, where especially digital platforms and online circulation are means found to be particularly conducive to populist messages. This is evident in Finlayson's study of Brexit rhetoric and in the study by Till, Kramer, and Ulrich of rhetorical maneuvering by two leaders of the right-wing political party "Alternative für Deutschland." There are several other intriguing properties found in one or a few of the populisms studied that invite further inquiry into how that property might be connected with a putative, underlying thread across populist discourses. As Hatzisavvidou suggests, there is, for example, the Syriza government's assertion of an inherent superiority of *moral dignity* in the Greek people which also resembles anti-EU rhetoric as studied by Finlayson; there is the *cultivation of victimhood* in Republican "melancholic" rhetoric of the Trump era according to Johnson; there is the apparent rank "*voltagabbana*" opportunism diagnosed by Pietrucci in Italy's Matteo Salvini of the "Lega"; and there is, according to Ostiguy, the massive *"Messianic" appeal* invoked by Venezuelan leader Hugo Chávez. Each chapter, in holding these populisms up for rhetorical scrutiny, offers a unique theoretical framework, and several of the case studies in fact occasion and test new conceptual developments. Numerous similarities become discernible across differences in these studies. We invite readers to also find them in their own observations and to try to look deeply there for a possible underlying and connecting thread. In doing that, they would enter into a discussion with the authors and editors who put together this book; they would be asked to grapple with the suggestions we offer and the questions we ask: Does it seem plausible, on the basis of these studies, that populism is best understood as a rhetorical concept, and might a rhetorical definition emerge that helps subsume them under the same concept?

The following pages offer brief introductions to following chapters.

## Populist "Melancholy" in Trumpist Republicanism

The 2020 Republican National Convention decided to not publish a new political platform for the 2020 presidential election but to instead keep the 2016 platform and even rule out of order any attempt to amend it or adopt a new one. This remarkable decision is the starting point for Paul Johnson's look at contemporary American politics of the right, and it was the clearest possible signal that the RNC pledged unequivocal support to President Trump's person and policies.

In a reading of the 2016 RNC that reveals its reliance on the theme of *victimage* undergirded by conservatism and the privileges of White America, Johnson shows how the GOP's rhetoric insistently affirms a narrow conception of "the people" and posits it in opposition to the Obama administration, which is constructed as the enemy. He also shows how the Republican platform links this ostensible enemy with the system in a way where improvement is not an option, thus leaving only one route of action: overturning the system in what is framed as an apocalyptic vision.

Johnson sees the Republican Party's approach to contemporary political challenges as an exemplar of what he calls *populist rhetorical melancholy*. With this concept Johnson brings together rhetorical studies, political theory, and psychoanalysis to characterize a rhetorical form which posits the negation of "the people" as the structuring force organizing the political and social system where the separation of "people" and politics is considered a done deal, leaving only the option to destroy the old political system to build a new one. Johnson shows how the 2016 Republican National Platform and the decision to not present a new platform in 2020 unequivocally render the voters' situation as one of victimhood, even as material conditions would suggest otherwise. Figuring populism as a rhetorical form and a political logic rather than an ideology, Johnson considers how it constitutes subjects through an argumentative frame that posits them as being somehow lost and critically threatened by the existing political system. *Melancholic populism*, he writes "attributes the loss of 'the people' not to the fact that there is no such thing as a 'people' in its totality but instead to actors external to the imagined nation." It also "primes its audience to expect the 'the people' [to] have been negated, and crucially satisfying this expectation of negation with the conclusion that the recognition of this victimhood is an appropriate response to this

negation." According to Johnson, another key characteristic of melancholic populism, particularly this right-wing version, is that this presumed unified will of the "people" is unchanging, and that the individual both is in opposition to and disavows any relationship to the system. With the term melancholic populism Johnson offers a model for explaining why a right-wing rhetoric of victimage can continue to appeal to voters. He explains how the unconscious character of "the people's" loss emerges in an intensifying grievance-based feedback loop as the need to experience the loop of loss and anger perpetuates and ends in a demand for authoritarian control and violence. Johnson's study of right-wing melancholic populism teaches us to understand the sense of a world in crisis, where the crisis is the loss of what has gone before, not a perpetuation of an absent core of a nation, and he also reminds us that not all rhetorics of crisis and "the people" can be thought of as similar.

## Self-Confident Turncoat: Italy's Salvini

In her chapter on *voltagabbana rhetorics*, Pamela Pietrucci studies "turn-coating" as a populist crisis strategy and turns to the workings of social media to explain this populist strategy. With a study of Italian MP and former Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini's history of opportunistically changing positions on topics—sometimes within a very short time, and usually going to the contrary position—she describes a rhetorical behavior which is rooted in a particular Italian political tradition called *trasformismo*, but which can also be found among right-wing rhetors around the world, including Donald Trump, Jair Bolsonaro, and Boris Johnson.

Unlike many accounts of populism as fundamentally driven by a declared rift between "the people" and the dominant political system, Pietrucci suggests that turncoating behavior is populist by virtue of its algorithmic origin. Drawing on Ico Maly's notion of "algorithmic populism"—defined as "a digitally mediatized chronotopic communicative and discursive relation"—Pietrucci draws on Italian politics and finds that Salvini's multiple and dramatic changes of view can be directly linked to careful monitoring of his social media and algorithmic adaptation designed for maximum positive feedback. Writes Pietrucci: "[w]hile Salvini carefully constructs his public image to appear authentic, direct, and in tune with [the] average citizen, the reality [of politics] is that every message of his public communication is carefully crafted, researched, and

based on algorithmic data: there is no improvisation or spontaneity in his public discourse." Pietrucci links the phenomenon of *voltagabbana* rhetoric to contexts of crisis and sees it as a populist response to complex exigencies where political leaders attempt to adapt their communication to the moment and garner support amidst volatile public feelings and unstable public opinion. The fact that political leaders can get away with proclaiming strikingly incoherent viewpoints rests, in the case of Italy, on the tradition of *trasformismo*, which has left the population with the cynical expectation that views come and go depending on what is opportune.

To explain this political impunity in other national contexts, Pietrucci turns to American rhetoric scholars Jennifer Mercieca and Joshua Gunn and their work on demagoguery and political perversion. To Pietrucci, Salvini's and other top politicians' deliberate use of *voltagabbana* rhetoric demonstrates the quintessential trait of demagogues, namely that they make it rhetorically impossible for the public to hold them accountable by using rhetorical figures such as paralipsis (saying something by saying that one won't say it), and by distorting public sentiment by means of manipulative social media mechanisms. She thus suggests that *voltagabbana* rhetoric is another rhetorical strategy used, in Mercieca's term, to weaponize communication, i.e., manipulatively gain compliance, enabling disavowal at the same time. This "perversion" (with Gunn's term) is possible because political cultures are increasingly losing faith in a shared authority or law, making it possible to get away with blatantly false or unrealistic claims because people (want to) believe what they hear:—Even when they know it is untrue, and even if they don't really believe it, they keep listening and interacting online with this rhetoric, thus contributing to its circulation.

## A Digital Boost to Character Appeals in Brexit Rhetoric

In his chapter "Brexit, YouTube and the Populist Rhetorical Ethos" Alan Finlayson brings together political studies, political science, digital media studies, and rhetorical studies to consider the implications of the increasing role of digital means of communication on populist politics and how their affordances form political communication online. A main argument in the chapter is that online communication creates new genres with new kinds of rhetorical situations that are centered on claims about character. Rather than pitting theories of populism that define populism

as a general structure across ideologies, as a specific political-ideological content, and as a style of performance, respectively, against each other, Finlayson wants us to notice how they overlap with respect to establishing a contrast between "the people" and an "Other," developing this contrast through a logic of good vs. bad, and performing this position in a manner that is recognizable across countries and systems. This pool of commonality, Finlayson suggests, can be characterized as a concern with "character," and the populist character is one who is outside or beyond the mainstream, deliberately breaking the rules political leaders are expected to follow. The point is not so much to invite followers to identify with the leader as to allow them to *identify as part of the people* which the leader defends. In Finlayson's reading, the weight of populist political argument is carried by the character of the speaker and audience, and *ethos* is, thus, not only a premise of argument, but a kind of conclusion. Finlayson finds in the increasingly multimodal digital media use perfect conditions for communication that is disruptive, even transgressive, but also empowering to those whose voices have not previously been heard. This mediated context, he suggests, is particularly conducive to populist forms of communication. As an example of an online form of communication which was prophetic of later social media he mentions the blog because it raised expectations of personal sharing by the blogging persona and thus encouraged affective attachment and communities linked to particular online genres and fora. Finlayson takes these thoughts to a study of YouTube rhetoric with a focus on political communication: Here the implied intimacy has particular resonance when communication takes the form of "ideological testimonials" and is consumed in viewers' individual, algorithmically constructed mix of politics, gaming, music, and entertainment. At the same time, YouTube viewers are invited to feel that they are part of a community, and the relationship between YouTubers and their audiences has a double nature, with leaders as both experts and peers, which resembles relationships between leaders and followers in populist politics. In a case study of a very popular YouTube video, "The Truth About Brexit," Finlayson illustrates how its producer, Paul Joseph Watson, employs a populist idiom in claiming the mendacity, even treachery, of the Remain campaign and presenting the Leave campaign as the only reasonable, patriotic road forward. Watson does this by utilizing distance and name-calling to underscore the unity of the "true" British people against Remainers, who are cast as mean-spirited, lying, domineering and undemocratic suppressors. In terms of

visuals, the video is shown to support the message via visual enthymemes, e.g., images supposedly showing refugees spilling into the country and wreaking havoc, presenting as "common sense" what is not stated explicitly, but clearly understood (the criminality of foreigners). In all of this, the unifying principle and the main reason to accept Watson's message becomes his own character—active, self-possessed, honest, rational, and morally right-minded as he presents himself. Combined with an organizing principle of pitting an ostensible Truth against supposed lies about Brexit, the video effectively taps into imaginaries about a core people under threat of being misled by evil bureaucrats and self-serving politicians. This casts Watson in the role of the truth-teller and the people's liberator.

Finlayson concludes more broadly that populism consists, in part, of a rhetorical form for which *ethos is both origin and destination*, a quality which is brought into sharp relief by audio-visual social media, which often are extremely speaker-centered; at the same time the attempt to forge a semblance of community between speaker and audience, and among the audience, becomes, in Finlayson's words, "a microcelebrity culture characterized by the seeming personalization and individualization of content and the inducement to form parasocial relationships." Finlayson links this to Weber's notion of *charismatic authority* because Watson relies on the personal trust shown to him by viewers, a trust that will lead them to accept his views, and considering the parasocial element, his likens Watson's rhetoric to a cult holding out a promise of salvation.

## Provocative by Design: Media-Savvy German Populist Rhetoric

In their chapter on the rhetoric of leading figures in the "Alternative für Deutschland" movement, Olaf Kramer, Anne Ulrich, and Dietmar Till argue for a conception of populism that rests on a combination of ideology, rhetorical form, and media logic. Like Finlayson, these authors point to social media as central to not only the spread of populist politics but also its form. They chart the rise of AfD (Alternative for Germany) as a right-wing populist party and how this rise is especially linked to online media. The populist rhetoric of the party is exemplified in rhetorical analyses of particularly notorious statements by two of the party's leading figures, Björn Höcke (a leader of the AfD's far-right faction "Der Flügel," "the Wing") and Alice Weidel (AfD leader in the federal Parliament, the "Bundestag"). The authors trace how mass media have

spawned "politainment" and how social media are particularly suited as platforms for criticism of authorities. This combination of high visibility and unorthodox communicative behavior (ranging from the entertaining to the provocative and scandalous) is conducive to the spread of populist messages and also fits well with populist politicians' ambivalent relation to the mainstream media: They are both dependent on them due to their wide reach and critical of them for being elitist and corrupt. To populists, social media offer a welcome possibility to position themselves as outside and independent of establishment power structures and thus present themselves as voices of protest.

Following Benjamin Krämer, the authors point to *people-centrism, anti-elitism, exclusion of others*, creation of a *populist worldview*, and expressions of *populist lifestyle* and *identity* as central characteristics of populist ideology, style, and rhetoric, noting that these work particularly well with online communication structures.

Because right-wing populist rhetoric circulates in a complex media environment comprising "mainstream" news media, "alternative" online and social media, the far-right world of imageboards, and the so-called "dark social" (content shared "invisibly" through private channels), the authors take on the complex challenge of studying communication across all these different platforms and media environments to present a thorough description of the media landscape in Germany in which AfD operates including print and online magazines, tabloid newspapers, websites, and more.

The first example to illustrate the populist rhetoric of AfD is a reading of Björn Höcke's 2017 speech to a youth organization in Dresden. It highlights this speech as a textbook example of populist rhetoric complete with incendiary and provocative claims pitting the audience against an institutional other said to perpetrate a distorted and crippling account of German history to the detriment of the people. Höcke is shown to appeal to his immediate audience as an in-group, forging identity with them, and at the same time to signal distance to the mainstream, which is said to be blinded by misleading narratives of the German past. A case in point is the mentioning of the Allies' bombing of Dresden, which is cited as evidence that Germans were the true victims of WWII. The most controversial part of the speech, however, was Höcke's mention of the Berlin Holocaust Museum as a "monument of shame," an ambiguous phrasing leaving two interpretations possible: "a monument to Germany's shame" or "a shameful monument." Although it was perfectly clear that Höcke meant

it in the latter sense, he met criticism with claims to the contrary and presented himself as unjustly charged. In this way, the authors suggest, Höcke managed to present himself as a *parrhesiastes*, one who speaks truth to power for a higher purpose and at their own risk, while at the same time posing as innocently accused.

The authors next turn to a 2018 speech by Alice Weidel, a floor leader for the AfD in the Bundestag. Through an analysis of rhetorical aspects of the speech, mass media coverage of it, and Weidel's accompanying social media communication they illustrate the populist cross-media strategy favored by Weidel and the AfD. With appeals to "the people" and anti-elitist claims, combined with racist and clearly Islamophobic attitudes, they find in the speech characteristic features of the AfD's populism. While the speech was met with protests from members of the Bundestag, and the President of the Bundestag, Wolfgang Schäuble, called Weidel to order and had the presidential board discuss judicial sanctions against her, these reactions only intensified media attention and thus effectively helped circulate Weidel's provocative attempt to undermine democratic institutions by confronting and challenging their authority.

In the concluding section of the chapter the authors, however, suggest that the AfD's populist politics in many ways came up short in the face of the COVID-19 crisis, as scientific information and rational decision-making earned a renewed popular interest. Weidel and the AfD have since tried to fan the flames of dissatisfaction with corona restrictions and positioned themselves as corona skeptics. But recent performance by the AfD in polls and regional elections has not, as of early 2021, been impressive.

## Syriza Over-riding the Moral High Horse

One theme that runs across the chapters in this book is the way populist rhetoric operates on a moral schism between "them" and "us." We see this in Johnson's chapter, where the Republican party pits the former Obama administration as irresponsible and essentially dangerous, and in Finlayson's discussion of the Brexit conflict, where Brexiteers are portrayed as defenders of British values and compassion for the common man (as opposed to Remainers, who are only concerned with taking care of themselves). Sophia Hatzisavvidou contributes to this theme with her argument that *moralization* is a rhetorical strategy endemic to populist discourse. She illustrates this through a case study of the negotiations between the Greek government and that country's creditors in 2015.