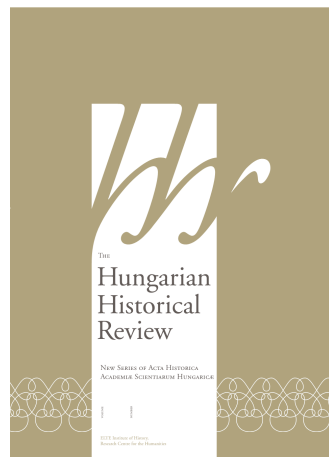


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Nationalism and Populism: Expressions of Fear or Political Strategies.

Edited by Carsten Schapkow and Frank Jacob. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2022. 301 pp.

Although I was overwhelmed by obligations, I was pleased in the end to have accepted the offer to write a review of *Nationalism and Populism*, which I found to be an extraordinary volume. Not so much because of the topic itself, which is very current and highly important, but also because of the ways in which the authors have addressed it. The editors have not only chosen the appropriate dramaturgy of thematizations to structure the contributions by the invited authors into meaningful thematic clusters but have also ensured an intergenerational and geographical multi-perspective approach to the discussion of nationalism and populism.

Laudably, the editors included one of the currently best-known authors of discussions on populism, Jan-Werner Müller, whose chapter (“The Politics of Fear Revisited”) is a compelling deliberation on the current situation, offering several important highlights. The editors’ bold sequencing of the sections and the arrangement of the chapters within them is also worth mentioning. For example, they have placed the thematic focus on the situation in Russia and the Republic of South Africa in the first section. Thus, at the point where Western-oriented readers expect a discussion of Trumpism, the Front National, or the AfD, we encounter a description and analysis of “sovereign democracy,” electoral authoritarianism, and the conservatism of “disparate post-Soviet elites” (p.65) in Russia and the “politicization of immigration by the ruling ANC” in South Africa. If you are not an expert on Russia and are not familiar with the specifics of post-Soviet social development, you may find it difficult to understand the consequences of the lack of a “public language that was emotionally neutral and moderately abstract capable of attaining generalizable qualities” (p.56). Those of us who point to the importance of catachresis in terms of “sociosemantic misuse of conventional concepts as well as a practice in which political identifications blur the distinctions defining established political activity” (p.57) are well aware of this problem.

It is important to highlight the language of consumerism, which has replaced political language in the division of various institutions into “good” and “bad.” Like most former communist and socialist countries, Russia is confronted with “culturalized disagreements” which have developed into a kind of “culture war between ‘cosmopolitan liberals’ on the one hand and uniform, authentic, and

homogeneous people whose identity is sharply juxtaposed to that of outsiders on the other.” Linked to this is the labeling of opposition of all kinds as Western and liberal. The result, according to Kashirskikh and Tsetsura, is an authoritarian election campaign “that reduces the electoral process solely to a plebiscite-voting without discussion” (p.65).

This account is followed by the best-structured chapter, which could also be considered a textbook example of how to write a short scientific text; it has a clear structure and offers balanced and sufficient context. My only point of contention with the author is his assertion that Bernie Sanders’ political campaigns have a “populist appeal,” so it is safe to claim that “populism can exist on both the left and right wings of the political spectrum” (p.78). This is certainly true, but I would not choose Sanders as the primary example of this. On the other hand, let me reiterate that the chapter “Populism in the ANC and the 2019 Xenophobic Violence in South Africa” (pp.71–95) is anything but a “modest contribution” to this volume, as it offers important insights into the South African political landscape, including an introduction to the incubation stage of xenophobic tensions. And unsurprisingly, we find that here too the responsibility lies with the traditional parties and their leaders, who tapped into “populist rhetoric” (p.82).

I am glad that Maximilian Kreter decided to start his chapter on White Power Music in Germany (pp.99–134) with a list of festivals with concerts and accompanying (e.g., militant) events, followed by a useful definition of right-wing extremism (p.103). This is the best way to start the text, even though he has borrowed it (Decker et. Al. ed., *Die Mitte in der Krise*, 2010). I also appreciate the two tables provided: Functions of White Power Music (p. 106) and Development of White Power Music in Germany from 1977 until 2017 (p.123). The second in particular one helps us understand what has been taking place on the White Power Music scene over the last forty years: the rapid increase in the number of active bands.

The seventh chapter, by Vladimír Naxera, “The Germans as a Threat to ‘Us’? The Use of History and Othering of Germans in the Speeches of the Czech President Miloš Zeman” (pp.135–156), begins with a very useful warning against labeling something as populist without “providing empirical evidence and argumentation.” Naxera also cautions against ignoring the previous comparative research and above all against the insufficient effort to link the study of populism with the study of other subjects and similar processes in other parts of Europe. Admittedly, authors from Europe’s periphery tend to reflect, quote, and consult

the established Western authorities (from Müller to Marcus Morgan) while overlooking colleagues from their neighborhood. On the other hand, I have to praise Naxera's interest in how "historical references play a role in the process of populist othering" (p.136), the division between populism and nativism, and the excessive use of empty signifiers like "the pure people" and "the corrupt elite."

The next chapter, "Dog-Whistle Politics as a Strategy of American Nationalists and Populists: George Soros, The Rothschilds, and Other Conspiracy Theories," (pp.157–187) by Armin Langer, touches on similar questions. Here, the empty signifiers take on an antisemitic tone. Langer begins with the image of the "laughing Jew" from the fourteenth century, then moves on to the notion of the Jew as a Christ killer and the "Judeo-Bolshevik Jews" and their alleged "Jewish-communist takeover of the Western World" (pp.171–73). The only thing that changes is the manner of disqualifying the selected Jewish "traffickers in evil" and their "whores," both signifiers usually attributed to George Soros and his plan for "mass migration to Europe" (p.179). Soros was also a favorite of the Charlottesville branch of the white supremacist movement in Virginia in 2017. I particularly like the section in which Langer shows that dog-whistle politics can actually motivate maniacs to kill people (p.179) and discusses accusations brought against people like Trump supporter Cesar Sayoc, for instance, according to which Sayoc sent pipe bombs to the homes of George Soros, Barack Obama, and Bill and Hillary Clinton (accusations to which Sayoc pleaded guilty). Langer also points out the role of mass and social media in spreading antisemitic canards and radicalizing far-right adherents and terrorists (p.182).

From here, I would encourage the reader to proceed directly to "Henry Luce's Nationalist-Populist Crusade." I only propose this sequence because it is much easier to understand "Dog-Whistle Politics" if one reads Henry Luce's story immediately afterward. By personalizing the entire process in his chapter, "For the Sake of His Country: Henry Luce's Nationalist-Populist Crusade to Forge 'The American Century,'" Murat İplikçi has managed to present us with the rise of Americanism as a result of liberal democratic internationalism. What started as Wilsonianism grew with the help of people like Henry Luce into a systematic promotion of "American virtues to the world." After this idealistic approach was "crushed by cunning [...] isolationists in Congress" and following the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, the U.S. was forced to withdraw from its isolationism and began to embrace the idea of promoting its foreign policy in an "American way" (p.211).

As the cofounder of *Time* magazine and the founder of *Fortune*, Henry Luce was in more of a position than any other “internationalist” to promote Americanism on a daily basis and within popular culture. The final push in that direction was the launch of the weekly image-based *Life* magazine, which aimed to “bring the world to its readers” (p.213). İplikçi also provides interesting details from Luce’s life, including his project “Keep Yale together,” based on which “one-third of the students at Yale had left to be drafted for WWI” (p.215). Luce was in a position not only to “sell American business culture and capitalism” to entrepreneurs around the world and train them with American standards but also repeatedly to put the smiling faces of Al Capone, Stalin, Mussolini, and even Adolf Hitler on the front page of *Time*.

Compared to the chapter on Henry Luce’s aggressive Americanization of the world, “Nationalism and Populism in Norwegian Historiography” by Steinar Aas feels like a pastoral. It is an extremely interesting one at that, especially for readers like me, who know little about methodological nationalism used among Norwegian historians. Starting with an intriguing introduction to the “poetics of Norwegian historiography,” where “the nation was a foundation for the greater national narratives” (p.192), Aas moves on to discuss the distinctive “‘social democratic order’ cementing the social, political, and cultural structure of Norway” (p.193). He presents the narrative of the nineteenth-century struggle for independence, as well as the social and political development after industrialization, up to the discussion on “What do people consider as Norwegian?.” It’s fascinating to see how Aas balances the interpretation of the revitalization of Sami identity, coupled with the discovery of local and women’s history, and the rising narrative of “democracy, people and populism, and populism and history writing.” It’s also interesting to see how historians help create the national master narrative about the Norwegian “pure people” and the Swedish “corrupt elite,” which would later be adopted in the postmodern populist approach to the narrative of “the people as a cornerstone of the nation-state” (p.209).

Readers from Central European University will be particularly interested in and challenged by Jonah Robertson’s “Catholicism, Polish Victimhood, and Nationalist Histories in Partitioned and Contemporary Poland,” although it is clear from the outset that the chapter is not only about Catholic nationalists tying Catholicism to the very origins of the nation. It starts with a brief introduction to the partitions of the country. After two major uprisings (1830 and 1836), a de-Polonization campaign (with the closing of the University of Warsaw) culminated

in a harsh Russian “attack on Polish culture,” where many towns and places were Russified and Russia ceased to use the name “The Kingdom of Poland” (pp.239–240). In addition to providing chronological and factual details, Robertson writes about the Poles’ introverted nationalism, which serves as the foundation for a “somewhat idealized version of Polish history.” Here, introverted nationalism—the definition is borrowed from Mayer Resnede’s *Catholicism and Nationalism*—is also defined by framing the nation as superior to others and by seeing others as enemies (p.246). Finally, Robertson also successfully shows that “[t]he very ideas that allowed for the creation and preservation of a Polish national identity during the partitioned years continue to serve as key elements of contemporary Polish national identity.” And even more importantly, he demonstrates how the ideas that were once used as methods of resistance and to prevent erasure are now employed to “erase diverse identities in favor of a homogenous national image” (p.251).

The analysis in Bjørn P. Müller-Bohn’s “Populist Politics and the Rise of the AfD in Germany” of the AfD’s descriptions of itself is particularly insightful: “We are neither left nor right [...] We only need healthy common sense [...] to regain national sovereignty” (pp.255–256). Müller-Bohn reconstructs the party’s priorities and main accusations. He touches on the notion of “broken promises,” a mix of aggressive anti-intellectualism, victimhood, and a claim for Lebensraum. In attempting to explain the rise of the AfD, Müller-Bohn turns to “neoliberalism turning market economy into market society” and the consequences of business-friendly labor market reform (Hartz IV) in 2003–2006. The prognosis is ominous. “By depicting themselves as victims of persecution [by the Altparteien], the New Right has adopted a defensive posture. By introducing a conservative-revolutionary habitus through platforms like Junge Freiheit and Sezession, the New Right has intellectualized right-wing extremism.” And crucially, “By introducing their vocabulary in public, which then translates into a significant presence on the streets, given the right circumstances, the New Right has gained cultural ground” (p.261). Müller-Bohn is hardly mistaken in predicting that the AfD is well-positioned to capture even more votes than in the 2021 election. The recent regional election (Landtagswahlen, 2023) in Hessen, where the AfD (almost reaching the 20 percent mark) emerged as the second-strongest party, unfortunately, proves him right.

A similar trend is apparent in India, where Prime Minister Modi is systematically dismantling and destroying the emancipatory legacy of Jawaharlal Nehru. This legacy, articulated in Nehru’s book *The Discovery of India*, is the starting

point for Britt Leake's last chapter in this volume, "The Positive Role of Islam in Indian History and Nehru's *The Discovery of India*." After reading this chapter, many (myself included) will be compelled at least to skim Nehru's book. It is crucial to any subtle understanding of today's India, which Nehru characterized as marked by a syncretic culture of tolerance and openness, embracing diverse influences—peoples, cultures, languages, and faiths—that seem vastly different on the surface" (p.276). Nehru underscored the critical role Muslims have played in an inclusive Indian nationalism, a particularly poignant message at a time "when populist Hindu nationalist forces seek to undo Indian secularism and reduce Indian Muslims to second-class citizens in their own country" (p.277).

Like any edited volume, *Nationalism and Populism* is an eclectic collection of texts. However, in this instance, it is a fortuitous mix of contributions and a well-conceived combination of works by authors of different generations using interdisciplinary approaches. Readers will learn a great deal, especially about Norway, India, Russia, and South Africa, areas about which many readers in Europe and the U.S. know very little. One only wishes that the editors had invited experts on Latin America or other parts of Asia and Africa, or on Southeastern Europe, with their variants of populist and nationalist narratives and rhetoric. Figures like Janez Janša, Viktor Orbán, and Aleksandar Vučić could serve as excellent case studies of small-scale, high-impact populism, particularly the latter, in the wake of contemporary Russian imperialism.

One should also mention Giorgia Meloni, who, according to David Broder, has "already [made it] clear [...] that post-fascism is not just a matter of 'returning to the past'" (p.176), but about writing a new (regional) history. Perhaps this volume will inspire someone to follow Schapkow's and Jacob's project and fill this gap.

In the meantime, I plan to use some of the chapters in my classes. I will also add it to my literature package. The contributing authors have provided basic knowledge about the current situations in various countries, and many of their findings are applicable to geographical contexts that are not explicitly covered in the volume.

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