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# Political Psychology Perspectives on Populism

*Edited by*  
Gilda Sensales

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Gilda Sensales  
Editor

# Political Psychology Perspectives on Populism

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*Editor*

Gilda Sensales  
Department of Psychology  
of Development and Socialization  
Processes  
Sapienza University of Rome  
Rome, Italy

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The following colleagues (in alphabetical order) contributed reviews:

Conrad Baldner, Department of Psychology of Developmental and Social Processes, Sapienza University of Rome, Italy

Elena Bocci, Department of Psychology of Developmental and Social Processes, Sapienza University of Rome, Italy

Antonello Chirumbolo, Department of Psychology, Sapienza University of Rome, Italy

Marilena Fatigante, Department of Psychology of Developmental and Social Processes, Sapienza University of Rome, Italy

Andréia Isabel Giacomozzi, Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina – Florianópolis (UFSC), Brazil

Fabio Presaghi, Department of Psychology of Developmental and Social Processes, Sapienza University of Rome, Italy

Gennaro Pica, University of Camerino, Italy

Alessio Tesi, Department of Political Sciences, Pisa University, Italy

Michele Vecchione, Department of Psychology of Developmental and Social Processes, Sapienza University of Rome, Italy

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## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

**Maja Becker** CLLE, Université de Toulouse, CNRS. Professor of social psychology at the University Toulouse Jean Jaurès. Her main line of research concerns motivational processes related to self-perception and identity and how the cultural context affects those processes.

**Matteo Cavallaro** Postdoctoral researcher in political psychology, Ph.D. in Economics and Sociology (U Paris 13), Institute of Psychology, University of Lausanne.

**Nicoletta Cavazza** is Full Professor in Social psychology in the Department of Communication and Economics at the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia (Italy). Her main research interests include political psychology, attitude change, persuasive communication, and social aspects of eating.

**Pasquale Colloca** is Associate Professor in Sociology in the Department of Education Studies at the University of Bologna (Italy). His main research interests include political attitudes, political participation, and electoral research.

**Anna Cortijos-Bernabeu** Doctoral Researcher in political psychology, Institute of Psychology, University of Lausanne.

**Jacopo Custodi** is a Ph.D. student in the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences at the Scuola Normale Superiore in Florence, Italy. He received master's degrees in political philosophy from the Universitat Pompeu

Fabra in Spain and in economics, politics, and international relations from the University of Pavia in Italy.

**Gabriele Di Cicco** Ph.D., is a postdoctoral researcher at the Centre for Social Cognitive Studies, Jagiellonian University of Krakow, Poland. His research interests focus broadly on populism, understanding aggressive behaviors, political activism, extremism, and radicalization from a motivational perspective.

**Mauro Giacomantonio** is Associate professor of Social Psychology at the University of Rome “Sapienza”, and the author of research papers on major social-psychological theories (cognitive closure, level of construal, and ego-depletion, among others).

**John T. Jost** is Professor of Psychology, Politics, and (by affiliation) Data Science at New York University, where he has taught since 2003. He is a Past President of the International Society of Political Psychology and founding editor of *Frontiers in Social Psychology*.

**Arie W. Kruglanski** Ph.D., is Distinguished University Professor at the University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, USA. He has published over 350 articles and books on human on basic psychological processes, and the psychology of terrorism.

**Luigi Leone** is Full professor of Psychometrics and data analyses at the University of Rome “Sapienza”. His main research interests are focused on personality structure, political psychology, and the ideological counterparts of personality dispositions.

**Efsio Manunta** CLLE, Université de Toulouse, CNRS. Ph.D. Student and Assistant professor in social psychology at the Université Toulouse Jean Jaurès. His main research interests are related to political attitudes, motivated identity construction, and cross-cultural psychology.

**Erica Molinario** Ph.D., is Assistant Professor in Social Psychology at the Florida Gulf Coast University, Fort Myers, Florida, USA. Her main research interests focus on human motivation to understand behaviors related to current social issues, such as pro-environmental behaviors, political extremism and radicalization, and intergroup conflicts.

**Valerio Pellegrini** is research fellow at Department of Social and Developmental Psychology, Sapienza University of Rome. His research focuses on investigation of the multiple facets of populism and prejudice, as

well as on development and implementation of advanced data analysis techniques.

**Katarina Pettersson** D.Soc.Sc., is an Assistant Professor of Social Psychology at the University of Helsinki, Finland. Her research has involved the discursive analysis of nationalist and radical right political rhetoric, hate-speech, and political communication and persuasion in the online sphere. She has recently been lead-editor of the book *“The far-right discourse of multiculturalism in intergroup interactions—a critical discursive perspective”* (Palgrave Macmillan).

**Eduardo J. Rivera Pichardo** is a Ph.D. student in the Department of Psychology at New York University. He is from Puerto Rico and received a master’s degree in political philosophy from the Universitat Pompeu Fabra in Spain.

**Laura Prislei** Ph.D. student in Social Psychology at Sapienza University of Rome. She is mainly focused on political psychology, with regard to populist online communication.

**Michele Roccato** is Full Professor in Social psychology at the University of Torino, Italy. At present, his main research interests are the prediction of populist orientation and votes and the social-psychological changes fostered by the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Inari Sakki** D.Soc.Sc., is Professor in Social Psychology at the University of Helsinki, Finland. Between 2020–2024 she leads two projects on populism “Populist Appeal” funded by Kone Foundation and “Mobilising Populism: its representations, affects and identities” funded by the Academy of Finland. Her research interests include political communication, nationalism, populism, national and European identity, collective memory, social representations, discourse, and multimodality.

**Gilda Sensales** Ph.D., is Associate Professor in Social and Political psychology at the Sapienza University of Rome, Italy. Her main research interests are the representations of populism, political communication between mainstream and new media, gender and sexism in politics, critical history of social and political psychology.

**Christian Staerklé** is Professor of social psychology, Institute of Psychology, University of Lausanne. His research integrates a social representational perspective with intergroup theories, and applies this general framework to cross-national comparisons of political beliefs, populism, social justice, cultural diversity, and minority-majority relations.

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# Introduction

*Gilda Sensales*

I hate the indifferent. I believe that living means taking sides. Those who really live cannot help being a citizen and a partisan.

Antonio Gramsci, 11 February 1917

This volume presents the results of different empirical research on populism conducted by young scholars and some of the most accredited social psychologists. It offers an overview of the contribution that political psychology can provide by applying social psychology constructs to populism for an understanding of a diversified and contradictory phenomenon that animates many contemporary democracies. These constructs are of cognitive, motivational, emotional, and social-representational type. The investigations are focused on European countries over a period ranging from 2017 to 2022. The most innovative and original aspect of the volume, which makes it unique in its kind, is that it presents studies from mainstream and critical perspectives in an ideal

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G. Sensales (✉)

Department of Psychology of Development and Socialization Processes,  
Sapienza University of Rome, Rome, Italy

e-mail: [gilda.sensales@uniroma1.it](mailto:gilda.sensales@uniroma1.it)

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dialogue capable of stimulating the reader to discover different points of view relating to a variety of approaches, strategies, and research settings, all rigorously in the field. From this point of view, the entire volume can be considered as the illustration of the results of an ideal research program that uses classical triangulation models (Denzin, 1978, 2012)—theoretical, disciplinary, methodological, of researchers and data—to restore the complexity of the object investigated from a sociocentric political psychology perspective. The hope is that the text will be stimulating for researchers, students, and those readers with some experience in the subject who question themselves on the forms of contemporary politics.

Populism was born toward the end of the nineteenth century in Russia and the USA and then spread to other parts of the world and took root in Latin America. According to Palano (2017) the term populism translated a Russian expression with a negative nuance, indicating movements and requests for the emancipation of the peasant population in the tsarist empire in the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1891 it appeared in the USA, always with a vaguely derogatory meaning, to define the militants and political positions of the People's Party, linked to the American peasants and becoming the third party that would present itself unsuccessfully in the presidential elections of 1892 with one candidate. The party backed unions, denounced long working hours, and supported income tax to redistribute wealth from businesses to farmers and workers. It also called for secret ballots, women's suffrage, an eight-hour work day, direct elections of USA senators, the president, and vice president, and moved to make the political system more people-friendly. At the same time, however, it showed a tendency to paranoia, claiming in its 1892 platform that it faced a vast conspiracy against humanity that needed to be actively fought. In these two forms of populism, two different interpretations can be seen. The former is, above all, a protest movement which in the latter transforms itself into a political party, that is, it raises the problem of becoming hegemonic in society and then, with the failure of this project, highlighting aspects linked to conspiracy theories that will re-emerge in contemporary populisms.

I will soon show how in the contemporary developments of populism, the vocation to the institutional dimension prevails, that is, to be a party that fights to get into government, to the detriment of the movementist, exclusively linked to a protest dimension.

Populism can be interpreted as a weak ideology, a mentality, a strategy, a style that has at its core the opposition between the good people

and the bad oligarchies in power. According to a Manichean vision of reality, the different actors in play are divided between good and evil. On the one hand, there are the good people, reified and mythologized; on the other, there are the political institutions, the bad elites, or minorities evoked differently to be condemned. Scholars have worked on these aspects from different disciplinary angles. To underline this theoretical, disciplinary, and empirical effort, Caini and Graziano (2022) show how in three different consecutive decades, 1990–2000, 2001–2011, and 2012–2021, the citations of the keyword ‘populism’ in Google Scholar database recorded 21,900 enrollments in the first period, 55,500 in the second, and 73,000 in the third. The trend bears witness to the exponential growth of interest around this topic which has also spilled over into the publication of many handbooks. Starting from the 2017 ‘Political Populism: A Handbook’ (Heinisch et al., 2017) and ‘The Oxford Handbook of Populism’ (Rovira Kaltwasser et al., 2017), four handbooks followed later—the ‘Routledge Handbook of Global Populism’ (de la Torre, 2019), ‘Austerity, Populism and the Welfare State’ (Greve, 2021), ‘The Palgrave Handbook of Populism’ (Oswald, 2022), the ‘Handbook of Racism, Xenophobia, and Populism’ (Akanke, 2022), while the latest—‘The Routledge Handbook of Populism in the Asia Pacific’ (Subedi et al., 2024)—is expected in early 2024. These Handbooks are not a sign of the paradigm shift Khun (1962/1969) attributed to the role played by this type of publication. They are instead a testimony of the vastness of the topic, which implied an analytical-interpretative effort that involved the entire academic community in studies attentive to the specificities of the political and social cultures in which populism manifests itself about a variety of themes. The Handbooks have thus presented studies conducted by multiple disciplinary fields—from law to political science, sociology, and political psychology—and can reassemble the puzzles of knowledge produced in a unitarian framework.

As regards the political psychological perspective from us privileged, we can cite the ‘Palgrave Handbook of Populism’ because it contains an entire section entitled ‘The Political Psychology of Populism & its Affective Underpinnings’. Together with this section, the volume by Joseph Forgas and colleagues (2021), ‘The Psychology of Populism: The Tribal Challenge to Liberal Democracy’ should also be mentioned. This book is the result of a meeting of some of the leading social psychologists called to discuss the topic at the 23rd Sydney Symposium of Social Psychology.

These contributions, with different accents, bring attention to three aspects that characterize contemporary populism and which marked the birth of social psychology and political psychology between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. The three aspects concern the psychology of the crowds-masses (Le Bon 1985/1905; Sighele, 1891), the psychology of the masses-public (Tarde, 1901), and the psychology of the nation-race (see Brock, 1992) with which the two nascent disciplines had debuted (Sensales, 2020; Sensales & Dal Secco, 2014). In the first case, in contemporary populism, the crowds/masses/people often continue to be the object of that prejudice that had marked the birth of conservative-oriented crowd psychology (Mucchi Faina, 2002). According to this prejudice, crowds were described as animated by atavistic, irrational, and often violent instincts that propagated through psychological processes, such as suggestibility, born in their formulation in a psychiatric, therefore pathological, field. These processes stimulated a negative interpretation of the behavior of the crowds, stigmatized for their violent actions capable of destabilizing the governments of the time. In this reading, the demands for social and economic emancipation of which the crowds were the bearers and which frightened the political elites of the time were obscured. The other characterization, always at the service of the criminalization of the crowd, was the fideistic relationship with the leaders seen as capable of guiding the crowds by directing and influencing their behavior. Underestimating the emancipatory role of the crowds-masses and overestimating the exclusively manipulative role of leaders are two elements often present in analyses, including psychological ones, concerning contemporary populism. Alongside these two elements, the attention to political communication, discovered by Tarde (1901) in his psychology of the parties-public as central and capable of conditioning politics itself in its form and content, is the other characterizing element of contemporary populism that individuates social media as a privileged place to promote the agency of the people-public. Finally, the idea of nation-race, part of that populist friend/enemy narrative, which valorizes its ingroup (the people-nation/race) and stigmatizes the ‘Other’, represented by the elites or [im]migrants, puts the theme of race and the majority/minority relationship on the psychology agenda. In the latter case, opposition to the elites evokes the idea of a nation made up of many—the majority—who want to have a say against a minority—the elites or mainstream political parties—who must be isolated and silenced once and for all because corrupt or

incapable of governing. Concerning the issue of migrants, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the psychology of race had legitimized the policies of containment of migratory flows in the USA,<sup>1</sup> helping to establish a ranking that saw large quotas for ‘good’ [im]migrants from Northern Europe and reduced quotas for the ‘bad’ [im]migrants from Southern Europe. Subsequently, it will always be the psychology of the nation-race that legitimizes the terrible policies of extermination of Jews and other minorities in Europe dominated by Nazism and fascism. Contemporary populism, as compared to the conflict with migrants—the ‘otherness’ par excellence—develops a rhetoric of the invasion that identifies the migrants as scapegoats for the nation’s economic and social difficulties. Even on these points—nation-majority/minority relationship and nation/race—psychology is questioned today, fortunately producing answers of a different nature from the past, some of which are also proposed in this volume.

Before illustrating the structure of this volume, I propose below a reading of populism also referring to political science. This reading can help frame the different contributions of this book.

Following the reasoning proposed by Nadia Urbinati (2019), a pupil of Norberto Bobbio, the populism asserts itself in response to the failure of two promises of representative democracy (‘the unfulfilled promises of democracy’, as Norberto Bobbio said): the abatement (1) of economic and social inequalities and (2) of national and global oligarchies. These two promises have not only been disregarded but have turned into their opposite with an unprecedented growth of inequalities fueled by fierce economic competition and an authoritarian or hierarchical inegalitarianism that values politics understood as a race that ensures the winner a superior recognition in the governance of society. Based on these unfulfilled promises, a representative process can be affirmed that allows the conquest of power by a collective subject that promotes itself as the true people capable of bringing about a remedial change concerning the injustices suffered.

The relationship with power is the element that makes the difference between real populism and protest movements. The last spring from the

<sup>1</sup> In particular, it was the social psychologist William McDougall—known at Harvard for his racist theories (Boring, 1929/1950)—who inspired the USA Immigration Law Restriction of 1924.

same profound malaise toward the developments of a society that increasingly ignores the demands and rights of the many against the privileges of the few, they take action to protest but do not fight for the conquest of power. The traditional demarcation also used in political psychology between institutional politics and movementist politics (Jost et al., 2017; Klandermans, 2003; Klandermans & Van Stekelenburg, 2013; Sensales, 2005; Thomas et al., 2022), sees movements arise more or less spontaneously by promoting horizontal forms of organization. They do not have the seizure of power as their objective and remain anchored to bottom-up politics, to ‘life politics’ (Giddens, 1991), or to the ‘sub-politics’ of ‘second modernity’ (Beck, 2000), with an organization that does not envisage strong leaders. It is a politics that concerns lifestyles, disputes, and battles on how to live in a world where what was usually fixed by nature or tradition has become the object of human decisions, but it also sees more radical reflections derived from Foucault’s considerations on power (cf. Rose 1989/1999, 1999/2003). It is a politics that develops a ‘dialogical democracy’ that creates a public arena capable of responding to controversial issues through dialogue rather than through pre-established and hierarchical forms of power. Examples are the environmental, feminist, pacifist movements, or protest movements such as the Italian ‘Girotondini’ of 2002 or the USA ‘Occupy Wall Street’ of 2011.

Populism, on the other hand, can be fully traced back to institutional politics (Bobbio, 1983) since it was born to use the rules of representative democracy as an instrument to conquer power through elections. To do this, it generates vertical forms of politics centered on the role of the leader. Thus, a process develops which allows the leader to make use of all the technologies made available by the contemporary world—surveys, opinion polls, social media, and so on—to know the orientations of the people-public and, at the same time, condition them, according to a dynamic, we can add, widely studied and known in the field of mass media research. Into this dynamic that eliminates all the intermediate bodies that usually serve as an interface between politics and citizens (from parties to the mainstream media system), another process is inserted that reifies the people in power. The people becoming the majority ultimately makes the defeated people marginal, having become a minority to be silenced by crystallizing it in this role. Thus that ‘disfigured democracy’ (Urbinati,

2019) is achieved according to which populism in power attacks representative democracy by implementing all possible measures to stabilize its position of power infinitely.

In this process, defined by some with the neologism ‘Peoplecracy’ (Diamanti & Lazar, 2018), the ‘democracy of parties’ is transformed into the ‘democracy of the audience/public’, in which victory is sought through elections to affirm radical majoritarianism. For its continuity, the latter requires a permanent campaign climate that prevents the new majority from becoming a new establishment. This permanent campaign is fought with identity slogans that use otherness as an enemy to be eliminated and the centrality of sovereign politics, both capable of reinforcing the internal ties to the true people, as opposed to the minority people. This is not the place to analyze in detail the dynamics just mentioned. What interests here is underlining how these dynamics recall those three articulations of psychology—of crowds, of the public, of the nation-race—which had sanctioned the birth of social psychology and political psychology. The three articulations come into play in interpreting populism by asking political psychology to intervene in public discourse to take measures of a complex and constitutively contradictory phenomenon because, as Urbinati (2019) affirms, populism needs democracy. Still, at the same time, it needs to constantly challenge the basic rules of that democracy, which allows it to exist as a governing force, but it does not ensure that it will remain in power forever as it would like.

Along this contradictory path, populism has been considered a ‘stigma’ word by those who condemned it and a ‘flag’ word by those who exalted it (Cedroni, 2014). In the first case, it is a stigma word used to define an opposing group, to denigrate and isolate it. In the second case, it is a flag word used by a group proudly to self-define positively. We will see how this double interpretation has been the subject of political controversies and academic debates. Ernesto Laclau, one of the leading scholars of populism, considers both possibilities and then dwells on what distinguishes populism and its articulations. In his definition, populism follows a logic capable of mobilizing the entire political and civil community through an appeal against a common enemy (according to a dynamic widely studied in political psychology), identified in the political elites insensitive to the problems of ordinary people (Laclau, 2005). This unifying call can take different forms depending on the political orientation. In right-wing populism, it tends to have highly exclusive, discriminatory, and xenophobic forms, whereby the people are



constructed in opposition to migrants and ethnic and religious minorities. In left-wing populism, however, the unity of the people is built through opposition to immoral privilege, embodied by greedy bankers, rogue entrepreneurs, and corrupt politicians, all accused of exploiting the ordinary persons, the ‘people’ (Gerbaudo, 2017; Rivera Pichardo et al., in this volume; Vasilopoulos & Jost, 2020). This vision makes it possible to identify the transversal and chameleon-like ability of populism to capture consensus both on the right and on the left, overcoming that entirely negative conception of the underlying social and psychological processes, sometimes dictated by reductive points of view, which recall the prejudice of the crowd. According to these points of view, populism would be considered only harmful, demagogic, and irrational, aimed at mobilizing the unwitting plebs through promises impossible to keep and inculcating non-existent fears. These dynamics actually seem to exist for many forms of contemporary populism, think of Trump, Bolsonaro, Farage, and Salvini. But they fail to grasp the emancipatory function of other declinations, such as those of some left-wing populist parties that arose in the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis, from the Spanish Podemos to the Greek Syriza.

Beyond the analysis of its articulations and in agreement with Urbinati (2019), in studying populism, the priority to give is not so much to its definition as to analyzing how it acts in society. The various authors of this volume have taken up this challenge by proposing a reading of the sphere of action and the impact of populism from the point of view of political psychology. If legal and political science scholars have mobilized to provide systematic interpretations of how populism transforms representative democracy, contributions of the psycho-social nature rest scattered and fragmented. It remains to study systematically how populism alters common sense, the perception of politics, the role of citizens, and that of their leaders according to a circular process. With this volume, we want to help provide stimuli in this sense. It will try to give an overview of some psychological aspects that may explain why populism can be successful, answering some questions through the results of empirical investigations. On which people can it exert a greater grip, and through which motivational forces can it act? What are the types of leadership that, exploiting the evolution of modern democracies, manage to build a convincing populist narrative? What can be the antidotes that can limit the action of toxic leadership by promoting forms of transformational leadership capable of developing a sense of individual responsibility and growth?

The book seeks answers to these questions focusing on the different forms of European populism, with a particular look to Italy. It sees the presence of European and USA social psychologists and sociologists as authors of the various chapters. They are scholars who have developed or participated in research programs on populism, acquiring the expertise and authority that emerges from their chapters. Their contributions develop along a pathway that favors a comparative perspective showing how populism acts concretely.

The comparative dimension concerns both different European countries and different periods crossed by events that have changed contemporary reality itself, from the dramatic ones of the Covid-19 Pandemic and the invasion of Ukraine by Russia to those linked both to resilience responses toward these two events and to the new centrality of science capable of neutralizing the pandemic situation in a couple of years through the development of anti-Covid-19 vaccines. These are also periods characterized by the emergence of an increasingly widespread women leadership at the more apical levels of politics, above all of a conservative and populist nature. It is a leadership that acts in an androcentric realm characterized by forms of sexism (Sensales et al., 2018) that leads women politicians to confront the double bind dilemma. As we will see shortly, this last point will be addressed in the section dedicated to communication in the blogosphere, with a specific chapter devoted to the communication on social networks of two populist women leaders. How these events have impacted our behavior as individuals and groups of different political orientations is one of the questions scholars who have participated in this volume try to answer.

As said at the beginning of these reflections the studies presented here propose a dialogue between mainstream and critical theoretical approaches, quantitative and qualitative methodologies, and numerical and linguistic analyses, all elements capable of profoundly exploring a complex phenomenon such as populism. Until a few decades ago, this dialogue was considered an essential but difficult goal to achieve (Jost & Kruglanski, 2002; Sensales, 2003). With this book, we show it actively at work.

The volume is divided into four sections. It starts from the first section dedicated to ‘Transcultural comparative analyses’, with two chapters. The first by Eduardo J. Rivera Picardo, Jacopo Custodi, and John T. Jost proposes a synthesis of a series of studies conducted, firsthand, or taken from the literature concerning Spain, Italy, France, Germany, and the UK.

In this synthesis the role of ‘top-down’ political and ‘bottom-up’ psychological perspectives are underlined. In the latter case the focus is on the different psycho-social and personality constructs capable of predicting populist attitudes. They are constructs related to authoritarianism, social dominance orientation (SDO), system justification, basic human values, Big Five, all analyzed with respect to the populist orientation of the left—inclusionary—and right—exclusionary—and in relation to some of the most important populist leaders, from Jean-Luc Mélenchon to Marine Le Pen, from Pablo Iglesias to Matteo Salvini. The different declinations of aspects closely linked to populism are highlighted. We can thus discover that the French populist left builds its idea of people-nation on multiculturalism and diversity, while the right on ethnicity and culture threatened by immigration and globalization. Or that, in France, system justification—an individual psychological construct based on a belief that society’s status quo is legitimate and desirable—is negatively associated with Le Pen’s voting intentions, and positively associated with Mélenchon’s voting intentions.

The second chapter of this section is by Christian Staerklé, Matteo Cavallaro, and Anna Cortijos-Bernabeu. It is a chapter theoretically framed in the critical tradition of social representations and brings together years of research centered on the ‘Intergroup model of the populist mentality’. It presents results involving several European countries—Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, and the UK—showing how the relationship between majority and minority takes shape, deriving from the ingroup/outgroup conflict at the basis of populist mentality. This conflict promotes an intergroup comparison that ends up crystallizing intolerance toward the minority-elite even when the power relationship is changed, i.e., when the populists govern, and the minority has lost power. This intolerance is based on the supposed moral superiority of the people/majority. The model proposed by the scholars is cross-culturally tested and shows similarities and differentiations of the populist mentality, also in this case characterized by the inclusionary-exclusionary and egalitarian-inegalitarian versions of populism, attributable to left–right polarization. A polarization related to other correlates of populist thought such as institutional and social (dis)trust, SDO, and authoritarianism. The model is extremely interesting because it demonstrates empirically and with psychological categories what Nadia Urbinati (2019) theoretically sustained on the toxic relationship of populism with the minority, which lays the foundations for

what the scholar defines as ‘disfigured democracy’, which emerges once the populists have seized power and who, in the name of their supposed moral superiority, claim to keep it forever.

The second section of the book is entitled ‘Psychosocial constructs in action’ and can be considered a ‘toolbox’ for studying populism from a psycho-social point of view. It excavates what was seen in the first section eliminating the trans-cultural comparative element. It starts with the contribution of Erica Molinario, Gabriele Di Ciccio, Gilda Sensales, and Arie W. Kruglanski, centered on the role of motivational aspects in joining populism. In this case, populist attitudes studied about the Covid-19 pandemic were monitored at two different times, when it appeared in 2020 and when it spread in 2021. The studies presented use the theoretical framework resulting from the ten-year research work conducted by Arie Kruglanski and his group about the psychology of extremist behavior (Kruglanski et al., 2017; Webber et al., 2018). The underlying idea is that populism is a compensatory set of beliefs that results from a motivational process that real or perceived threats can trigger. Threats derive from critical situations of various kinds linked to economic difficulties, migration crises, and geopolitical tensions, to name just a few. In this specific case, the crisis resulting from the outbreak and widespread of Covid-19 pandemic has made it possible to study on the field the activation of three motivational processes—the need for personal significance, collective significance, and cognitive closure. Those three processes lead us to seek certainties and means of self-affirmation through adherence to a simplified reading of reality, such as that linked to populism. It is a reading that contrasts uncertainty by clearly delineating the demarcation between good and evil that fits with those who need closure. It is a reading founded on the promise of emancipation and social recognition and on a call to action to win the battle against the enemies of the people. With the studies reported, it has thus been discovered that a more significant perceived threat (Covid-19) corresponds to a greater need for cognitive closure, for the search for individual and collective meaning, three motivational forces positively correlated to populist attitudes. The chapter concludes with some considerations of the subversive force of a certain populist narrative and how to counter it.

The following chapter of this second section is by Valerio Pellegrini, Mauro Giacomantonio, and Luigi Leone. It is dedicated to another central theme for those who study the psycho-social dynamics

of populism, that of conspiracy theories. As we have seen in the historical considerations on populism, since its birth, this has been linked to a conspiratorial vision that spread when, in the last decade of the nineteenth century, it suffered electoral defeats that would have marked the decline of its ambition to rise in power. This tendency also accompanies contemporary populism, and the authors of this chapter wonder about the possible psychological characteristics shared by populism and conspiracy theories. The first aspect concerns their extreme narrative simplification based on a moral dimension, which identifies, in both cases, the evil to be fought by the elites in power. There is then a direct link to the previous chapter in its attention to the search for certainty and control over reality, over the image of oneself and one's group, identified as distinctive traits of adherence to populism and conspiracy beliefs. But there is also a clear and explicit reference to the themes dealt with in the chapter by Rivera Picardo, Custodi, and Jost, who thus find a deepening in the empirical study of the link between ideological belief systems, such as the system justification, the social domination orientation, and right-wing authoritarianism, not only with populism but also with conspiracism. In both cases, the clear positive association with authoritarianism and negative with the tendencies of system justification is demonstrated. At the same time, concerning the social domination orientation, the results are more ambiguous. The conclusion addresses the application implications of these results.

The chapter by Efsio Manunta and Maja Becker ideally closes this section by addressing the theme of ideology, which is central to political psychology in general and the study of populism. In the latter case, it is presented concerning the concept of thin ideology as outlined by Mudde and Kaltwasser (2013), in contrast to the host ideology. The authors illustrate the difference between the two concepts, explaining that the former is seen as a fragile belief system unable to define a coherent point of view on how society should be and influenced by contextual aspects. The second is, however, a coherent system of beliefs and values capable of outlining a clear prescriptive vision of society. In the synthesis proposed by the two scholars, the thin ideology is rooted in a set of two fundamental beliefs that can be traced back, on the one hand, to the division of society into pure-people-ingroups and corrupt-elites-outgroups; on the other, to the interpretation of right-wing politics as a direct expression of the general will of the people without any institutional mediation. The chapter, therefore, proposes a theoretical analysis of thin ideology,

starting from the theory of social identity and then going on to illustrate the various attitudinal measures on populism developed so far, underlining their strengths and weaknesses. Based on this analysis, the two authors highlight a discrepancy between the theory and its operationalization to arrive at proposing a new scale—POP-ThIS—tested in France with various studies which are illustrated proving to be able to meet the psychometric validity requirements of the POP-ThIS. The chapter concludes with the hope of testing the scale in other cultural contexts by promoting and expanding the empirical comparison with other metric tools.

The third section is dedicated to ‘The Italian case’ chosen because it offers the opportunity to compare various forms of populism in the same socio-political context. Italy considered the ‘promised land of populism’ (Tarchi, 2015), has, in fact, seen the birth of modern center-right European populism and the affirmation of a radical right-wing populism together with a more transversal populism recently more left oriented, showing the presence of several populist leaders on the political scene of the country. The section opens with the chapter by Michele Roccato, Nicoletta Cavazza, and Pasquale Colloca, which shows how the theme of populism and the Covid-19 pandemic, already addressed in a previous chapter, can be treated from a perspective centered on psycho-social constructs different from those of Molinaro and colleagues. In this way, the richness of ideas offered by the psycho-social approach is highlighted. The chapter proposes a longitudinal look of a research program started in June 2019 and, through four different surveys, concluded in April 2021. In accordance with the Compensatory Control Mechanism (Kay et al., 2008, 2011), the scholars assume that people in a threatening situation are driven to face psychological discomfort, deriving from the fact that they are not able to exercise primary control over their world, through different defensive strategies. One such strategy is well illustrated by the uncertainty-threat model of political conservatism (Jost et al., 2007), in which the need for certainty, control, and closure resulting from uncertainty and threat is satisfied by resistance to change and the adherence to authority figures, that explains the likelihood of choosing a conservative political orientation in threatening situations.

Furthermore, psychology has shown that in exogenous crises, a phenomenon known as the ‘rally-round-the-flag effect’ (Mueller, 1970, 1973) is triggered, leading people to gather around their executive class. The Covid-19 pandemic is seen by scholars as capable, in some respects,