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Democracy, disinformation and populism: Populism as a factor in the disintegration of the West

Abstract:

Democracies, much like everything human, are systems that can be improved and not just a magical word. They imply rule by the majority but respecting the minority, which is why a series of checks and balances have been set up which are the result of various social agreements and materialise as institutions.

Populism is a political strategy that stretches across the political spectrum but is especially present at the extremes, given the consistency of its message at both ends. For this reason, it tends to pull those employing this strategy toward said extremes. Its key lies in disinformation.

It aims to respond to the shortcomings of democracy and restore the power of the majority, i.e., the people. But in doing so, it undermines the legal-political framework of countries, eroding their balancing structures (such as the press or the judiciary) as well as their procedures. And democracy requires a kind of loyalty to which populism is also unwilling to commit.

This becomes a polemological factor when it recombines or merges with nationalism and projects itself onto the international arena using its internal legitimacy.

Keywords:

populism, democracy, disinformation, nationalism, post-politics, postmodernity.

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1. DEMOCRACY, LEGITIMACY AND EQUALITY¹.

In his seminal work, Fukuyama predicted that democracy would become the universal political model. And it is true that it is claimed by many, even if only as a formality or as a touchstone to legitimise themselves. But much like everything human, democracy is a system open to improvement. And even more so in that it involves various compromises or consensus.

All this notwithstanding, the political function of democracy extends beyond the magical significance that is commonly ascribed to it. In practical terms, it consists of building a resilient framework that promotes the bringing together of forces that are occasionally in stark opposition to each other, so that the decisions taken are the best for the greatest number and place limits on the conflicts that lead to their adoption. In fact, democracy embodies an attitude, a form of approaching conflicts.

It thus seeks to express what Rousseau termed the general will, or the will of the majority, which differs from the will of all, which is a mere sum of individual wills.

This is the source of its resilience: it serves to contain the tension between different, occasionally radically opposed, factors whose articulation makes it possible: between different groups, between spheres of competence, between opposing concepts (diversity versus integration), and so on. This generates systematic push and pulls which, to quote David Easton, require large centripetal doses of solidarity and loyalty as a compensatory factor.

All commitments require it. Furthermore, loyalty is a key concept for the functioning of the system. Without it, the system cannot function properly and is doomed to decline. It is sustained not only by an acceptance of the system, but also by the internalisation of its rules and principles.

The rules of proper conduct, as Hayek argued, are beneficial because they foster a consistently favourable framework of predictability and trust. And as in all matters human, for loyalty to be sustained, there must be a reciprocal and two-way component; it requires results. In short, democracy incorporates contradictions and conflicts, resolving them

¹ This section expands upon the work of the Political Studies Group of the CEU Institute of Studies on Democracy, published by CID, Teresa; ESTÉVEZ Ramón (eds). *España, democracia y futuro*. Tirant Lo Blanch, Valencia, 2023, p. 2017.

through compromises born of the loyalty of the parties involved. It thus provides society with a solid and consistent framework in the form of certain norms that underpin its structure and prevent any form of divisive tribalism.

The eternal question in politics, let us reiterate, is that there is no such thing as a perfect order; and the great problem lies ultimately, in line with Sièyes's introduction of that mysterious concept, in achieving the most appropriate level of representation possible for its foundations: the people.

That being the case, equality, which is at the root of this system, is surreptitiously becoming the defining issue of our times. As a matter of fact, equality is the driving force behind the transformation, even revolutionary, of social relations, political forms and modes of governance. Additionally, all political thought since the French Revolution has been, in some way, built upon different approaches to the idea and significance of equality. And therein lies its foundation.

True versus formal equality. Equality amongst the intellectual elite and those outside; amongst those that are about to leave this world and those who have just arrived; or amongst individuals belonging to different economic classes, etc. That is why democracy, which has been founded on this fiction, is an unattainable ideal. And it is also why attempts to expand the middle classes, making them the bedrock of the model, are being made, reducing economic disparities between different social sectors due to their impact across all dimensions.

Democracy is multidimensional. An assessment of the quality of democracy requires designing various benchmarks to measure the very disparities that are sought to be reduced. When promoting genuine economic equality, the aim therefore is to broaden the middle class, given that the economic sphere underpins a large part of the other dimensions. In any case, the State, created for the sake of equality amongst its members, becomes the guarantor of this equality.

It is worth looking back towards its origins and the basic principles that underpin this concept. The Greco-Roman historian Polybius spoke of anacyclosis, a six-phase cycle in the political evolution of governments. A monarchy degenerates into tyranny, which is superseded by an aristocracy that ends in oligarchy, leading to a democracy that degenerates into demagoguery; and so the cycle begins anew.

To overcome this, he advocates a mixed government with Aristotelian overtones that balances the powers of these three forms of government by combining their advantages. This is the idea or principle underpinning the separation of powers.

Similarly, modern democracies embody a somewhat more complex system that enables both the masses and the elites to play their part. However, the power inequality between the two inevitably creates an oligarchic component and, with it, to a greater or lesser extent, a form of true equality that varies according to segments. This oligarchic component, that is, a group with significantly greater power than the rest and from which the very existence of elites is derived, will inevitably become the target of criticism.

We are talking about the forces operating in “the corridors of power”, to use Carl Schmitt’s phrase. And it should be noted that the existence of the oligarchy, that is, the elites, is not limited to the economic sphere, although this is a characteristic and especially important aspect; rather, it extends to all dimensions of power: intellectual, cultural, political, military and others, according to the aforesaid multidimensional nature of society.

A key element of institutional design is the political party system, as it serves to enable effective ideological plurality. However, beyond idealised notions, parties in turn see their internal democracy eroded as a result of the process that leads to power being concentrated in the hands of leaders, the transformation of politics into a profession, and also due to the problems associated with their funding, which may result in international intervention and even their capture.

Similar issues arise with the press, which acts as a structural counterbalancing mechanism insofar as it enables relatively independent scrutiny of the system as a whole. Its plurality and diversity serve democratic quality and, in this sense, are an indicator of it. This is why Alain de Benoist criticised the fact that “the political and media elites espouse the same discourse”.

Additionally, and given its hybrid nature (combining commercial and public service interests), the media disseminates facts and ideas in parallel for the purposes of information, advertising, propaganda and even entertainment, thereby generating

confusion between them².

And as if all of this were not enough, large groups and corporations have emerged, which are often linked to state interests and wield considerable influence and which exploit the absence of effective borders to activate, stimulate or reshape existing narratives in a populist fashion, or carry out disinformation campaigns in line with their own interests. This poses a risk of interference in the internal affairs of third parties and a threat to their sovereignty. Influence politics are gaining ground in the 21st century.

2. POST-MODERNITY AS A SOCIAL ERA.

Post-modernity, regarded as the current era in the West, is a state of mind, an attitude of denial and even rejection of all that was in the past. In this era, the ephemeral becomes the norm due to a lack of ultimate principles. We live in an age of confusion and weak concepts that inevitably rejects any form of sanctification. It is Baudrillard's "light society" or Bauman's "liquid modern society".

Institutions such as education, the media and the regulatory framework itself, which enable a shared truth are severely weakened. And so too is the society-state duality of which they are the juncture.

Consequently, Western societies lack the necessary points of reference, and with them even the very idea of perfection. As a result consequently, their legitimacy is undermined and instead, a nebulous chaos and a sense of drifting emerge. Man is left as the measure of all things, which evokes a sort of nihilism, similar to that which was responsible for the emergence of the Sophists in Ancient Greece.

The times have contributed to this. Thus, for example, members of the "Generation Z" (those born between 1995 and 2015) have lived through a period of constant change, in which one paradigm follows another, and in which the latest is built in opposition to the previous one and supersedes it, and is, in turn, rejected. This is what Paul Valéry described as a "programme of very rapid substitutions".

Old solutions no longer work, and the new ones fail to fully address the problems. In these

² MANRIQUE, José Luis. "Populismo y posverdad, ¿Solo tendencias?" *Revista Inmanencia*. Vol. 5, No 1. (2016). <http://ppct.caicyt.gov.ar/index.php/inmanencia/article/view/10831>

circumstances, the word “future” evokes a period close in time. The sensation is one of a permanent interregnum. During the Modern Age, ideologies served as a vantage point from which to view the world and which compelled the realisation of what was to come. Conversely, the current absence of a vision for the future means that all solutions are focused on the present. It may be concluded that the management of the present or a permanent sense of , immediacy and urgency constitute the hallmarks of a postmodern attitude.

This sole focus on the present, in turn, hinders the development of long-term projects. Commitment also loses its value, as every moment is a new starting point; one does not look to a past that neither exists nor is understood, nor inspires commitment. The issue is that, by operating exclusively on the temporal plane and on a short-term basis, this approach leads its principles to contradict each other, generates incongruity and absurdity on other levels, and eventually, to a kind of short-term hedonism. In this context, any efforts made appears to be merely for show and may prove futile due to their inconsistency and contradictory nature.

The lack of horizons creates a sensation of drifting, as the necessary references that underpin decisions are missing, and in the absence of certainties, anything is possible. The postmodern world has abandoned the search for a general justification of reality that would give it full meaning. And without meta-narratives, there can be no utopia.³

The twilight of ideologies that marked the dawn of the new century brought with it a new anthropocentrism, which in turn birthed a questioning, softening and reformulation of many of the then-prevailing ideas. All of this is what Gianni Vattimo calls “weak thought”. It is the realm of the “light” man, the complacent citizen, one without fixed values or convictions, who lives in a reality that tailored to his own needs. This is why 21st-century society is conformist and uncritical. Citizens declare themselves satisfied with everything as long as their status and standard of living are guaranteed.

Postmodernism is also post-heroic. This is a liquid age, devoid of certainties or narratives. There is no value behind effort; heroes are dismissed as unnecessary, or even dangerous (their example condemns inaction); at best, they are generic characters or

³ BIANCO, Gabriella. “Desde el post-modernismo a la post-verdad.” CECIES, pensamiento latinoamericano y alternativo. <http://www.cecies.org/articulo.asp?id=582>

empty shells. Restorers and other professions, now part of the cultural sphere, appear to have taken their place in the deification of the common man. For this reason, in the interests of horizontality, heroes must be fictional characters, and this must be known. Everything contains an element of acknowledged and exculpatory falsity that serves the cause of equality. We live in a secularised and post-mythical era.

Max Weber had already prophesied the disappearance of values, falling victim to processes of rationalisation. Modernity and nihilism, then, go hand in hand in postmodernity, dismantling the cohesive (and also legitimising) elements of society, including patriotism and religion, insofar as they placed the individual at the service of the latter.

Postmodernity is adaptive; values are fluid and take on any form, thereby benefiting from their amorphous nature. As they lack a defining structure, they cannot be directed and therefore there is no expected benefit to this adaptive capacity. This makes it static, it belongs to the present and we return once again to conformism and the absence of a future. Emotion and sentiment reign supreme in this context and convey a false sense of movement.

But not all is detrimental in postmodernity, far from it. It is, firstly, a re-evaluation of humanity and a questioning of the prevailing system, its clichés and dogmas. One of the great merits and cornerstones of postmodern thought is its anti-dualist outlook and its emphasis on new perspectives (gender, the environment, disadvantaged groups), promoting pluralism and diversity. Furthermore, the relativism inherent to this phenomenon serves to defuse conflicts insofar as it helps to question their causes. And it does not necessarily belong either to the right or to the left.

3. POPULISM AS A CONCEPT BETWEEN DEMAGOGUERY AND POLITICAL REPRESENTATION.

The word 'populism' first appeared in the second half of the nineteenth century as a direct translation of the term *Naródnichestvo*, used to describe a diverse range of political movements within the Russian socialist left. However, as is often the case, the term reflects a long-existing prior reality. In the words of Ernesto Laclau, "populism is, quite simply, a way of constructing the political".

Nonetheless, this term, which fits perfectly into postmodernity, has taken on pejorative connotations, even within the spectrum of meanings offered by a word that is, in itself, highly polysemous due to its inherent conceptual ambiguity. And it has become a mere label used to characterise and disparage any political opponent and their proposals. The result is that it has lost its capacity for analysis and comprehension⁴.

From this perspective, the term is an expression of degradation, that is, a corruption of Rousseau's general will, even though it may be presented or described as its culmination. We are faced with a concept that is essentially anti-liberal or illiberal, depending on how one looks at it. It is not faithful to the framework responsible for its creation, nor is it symmetrical in its respect for dissent. It would be what Polybius termed ochlocracy, or mob rule, that is to say, governed by passions.

Traces of populism may be found even in the agrarian reforms sought by the brothers Tiberius and Gaius Sempronius Gracchus in Republican Rome. These would be their alignment with the lower classes or their confrontation with the political and social elites of the time, manifested in unconventional proposals for social justice which were moreover highly radical for their time.

But the fact is that populism is remarkably adaptable or versatile. Rather than an ideology, it is essentially a rhetorical concept, a methodology or strategy available to any political actor. For this reason, as pointed out by Vallespín and emphasised by Areilza, it is easier to use it as an adjective than to define it as a noun.

Nevertheless, it is especially well-suited to extreme positions, given its great communicative power arising from this apparent consistency. This means that nuance loses its relevance. It follows therefore that it serves as a catch-all for all ideologies, even though it is predominantly occupied by the political extremes.

It is also worth remembering that in order to further its political agenda, the British Conservative Party, led by David Cameron, first called a referendum on Scotland's continued membership of the United Kingdom and subsequently facilitated Brexit. The result of this contradiction is a tension that may benefit another avowedly populist and extreme party. The US President Donald Trump belongs to the Republican Party, a highly

⁴ AHEDO, Unai. "Populismo, un concepto y una palabra controvertida". RIPS: Revista de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociológicas. Vol. 22 Núm. 1 (2023).

traditional party, which may also suffer as a result. In fact, quite a few authors consider that this political party has already undergone a transformation or lost some of its roots.

That said, the populist strategy inevitably pushes those who employ it to extremes due to its need for consistency. And by offering simplistic solutions to difficult and complex problems, it succeeds in politicising any social unrest.

All in all, the left-right divide, the cornerstone of politics since the 20th century, appears to have run its course. With the welfare state crisis, the consensus surrounding the social and democratic rule of law is beginning to falter, and the social contract that had governed Europe over recent decades is being broken. This breakdown is leading the democratic left to adopt conservative stances in an attempt to preserve the welfare state, despite recurring crises. Meanwhile, the democratic right is redefining itself and seeking innovations in the economic organisation of society and security, whilst striving to lead political, social and economic change⁵.

The plebiscitary nature of populism, its purported commitment to direct democracy rather than representative democracy, entails a direct appeal to the people and the revitalisation of their role within the institutional framework, to the detriment of the minority and the safeguards built into the latter's framework.

According to populism, political representation, and by extension, liberal democracy, takes away power from the people, as institutions that act against the will of the majority serve, in practice, to block their decisions. For populism, there is only one collective subject with a will, and based on this logic, the institutions of liberal democracy (the constitution, rights, parliaments, the press or an independent judiciary) are positive if they are subordinate to "people's power", but negative if they limit its sovereignty⁶.

It is thus the exercise of power without checks or balances. Boosted by this legitimacy, populism acknowledges no restrictions whatsoever, neither organisational, procedural, etc. nor ideological or intellectual. It presents itself as the only valid and possible ideology.

⁵ GRATIUS, Susanne; RIVERO, Ángel." Más allá de la izquierda y la derecha: populismo en Europa y América Latina Revista". *CIDOB d'Afers Internacionals* n.119, p. 35-61

⁶ GRATIUS, Susanne; RIVERO, Ángel." Más allá de la izquierda y la derecha: populismo en Europa y América Latina Revista". *CIDOB d'Afers Internacionals* n.119, p. 35-61

This makes it not only illiberal but also anti-pluralist, anti-elite and anti-expertise⁷.

It shields itself with the socio-economic circumstances prevailing at any given time. These circumstances are channelled into enemies, embodied by potential political rivals, and it makes no attempt at persuading them with arguments.

It is characterised by its ability to mobilise and connect emotionally with the masses, appealing to their prejudices and aspirations. To achieve this, it simplifies the public sphere and seeks to concentrate power in the executive arm, often at the expense of freedoms, which can lead to the erosion of the rule of law and of the institutions responsible for oversight⁸.

This represents a psychological and intellectual regression, as it entails the predominance of emotions over rational thought. Populist demagogues stoke the passions of the people, their most immediate ambitions. And while they satisfy them, they also neglecting the people's true interests and do so without due process, employing a dichotomous, black-and-white approach. Thus they seek to establish a policy of irreversibility.

While it constitutes an appeal to the people, it can also lead them to act against their own best interests, against their deepest and most genuine concerns. As a result, the institutions designed to act as a counterbalance to power are left in limbo, and their credibility is undermined. Furthermore, in doing so, it betrays the foundations of democracy and fails to uphold the loyalty demanded by democracy. Power acts against the state, as was demonstrated by the storming of the Capitol in 2021.

This instrumentalisation undermines political representation itself, whilst weakening other powers that serve to keep it in check it, such as the press or the judiciary. Institutions are expressions of social progress and contribute to the organisation of societies. This is why populists are labelled "anti-system" to the extent that, by acting against institutions, they call the model of the state into question.

Laclau and Mouffe consider hegemony to be the capacity of a social group to articulate

⁷ GRATIUS, Susanne; RIVERO, Ángel." Más allá de la izquierda y la derecha: populismo en Europa y América Latina Revista". *CIDOB d'Afers Internacionals* n.119, p. 35-61

⁸ RIVERA MAGOS, Sergio; GONZÁLEZ PURECO, Gabriela. "Populismo, desinformación y polarización política en la comunicación en redes sociales de los presidentes populistas latinoamericanos" Revista Mexicana de Opinión Pública • Year 19 • no. 36 • January - June 2024, pp. 79 – 107.

the elements of a society and endow them with a common direction of progress. Authors such as Gramsci believe that this can only be achieved by the bourgeoisie or the proletariat.

However, the two post-Marxists⁹ reject this view and regard it as economic reductionism. They assert that hegemonic capacity is contingent in nature and its success is not guaranteed, contrary to what Hegel and Marx's claims, since there are no determinisms. Moreover, they believe that it depends as much on socio-historical conditions as on the strategies pursued to achieve it.

Consequently, hegemony can be structured along other lines (feminism, environmentalism, etc.), not just economic ones, and which may be utilised, even successively, to make progress¹⁰. The strategy lies in their successive application to achieve this goal.

For these authors, the main features of populism are: the creation of antagonism within the community and the challenge to the order as a whole. This challenge must be framed in terms of the people versus the elite, even though it may take various forms. The populist strategy involves pushing the system to its limits, for which it resorts to an oversimplification of reality, social division, demagoguery and authoritarianism. And the key to it all is communication¹¹.

The problem lies in its often demagogic nature, as populism can capitalise on resentment but is unable to capitalise on its victory. This is because it poses no alternative to current paradigms, nor is it able to deal with the complexities of the 21st century.

It claims to represent the people, interpreting their most intimate and even hidden desires, which, once articulated, shape its political agenda. It then becomes a media agenda or a direct line of communication between populist leaders and the people, to whom they appeal directly and without nuance. In doing so, populism helps to focus media attention on the person who presents themselves as the champion of the populist agenda, thereby

⁹Unlike Marx, who had replaced Hegelian reason with the class struggle as the driving force of history, Laclau and Mouffe consider that the very idea that history is determined must be overcome, given that capitalism is a failed structure, which broadens their scope for political action.

¹⁰ LA TRIVIAL. "Laclau el teórico del populismo". *Filosofía&CO* 16.05.2024 <https://filco.es/laclau-diez-claves-populismo/>

¹¹ LA TRIVIAL. "Laclau el teórico del populismo". *Filosofía&CO* 16.05.2024 <https://filco.es/laclau-diez-claves-populismo/>

reinforcing it. And if their representation is accepted, they establish themselves as a leader. The populist leader embodies a proposal for change. The leader and the proposal thus become one and the same. Subsequently, the proposal disappears and only the person remains.

Populism thus heralds the populist leader, serving to build their image by endowing them with a redemptive mission. And the leader, in turn, practises populism in that they politicise existing discontent by capitalising on it. To this end, they adopt a self-serving approach to the political situation. They use it as a source of authority in order to legitimise their authoritarianism. The situation demands their policies.

Unlike other political parties, populists are not bound by ideologies, as their primary objective is to first come to power and then to maintain their position. For this reason, it is not a political movement per se, rather a political logic or strategy. The populist leader is therefore a central figure in this scheme; their credibility is as crucial as that of the agenda they represent. Without populist leaders, populist movements are ineffective and are relegated to the fringes of the political system¹².

However, it is also true that labelling a certain course of action as populist may be an attempt to delegitimise a specific political proposal. And, by doing so, it ignores the real concerns of the people. This is all the more so if the proposal diverges from the dominant political thought or that which is championed by the elites. . Not only that, but one may also be casting doubt on the political capacity of the most disadvantaged sections of the population. And, incidentally, it also undermines the mechanisms for correcting the imbalance of power that exists in any established political system, including democracy.

Consequently, for authors such as Laclau, populism is a logic that produces popular identities and which is absolutely necessary to put an end to exclusionary administrative systems and to build alternative orders. Viewed in this light, the populist rupture is precisely the alternative to post-politics, to the administration's denial of the political¹³, or, in other words, to the replacement of politics by administrative management.

¹² DE LA TORRES, Carlos. "Populismo: estrategias conceptuales y debates" Revista de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociológicas, 21(2) (2022).

¹³ DE LA TORRES, Carlos. "Populismo: estrategias conceptuales y debates" Revista de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociológicas, 21(2) (2022).

4. POST-POLITICS, POPULISM AND COMMUNICATION.

With the end of the Cold War, representative democracy has undergone a full-blown crisis. This is, in part, the result of a process of consensus-building that has narrowed the spectrum of the political arena by relegating matters of consensus to the technical or scientific realm. This “Twilight of Ideologies”, a concept formulated by D. Bell, may be interpreted as a certain de-democratisation of society, as the scope of political debate has been narrowed by technocracy. And by the same logic, it is accompanied by a subsequent crisis of legitimacy in decision-making mechanisms and procedures.

Viewed in this light, populism is not the cause of such a crisis of legitimacy but, rather, its result. Democracy is thus transformed into an event of dissent, that is, a questioning of the entire system, whenever it is relegated to a marginal role. The point is that it does not oppose a specific resolution but rather the technical regime that facilitates its adoption, given that this regime has removed itself from politics by its administrative trivialisation, that is, by removing it from the political sphere and handing it over to the civil service and expert governance.

It is this depoliticisation of politics that Žižek, termed “post-politics” in 1999. Politics has thus left behind old ideological struggles to cover what has become a technical regime of administration.

Through this strategy, people’s attention is diverted from structural issues that, especially in the case of the economy, have been technicised and transformed into the objective state of affairs, and replaced with issues of identity and culture. The answers demanded are heuristic or involve multiple valid responses; and they are of little social significance.

The natural result is also a depoliticised society insofar as it is only interested in the recognition of marginal, fluid and changeable identities (gender, ecology, ethnicity, cultural minorities, sexuality...) and in the tolerance of difference. Without downplaying these issues on which Žižek acknowledges that progress has been made, as a true neo-Marxist, his proposal is to repoliticise the economy, that is, to refocus debates on it by removing it from the realm of technicality and placing it at the political centre.

In 2007, Christian Salmon referred to post-politics as the politics of post-truth. It seeks to create or shape public opinion by appealing more to emotions and personal beliefs than to objective facts.

To this end, it primarily utilises the emotions that Moïsi identified in relation to trust: fear (a lack of trust), hope (the expression of trust) and humiliation (wounded trust), and uses them to structure the discourse. These emotions serve to convey messages, as they provide access to the subconscious. And it manipulates them to achieve implicit objectives. We are faced with a distinctly populist strategy.

Disinformation becomes the lifeblood of this depoliticised conception of politics. It makes use of social media and a population with access to information but limited time to analyse it; and one that lacks the necessary training and ability to discern accurately. The key to its implementation is the absence of critical thinking, which is further bolstered in the short term by the weakness of a journalism sector that is adapting to the digital age.

Its origins have also changed. Thus, the term “agitprop” (agitation and propaganda) was a political strategy effectively employed during the Russian Revolution. It emerged as a movement created by artists of the time to influence public opinion in two ways: passively, through propaganda aimed at shaping people’s minds, and actively, through agitation¹⁴.

Whilst thinkers such as Chomsky or Derrida were traditionally defined as ‘alternative’, now the ‘alternative’ is, in fact, to be found in power. And that is strange, or at the very least, novel. Power, now, from this conception of politics, engages in agitprop and is also ‘alternative’. A surprising oxymoron. This is the natural result of power positioning itself against the state by seeking to alter its institutional balances and, with them, its basic consensuses.

And, given that politics is founded on perceptions, the term ‘post-politics’ comes to describe the widespread adoption and public recognition of a practice. This involves an attempt to connect with the public’s feelings and emotions, with their lived experience, and from there, by a roundabout route, to reach their reason. And this ties in once again with populism.

The populist agenda exploits issues that stir emotions and arouse interest among the electorate, regardless of their political significance (a prime example might be the proposed change to the clocks, which, due to its political irrelevance, is framed without

¹⁴ LENOIR-GRAND PONS, Ricardo. “Cuando la información busca desestabilizar el enemigo.” *La Grieta*. 17.04.2017. <http://lagrietaonline.com/cuando-la-desinformacion-busca-desestabilizar-al-enemigo/>

even specifying whether summer or winter time is intended). And, opportunistically, it even capitalises on social problems, the mobilisation of resentment, or exploits public security issues to advance its agenda.

We are faced not so much with a novelty, as this always been the case to a greater or lesser extent, but rather with a systematisation, a model that implies, de facto, the acceptance of a practice, because it is not an ideology but a strategic model. This represents a significant erosion of representative democracy since, as a result of this dual discourse, citizens are deprived not merely of the political goals achieved but of the political agenda itself, that is, what is actually being decided.

However much Max Weber may have maintained that truth had no place in politics, this had never been entirely the case. The fact is that politics had never been understood as pure deception, and even more so in a democracy, however much deception might be a potential tool employed by politics to serve its ends.

Moreover, a dialectical relationship is established between truth and politics, since politics cannot be entirely subservient to truth insofar as it aspires to change it, as an expression of reality. For this reason, truth thus becomes yet another tool at the service of politics. As Baudrillard points out: "We live in a world in which the highest function of the sign is to make reality disappear, at the same time the sign also functions to mask this disappearance."¹⁵

To achieve this, a direct and emotional connection must be established with citizens based on expressiveness. The dramatisation and personalisation of political leaders thus transform them into a sort of presenter or host, placing them in a realm distinct from the events described, regardless of whether they are a part of those events or not.

In this way, they transcend the parameters that define reality. Even more so, they transform into champions of the will of the people in their struggle against democratic checks and balances, denouncing such measures as obsolete and ineffective, claiming they limit the capacity for renewal, and lack legitimacy. And so is a message legitimised in emotional terms.

Another difference with the current situation is that social media also possesses this

¹⁵ BAUDRILLARD, Jean. *El crimen perfecto*. Editorial Anagrama, 1997, p. 17

capacity, such that civil society has, through these platforms, overwhelmed the state.¹⁶

As Wittgenstein pointed out, words mark the boundaries of knowledge. This Orwellian Newspeak through which postmodernity expresses itself may be expressed within Twitter's 140-character limit. It is a condensed form of language whose power of concentration, further accentuated with visual imagery, encourages extremism.

One can express an opinion with 140 characters, but not conduct an analysis. And within those characters, there must be room for political correctness, which takes up no small amount of space; and also for the use of eye-catching adjectives with a view to capturing the audience's attention. Politics, which is discourse, is thus skewed by the limited space it occupies, and, consequently, hollowed out and, moreover, radicalised.

This new populist narrative is built on the logic of Twitter's character limit, manifested in short, impactful discourse, and in post-truth. And it is conveyed through emotional language. This language appeals to citizens who, from the outset, distrust traditional institutions, which they regard as outdated and ineffective.¹⁷

Public discourse thus follows a logic similar to that of song lyrics. It is peppered with platitudes (which seem to be something one must inevitably revere) and symbolic elements, and thus comes across as disjointed and incoherent, even though, as is well known, it encompasses a semi-clandestine plan of action. The prefix "semi-" is found in almost everything related to the postmodern world

The disruptive style of populist communicators generates an unprecedented narrative that partially fits within the classical framework of storytelling, inasmuch as it links disjointed ideas without considering their truth or plausibility. A narrative tension (the agony of theatre) is applied to their intrinsic emotional charge, and based on a binary reading of the situation in terms of good and bad, fair or unfair, thereby challenging the prevailing political model as outdated and corrupt. Post-political leaders are embodied in the voice of the people, with whom they establish a direct, unmediated relationship. They are populists.

¹⁶ LENOIR-GRAND PONS, Ricardo. "Cuando la información busca desestabilizar el enemigo." Op cit.

¹⁷ SARASQUETA, Gonzalo. "Pospolítica ¿autopsia o metamorfosis del relato? El caso de Donald Trump." *Revista Especializada en periodismo y comunicación. Questión. Universidad de Río de la Plata* Vol. 1, No. 57 (2018): Summer (January-March)

The emotional charge of these narratives captures attention more effectively than mere information, enabling the audience to grasp the meaning that the selected events, whether real or fictional, seek to convey. Fear or irony replace facts, and the consistency of the whole facilitates penetration of a society with weak concepts that melt away in its presence like ice on a mild day.¹⁸

As Roger Bartra points out, there is also a great deal of information circulating in the form of entertainment (such as TikTok), which steers it towards areas where reflection does not play a major role and thus, once again, facilitates its penetration.¹⁹

Hyper-fragmentation, narrative leaps and the presence of charismatic communicators, such as US President Donald Trump, are interconnected and acquire meaning as part of this phenomenon, aligning with a light society characterised sociologically by a profound process of de-ideologisation, a deep crisis in the institutions that underpin it, and a scepticism that cuts across all social strata.²⁰

Values, feelings and emotions act as a framework for the messages and ensure an impact fuelled by the shock caused by emotional language. The narrative moves from one topic to another, within a narrow spectrum of themes, by means of a series of expressionistic strokes or sketches, leaving it to the viewer's imagination to fill in the gaps. In other words, a micro-narrative is created so that the final composition, now on a macro level, is formed by the voter taking a stance on one of the extremes of the issue addressed²¹. It is an 'empty signifier', as intended.

These are highly targeted discourses aimed at certain sectors deemed strategic, even to the point of gerrymandering²². At the same time, there is an open refusal to seek support in other sectors due to the costs of the process involved and in order to further distinguish their own discourse. The cost is, once again, greater fragmentation of society, which runs counter to the inherently inclusive nature of democracy.

¹⁸ SARASQUETA, Gonzalo. "Pospolítica ¿autopsia o metamorfosis del relato?" Op cit.

¹⁹ ORTEGA, Octavio. "Favorece ignorancia posverdad en México." *Revista Reforma*, 26 de marzo de 2017. Universidad Nacional de México. http://www.iis.unam.mx/pdfs/iismedios/marzo2017/02_reforma

²⁰ SARASQUETA, Gonzalo. "Pospolítica ¿autopsia o metamorfosis del relato? El caso de Donald Trump." *Revista Especializada en periodismo y comunicación. Questión. Universidad de Rio de la Plata* Vol. 1, No. 57 (2018): Summer (January-March)

²¹ IBIDEM.

²² Manipulating electoral constituencies within a territory, grouping them together with the aim of influencing election results

Within this context, citizens are reduced to a sterilised audience, having been deprived of genuine debate and, with it, their sovereignty. In this conception of politics, every trace that may reveal a hidden ideology and one that may actually be formulated by specialists, has been removed. In other words, discourse exists, but is it neither aligned with any specific ideology (its boundaries are blurred and its explanations are not accepted) nor, above all, is it presented as such.²³

Emotions are the basis of the narrative, while politics is staged as a spectacle to divert attention. What is real, objective and rational is unnecessary for political engagement. Credibility is irrelevant; indeed, it is an obstacle to visibility. Shock, inventiveness and spectacle, on the other hand, are essential. The leader is thus transformed into a new “conducator”.

It can even reach the extremes of PSYOPS (psychological operations) influence campaigns and even outright digital disinformation. As a matter of fact, large-scale influence operations have been carried out under the guise of algorithms and social media.

5. INFORMATION, NARRATIVES AND DEMOCRATIC RADICALISM.

Twenty-first-century society is an information society, given that information is an essential resource. It is estimated that, up to 2003, humanity had produced 5 exabytes of information, and by 2011, this figure was being generated every two days. In 2007, the figure stood at 295 exabytes; by 2011, it had risen to 600 exabytes;²⁴ and by 2020, 2.5 quintillion bytes were being generated every day. Since then, the totality of human knowledge has doubled every two years, meaning that today, 90 per cent of it is less than 2 years old²⁵.

The public has little discerning ability, little research time, looks for emotion rather than truth when seeking information, and does not like to be contradicted. And this is at a time

²³ SARASQUETA, Gonzalo. “Pospolítica ¿autopsia o metamorfosis del relato? El caso de Donald Trump.” *Revista Especializada en periodismo y comunicación. Questión. Universidad de Río de la Plata* Vol. 1, No. 57 (2018): Summer (January-March)

²⁴ MARINA, José Antonio “Porque la sociedad de la información está a punto de fracasar”. *El Confidencial*. 27. 06.2017.

²⁵ GILLI, Andrea. “Preparing for “NATO-mation” the Atlantic Alliance towards the age of artificial intelligence”. *Colegio de Defensa de la OTAN*. NDC policy brief No. 4 February 2019.

when we are faced with an increasingly unmanageable universe of data. The internet fulfils the purposes for which it was conceived: to be an uncontrollable tool for the creation of a global village.

Twenty-first-century societies consume vast amounts of information, and they do so in a relational manner. Their sources are derived from their immediate surroundings, which is what lends credibility to the information. The recipient becomes the sender, creating a distribution chain that ensures the information received is regarded as highly credible. In the information age, both information generation and distribution technologies have made everything easier. The information landscape has become more complex and powerful.

It is clear that traditional media have lost their monopoly on news distribution. It has always been in the hands of those who produce the news, and now they are individual actors.²⁶ And its dissemination has depended on various factors, of which one, although not the most important, is its veracity.

The fact is that communication patterns have undergone a radical transformation. Social media is thus the cornerstone of the 21st-century “information ecosystem”, and it also serving as an expression of that democratic horizontality which gives a voice to all participants, regardless of their status or characteristics. These are spaces in which users encounter a relative homogeneity and ideas and beliefs are thus levelled out, amplified and reinforced, regardless of the individual factors at play.

There has also been a significant concentration of companies, meaning that the vast virtual space has been cordoned off and divided up by an oligopoly of digital firms.²⁷ In 2016, 62 per cent of US adults accessed news via social media, and 44 per cent via Facebook.²⁸ According to Reuter's *Digital News Report* in 2025, 26% of all social media users got their news from Facebook, 21% from YouTube, el 16% from Instagram, 15% from WhatsApp, 11% from X (Twitter), and 10% from TikTok.

In 2024, Facebook (Meta) had 3,065 million users, YouTube 2,491 million, Instagram

²⁶ ALANDETE, David. “Como combatir la posverdad” *El País* 22.11.2016

²⁷ MERCHAN GABALDON; Faustino. “Verdad frente a posverdad.” *La Tribuna del País Vasco*. 02.12.2017.

²⁸ GOTTFRIED, Jeffrey; SHEARER, Elisa. “News use across social media platforms.” Pew Research Centre & Knight Foundation.
<http://www.journalism.org/2016/05/26/news-use-across-social-media-platforms-2016/>

2,000 million and Twitter 619 million, with an average daily usage of 2 hours and 23 minutes. There are “influencers” capable of mobilising or influencing hundreds of millions of people through their opinions.

Social media has been employed as a political marketing channel, since it enables direct, unmediated, and real-time interaction between leaders and the public. This is especially true in the case of populist parties. As a matter of fact, they have played a decisive role as a space for mobilisation, where supporters unite and enthusiasm for campaigns is generated. Social media are spaces well-suited to populism, that is to say, one in which it finds a structural framework that is conducive to the spreading of information. They have even been described as “mobocratic”.²⁹

We are faced with a powerful weapon for populism, as social media includes a set of interconnected communications tools and practices that fit perfectly within populist rhetoric. Thus, the characteristics of populism and social media appear to reinforce one another. Social media facilitates the emergence of populist movements, and these movements have helped turn social media into a space for political mobilisation³⁰.

For their part, search engine algorithms are also not neutral, since they draw on prior preferences. The algorithm selects information it believes the individual will like and filters out what it believes they will not. Users are also grouped according to their desires, beliefs or expectations, creating a homophilic classification, that is, one that groups together all those who think or feel the same way.

This reinforces polarised thinking, naturally driving it towards extremes and generating “filter bubbles” (in the words of Eli Pariser). This further contributes to society’s fragmentation into ideological strongholds, thereby atomising it. Thus, driven by an arcane instinct for coalition-building, it forms clusters of individuals who reinforce each other’s beliefs while rejecting data that does not align with their worldview. Additionally, data is treated in the same way as opinions, with information that is not shared or that is

²⁹ GERBAUDO, Paolo. “Populismo y redes sociales: ¿una afinidad electiva?” in GUERRERO-SOLÉ, Frederic; MAS-MANCHÓN Lluís; VIRÓS I MARTÍN, Clara *Populismo de extrema derecha y redes sociales. ¿El futuro de la democracia en juego?* <https://repositori-api.upf.edu/api/core/bitstreams/51cec47b-e2d9-4eaa-beff-02d3a9d41ab8/content>

³⁰ GERBAUDO, Paolo. “Populismo y redes sociales: ¿una afinidad electiva?” in GUERRERO-SOLÉ, Frederic; MAS-MANCHÓN Lluís; VIRÓS I MARTÍN, Clara *Populismo de extrema derecha y redes sociales. ¿El futuro de la democracia en juego?* <https://repositori-api.upf.edu/api/core/bitstreams/51cec47b-e2d9-4eaa-beff-02d3a9d41ab8/content>

disliked being subjectively dismissed on that basis alone.³¹

These groups are cognitively coordinated. Their members share and reinforce their beliefs without questioning them; outside the group, fear prevails, creating an atmosphere of perpetual unanimity. This ties in with imaginaries as tools for “the creation of realities”³².

Thus, the combination of globalisation and digital democratisation has generated a form of energised emotional tribalism or identity-based groups that are open to anyone seeking to join, which occasionally lead to extremely dangerous developments. Social reality acquires the form of a mosaic, a return to the world of the High Middle Ages in the midst of the era of globalisation.³³

Thus, social media have transformed cyberspace into a vast archipelago of comfort zones, although it is true that such fragmentation is not new and similar bubbles were already present in society. What has happened is that they have been moved to the internet.³⁴ We are witnessing a convergence of individualism and communitarianism, manifested in the merging of individuals into communities. The term used to define this phenomenon is “online multitude”. Users share the same virtual spaces for interaction, even though they are physically separated, thus converting the internet into a space for public assembly. These assemblies enable models such as e-democracy.

And some authors suggest that these assemblies or cells may have been created under common alternative causes such as anti-vaxxers, flat-earthers, climate change deniers, etc. who may later be activated by other causes and exploited. These cells may be coordinated through rhetoric and, through their influence, draw society as a whole or significant sectors of it into their orbit.

The phenomenon of a “return to a new man” becomes a paradox rife with contradictions,

³¹ GONZÁLEZ-RIVERA, Juliana. “La información en la era de la posverdad: retos, mea culpas y antídotos.” Universidad EAFIT.

<http://www.eafit.edu.co/medios/eleafitense/112/Paginas/informacion-posverdad.aspx>

³² ABRAHAM FERNÁNDEZ, Jesús. “Algoritmos, las nuevas armas de ¿construcción? Masiva.” Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies. DIEEE 06-2017.

³³ IBIDEM

³⁴ CARNICERO URABAYEN; Carlos “Posverdad y redes sociales, una amenaza a la democracia.” *Huffingtonpost*. 17.09.2017

https://www.huffingtonpost.es/2017/09/17/posverdad-y-redes-sociales-una-amenaza-para-la-democracia_a_23063245/

which will be accentuated by technological development. Technology provide possibilities for turning everyone into an activist. But there are also organised groups dedicated to achieving such ends, sometimes sponsored by or operating in the shadow of states, equipped with substantial resources to achieve their aims or provide support services for specific purposes.

Their work is amplified on an industrial scale by thousands of bot networks (robots that act as if they were people), teams or “troll farms” (identity impersonators), websites and social media platforms that amplify propaganda and which, in turn, are supported by hacker networks. Malware equipped with an algorithm may be collecting data for years in order to divide a society and exert significant influence.³⁵

Narratives, discourses or stories amount to a script that is meticulously planned by various actors and developed by a powerful technological bureaucracy that may be linked to states or not, and which transcends national borders, even allowing for direct interference. These are a selection of ideas and references used to propose imaginaries and appeal to the senses and emotions. In this way, a truth is presented, and with it, social guidance is provided. We are against an extremely powerful instrument of political persuasion, amplified by technology. Through its use, information can be organised and reality explained.

It is worth highlighting the importance attached to narratives by post-Marxist thinkers Laclau and Mouffe in their analysis of populism. According to them, discourse is what gives meaning to and structures the social. It is the means of accounting for historical specificity

However, discourses are explanations that compete for acceptance. This highlights their partiality and leads to an irreconcilable antagonism between various political actors. Within this context, the aim of their implementation is to polarise the population³⁶.

According to Laclau, these discourses are constructed using “empty” or floating signifiers. These are contested terms (such as “democracy”, “freedom”, “the environment” or “climate change”) whose meanings are not fixed and are contested. By using them, a

³⁵ ABRAHAM FERNÁNDEZ, Jesús. “Algoritmos, las nuevas armas de ¿construcción? Masiva.” Op cit.

³⁶ LA TRIVIAL. “Laclau el teórico del populismo” . *Filosofía&CO* 16.05.2024 <https://filco.es/laclau-diez-claves-populismo/>

political boundary may be drawn between the set of demands and the established order that supposedly prevents them from being realised. Discourses can articulate this set of disparate demands and thereby mount a challenge to the existing order, together with the proposal of an alternative³⁷.

Populism thus involves mobilising a range of diverse demands united under the banner of a floating signifier. This floating signifier acts as a focal point that seeks maximum reach, dividing the social arena by constructing a fundamental dichotomy: the people and the other.³⁸

But the fact is that this discourse also serves to create a common enemy. It is also associated with a leader who embodies the union of all demands and who synthesises and consolidates them. It seeks an emancipation that will never be complete, for there is always one possible order that is rejected when another is chosen.

Emancipation is thus a promise, but it will never become reality, and this potential for improvement is, thus, a guarantee of freedom. Its proposal is a radical democracy that pushes the rights of the majority ever further. For this reason, the result is also an endless conflict³⁹.

Discourses serve a social process of constructing and affirming identity. Their goal is to build a collective identity with which group members can identify, feel secure, and achieve a sense of permanence and stability⁴⁰.

Within this context, new technologies enable both data collection and processing. This facilitates greater control over citizens, who are also offered the opportunity to participate directly in matters of state, thereby empowering *-de facto-* the ordinary citizen whom they also control.

Relativism ties in with a kind of democratic horizontality that renders any opinion valid and worthy of respect, regardless of the speaker's credentials. This gives rise to two

³⁷ LA TRIVIAL. "Laclau el teórico del populismo" . *Filosofía&CO* 16.05.2024 <https://filco.es/laclau-diez-claves-populismo/>

³⁸ RIVERA MAGOS, Sergio; González Pureco; Gabriela. "Populismo, desinformación y polarización política en la comunicación en redes sociales de los presidentes populistas latinoamericanos" *Revista Mexicana de Opinión Pública* • Year 19 • no. 36 • January - June 2024, pp. 79 – 107.

³⁹ LA TRIVIAL. "Laclau el teórico del populismo" . *Filosofía&CO* 16.05.2024 <https://filco.es/laclau-diez-claves-populismo/>

⁴⁰ ARRANZ MARTÍNEZ, Raquel. "The creation of imaginaries." IEEE Research Paper 2018.

social trends that are not necessarily at odds with one another: one geared towards greater direct democracy (opinion polls that carry increasing weight in the political activity) at the same time, enabling the reverse: greater control by the state apparatus over citizens and, consequently, greater state intervention, both directly and indirectly, such as the formulation of narratives associated with the use of data mining.

These two movements, state interventionism and direct democracy, converge in populism which, in the name of democratic radicalism or a democracy not subject to rules, continually appeals to the will of the people as a justification and legitimisation for any course of action by leaders who also possess sociological tools to control the masses they claim to represent and who act, *de facto*, according to their dictates.

We are thus faced with a situation where technology pits representative democracy against direct democracy and dirigisme against personal freedom, and all these contradictions must be reconciled.

6. TRUTH AND THE STRUGGLE FOR CONTROL OF THE NEWS AGENDA.

In post-materialism, matter and reality become so diluted that they disappear; they depend entirely on the will of the interpreter. As Nietzsche pointed out, “there are no facts, only interpretations.” What matters is not so much the fact itself as one’s opinion of it. For this reason, the expression of fact prioritises form over substance, imbued with a relativism that does not admit one single truth.

Truth is also a realm of morality, and everyone can, in theory, have their own truth without this necessarily having any impact, provided that the current regulatory framework is complied with. In any case, the drive towards integration inherent in any society requires the existence of common spaces of truth—that is, shared truths. And this implies that a fracture in truth ultimately leads to a fracture in society.

Positivist metaphysics leads one to believe that social truths are universal and may be presented as natural. In other words, what matters is not so much correspondence with the facts as the group’s consensus regarding said facts. The outcome is not that there is no truth, rather that there are many truths, some more solid and others more debatable.

Truth thus becomes a point of reference in a world lacking such points, and compels

those who encounter it to step outside their comfort zone to take it into account. That is why it makes us uncomfortable; it questions our emotions and challenges them. That is why contradiction is silenced. That is also why it becomes emotionally associated with “bad news”, as it disturbs and disrupts the flow of one’s own emotions; consequently, rather than looking at the facts, one distances themselves from the truth. But without the truth, without paying attention to reality, consensus cannot be reached, and the community ends up fracturing. People need points of reference.

In any case, we must not forget that we are not pure spirits. All decisions arise from feelings, from the irrational, before subsequently taking shape and becoming coherent through reason. First we feel and intuit, and then we decide and act. As Byung-Chul Han points out: “Feeling precedes thought,”⁴¹ and music precedes the word. Similarly, any rational decision must pass through the emotional filter of the human being

Emotion thus ends up taking precedence over reason in a sort of anti-Victorian attitude, a form of revenge against Cartesian rationalism, which has hitherto been the cornerstone of the West. Truth is not rooted in fact, but in the feelings it arouses or the allegiances it provokes. Emotion takes precedence over reason. In the age of technology (and paradoxically, given that it is technology that has made this possible), reason ceases to be the cornerstone of knowledge.

This is nothing more than a reworking of Nietzsche’s thought. He had already championed instinct, and the irrationality it entails, as the definitive criterion of truth. The result, in turn, implies a reformulation of the Cartesian maxim, which becomes “I feel, therefore I am”; and it even enables the practice of a geopolitics of feelings in the form of volatile identities of all kinds and scales, accessible solely by virtue of being felt.

This inevitably leads once again to a reinforcement of a sceptical attitude. An idea is not valid simply because it is accepted by a community. Extreme subjectivism fails to recognise the differences between facts and data, laws and rules, models and representations. It confuses the map with the territory.⁴² Truth becomes blurred between relativism and subjectivity when civilisation and democracy are built upon them.

⁴¹ BYUNG-CHUL, Han. *La sociedad del Cansancio*. Ed. Herder, 2012.

⁴² FICHTENTREI FUENTE, Daniel. “Posverdad la ciencia y sus demonios.” *Intramed*. 02.05.2017, p.1. <http://www.intramed.net/contenido.asp?contenidoID=90809>

Language makes reasoning possible. Imposing a linguistic framework makes it possible to set the political agenda in advance by removing certain ideas from public debate. And some of these are precisely the most important ones. Furthermore, reality may possess a certain degree of malleability and subjectivity that is possessed neither by the facts nor by the data into which it can be broken down. Nevertheless, it may be deconstructed and reconstructed in a significantly different way. Thus, the debate is first restricted to a set of facts, which are then transformed.

And this is the case when power is not measured by the yardstick of wealth and the exchange of goods; in fact, it is neither given nor exchanged, but rather exercised; it exists only in action and is a “producer” of knowledge and truth.⁴³ As Michel Foucault put it, “We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth.”⁴⁴

In other words, whoever holds the power holds the truth; and this is no trivial matter, for the reverse is also true: whoever holds the truth holds the power. The struggle over the meaning of a term – and even more so in the case of so-called ‘empty concepts’ – is, at heart, a struggle for power.

Lewis Carroll would make Humpty Dumpty say: “‘When I use a word,’ [...] ‘it means just what I choose it to mean--neither more nor less.’ ‘The question is,’ said Alice, ‘whether you can make words mean so many different things.’ ‘The question is,’ said Humpty Dumpty, ‘which is to be master-- that’s all.’”⁴⁵

Populism seeks to dominate the political agenda. And this involves dominating the news agenda, inasmuch as the latter is an expression of the social reality. Public opinion and published opinion converge to a high degree, a convergence that only the oligarchy can alter. And, in a democracy, only to a limited extent.

To this may be added the fact that media news coverage focuses on events that represent a certain rupture, and populist, emotive and disruptive messages are precisely that. This is especially significant in the tabloid media, which are often directly involved in spreading

⁴³ GARCÍA CANEIRO, José; VIDARTE Francisco Javier. Guerra y filosofía. Tirant Lo Blanch, Valencia, p. 199.

⁴⁴ FOUCAULT, Michael. “Lecture of 14 January 1976” in VV.AA. *Microfísica del poder*, La Piqueta, Madrid, 1979 p. 140.

⁴⁵ LEWIS, Carrol. “Alice Through the Looking Glass”. Chapter 6. www.elaleph.com/libros

such messages. In fact, the format of media spectacles (including video games) or infotainment lends itself very well to the polarising ideas they promote, thereby creating a sort of symbiosis in which both sides benefit⁴⁶.

Populism strives to set the news agenda and shape public debate. To do so, it appeals to people's emotions. This is especially true in postmodern societies, which seek out dramatic and powerful emotions such as fear, anger and hostility. This is usually achieved by simplifying and presenting reality in black and white to mobilise public opinion. And by repetition, because politics is, in essence, repetition and education.

People do not want to think as much as they want to confirm what they already believe. This is psychopolitics. A political construct systematically built upon its irrational component, that is, by exaggerating the emotional factor, through an intensified expression of the emotional-identity dimension, which is used as a means of getting a message across. Populist politics thus fractures society in order to subjugate it.

7. DISINFORMATION AND POPULISM.

The world has become multi-referential, multidisciplinary and, at the same time, diverse. Subjectivity is inevitable in all human activity, especially now that globalisation has brought together different cultural references.

Furthermore, and as has been noted, although there is greater dissemination of knowledge, the average quality of information is lower; sources are not cited and, consequently, claims cannot be verified. The key lies in the selection and prioritisation of information, and in the proper formulation of the news agenda; lies are not the key to disinformation, but merely one tool (and not even the most important one) for achieving it. To quote Derrida: "A lie is not something opposed to the truth, but rather lies at the heart of its purpose."

In short, disinformation is anything that hinders the correct use of available information. And it is not directly related to lying. In a century in which truth may be constructed from any fragment of reality and then completely severed from it, this makes lying seem almost

⁴⁶ PRIOR, H. (2021). "Digital populism and disinformation in 'post-truth' times". *Communication & Society*, 34(4), 2021, 49-64.

childish, merely the result of a lack of imagination or incompetence. The important truth can be hidden amongst a myriad of others that are not as important. Or attention can be drawn to a lie.

Disinformation in populism is not merely about spreading false facts, but about making people doubt true facts. In this way, it strikes at the fault lines within societies to first provoke them, then throw them into turmoil, and finally, to disorient them. Through this, truth in its Derridian sense is deconstructed first, followed by society as the final stage.

The fact is that everything, the truth and that which is not the truth, is on the internet; it is public. And this is at a time when facts and reality count for less in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotions or beliefs.

The West is the civilisation of doubt, a civilisation that mistrusts everything, even itself. This is why disinformation strategies artificially stoke doubt. By plunging Western societies into doubt, the entire system reverberates and confronts us with our own internal contradictions. All social systems are built on consensus. When pushed to the limit, it becomes possible to see these consensuses and their contradictions, causing us to doubt the ethical model, also under attack, which underpins the legitimacy of the whole.

Previously, the media would filter the information they published, rigorously and judiciously verifying its source, relevance and priority. Information was more or less reliable, while the diversity of similar sources lent greater objectivity to the system as a whole, correcting any potential malfunctions.

Now, the media themselves, in the pursuit of a false objectivity, find their judgements constrained and are compelled to give equal space to both the truth and to that which is not true. This is why, in politics, those who employ populist strategies and make use of post-truth or hoaxes receive greater media coverage, as their propositions and debates, both for and against, place them at the centre of the media landscape. Centring the debate is critical.

Within this context, post-truth trivialises reality by presenting itself as just another alternative interpretation of reality in a world flooded with data and information, and endowed with the same counter-intuitive nature as science. It is a reinterpretation undertaken from new perspectives or based on a different angle of approach, thereby concealing the malice underpinning its deliberate creation.

Its intentionality is precisely what distinguishes it from the alternative embodied by critical thinking, with which it seeks to blend. “Post-truth” or hoaxes have been designed and constructed to evoke empathy. We are faced with an emotive idea that reflects not so much reality as what is desired or feared, and which seeks to influence public opinion. The aim is to distort it, to transform perception by manipulating the emotions of the collective. Certain factors are emphasised, others ignored, while the terms of the statements are blurred⁴⁷.

Public opinion is also fickle. It stems from a combination of a lack of individual or collective accountability; when everyone is responsible, no one really is. This allows opinions to change rapidly and radically without anyone being held to account, coupled with a lack of knowledge on public affairs and, once again, the primacy of emotions. It is important to remember that representative democracy seeks to correct such flaws.

It is no coincidence that the resurgence of populism worldwide has coincided with the proliferation of disinformation. The fact is that populism, disinformation and polarisation are intrinsically linked and feed off one another, which is worrying in terms of democratic integrity, and makes it important to understand how they function together. Disinformation especially thrives in environments with high levels of emotional polarisation⁴⁸.

Thus, populism as a political phenomenon is characterised by its ability to mobilise and connect emotionally with the masses. Meanwhile, disinformation serves to discredit those who are “not the people”, or to bend reality to fit its narrative. The Manichean logic of populism, combined with disinformation, serves to underpin a polarising and divisive narrative. This undermines trust in democratic institutions and political actors, affecting the quality of public debate, which becomes unfocused and fails to address reality⁴⁹.

Populist leaders often use disinformation and delegitimising strategies against their opponents in order to consolidate support and perpetuate polarisation. This simplifies politics by dividing society into two opposing camps. It involves mechanisms such as

⁴⁷ MANRIQUE, José Luis. “Populismo y posverdad, ¿Solo tendencias?” Op cit.

⁴⁸ RIVERA MAGOS, Sergio; González Pureco; Gabriela. “Populismo, desinformación y polarización política en la comunicación en redes sociales de los presidentes populistas latinoamericanos” *Revista Mexicana de Opinión Pública* • Year 19 • no. 36 • January - June 2024, pp. 79 – 107.

⁴⁹ RIVERA MAGOS, Sergio; González Pureco; Gabriela. “Populismo, desinformación y polarización política en la comunicación en redes sociales de los presidentes populistas latinoamericanos” *Revista Mexicana de Opinión Pública* • Year 19 • no. 36 • January - June 2024, pp. 79 – 107.

dehumanisation, depersonalisation and the use of stereotypes, which contribute to emotional aversion, fear and mistrust towards individuals belonging to the other group. This may escalate into inter-group conflict, where members become fiercely loyal to their own side and harbour strong prejudices against the other⁵⁰.

Disinformation thus undermines the very foundations of democracy by shaking its basis, as democracy rests on the supposedly free and unconditional decisions of its citizens. In the words of Edward Bernays:

“The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society. Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country. We are governed, our minds are molded, our tastes formed, our ideas suggested, largely by men we have never heard of.”⁵¹

Fake news or post-truth narratives must offer some kind of benefit, given that their production is expensive. If we are to combat them, we must understand the reasons behind them and identify the sources fuelling them. As Derrida once noted: “What is important in a lie is never its content, but the intention behind it.”

There have always been fake news and hoaxes throughout human history. This is not new. What is new, however, is the ease and depth with which they now penetrate society through information technologies, and the mass scale of this phenomenon. Fake news also amounts to a kind of jamming, an intentional disruption, which raises the level of background noise and makes it difficult for information to reach its intended recipient; and it may be targeted. The real truth remains hidden beneath a vast accumulation of irrelevancies and even falsehoods with which it can be conflated.

Mistrust of the news, of its truthfulness and intent, translates into mistrust of society as a whole and undermines its cohesion. It also affects institutions and their credibility, since they become one of the prime targets of these attacks, given that they are – or should be

⁵⁰ RIVERA MAGOS, Sergio; González Pureco; Gabriela. “Populismo, desinformación y polarización política en la comunicación en redes sociales de los presidentes populistas latinoamericanos” *Revista Mexicana de Opinión Pública* • Year 19 • no. 36 • January - June 2024, pp. 79 – 107.

⁵¹ BERNAYS Edward L. *Propaganda*. Editorial Melusina, p.16.

– the foundations underpinning society. Disinformation thus serves, directly and unambiguously, to dismantle societies.

But this is nothing new, even if it has been given new life by the technical apparatus that has been developed to implement it. The lack of effective filtering on social media means that users are left to act as the sole judges of the accuracy of the news that reaches them, even though they possess neither the expert knowledge, nor access to sources, nor useful tools with which to assess it.

Quite a few of these news items are genuine products of social engineering, constructed from fragments of reality and emotional elements, aimed at segments of society predisposed to accept them, or at shocking and sowing doubt amongst those who are not. All of this is spread through sensationalist news items designed to stir up controversy, with the aim of influencing readers' perceptions. The key is to steer the debate in a particular direction or divert it from the main issue. And it is people, not bots, who are primarily responsible for the viral nature of fake news; nor should this come as a surprise to us, as that is precisely why they have been designed⁵².

Additionally, disinformation is a symptom of a deeper-rooted problem. In some countries, this may stem from a crisis in their model of citizenship, manifesting itself in the form of low educational standards, functional illiteracy and social fragmentation.

It seeks to exploit periods of tension and polarisation *per se*, such as during electoral processes, in order to achieve the aforementioned objectives. In politics, it is not so much a question of supporting this or that candidate deemed most favourable (although that is also a factor) but, above all, of challenging the framework, sowing doubt within the community, highlighting the contradictions and shortcomings of the system underpinning it, and calling that system into question. It is a question of putting it under pressure and making people doubt their own points of reference.

Due to polarisation and its ability to highlight existing social breakdown, the electoral framework is especially conducive to this. So too are moments of crisis, as these generate media interest whose control can prove far more significant than the problem itself. Thus, if control over the news is lost, control over the crisis may also be lost, damaging

52 VOSOUGHI, Soroush; ROY, Deb; ARAL, Sinan. "The Spread of true and false news on line." *Science* 09 Mar 2018:Vol. 359, Issue 6380, pp. 1146-1151DOI: 10.1126/science.aap9559

institutions and the system as a whole, and calling their effectiveness into question. This enables a direct strike at the bond between society and its institutions at a time of heightened vulnerability.

Digital disinformation campaigns also aim to undermine public confidence in institutions and sow doubts regarding democratic processes, through allegations of electoral fraud. Examples include Donald Trump, Bolsonaro and Andrés Manuel López Obrador.

Similarly, why have so many of us, if not all, received messages warning of terrorist attacks in shopping centres or the raising of emergency alerts to their highest levels, for example? The goal is to undermine society's sense of security and with it, its trust, which, as we have seen, is a cornerstone of Moïsi's emotional framework.

Disinformation also serves to neutralise the media's role as the "Fourth Estate", thereby weakening democracy. We are faced with a key element of many populist strategies, which pave the way for a direct relationship between the leader and the people whilst eliminating or limiting any mechanism of opposition to their proposals.

Furthermore, the media are vulnerable to the influence of sponsors and political power, given that as business, they are also profit-driven. Thus, for example, they are sometimes more interested in virality or being the first to break a story than in truth or quality⁵³.

As a result of this, and due to competition from social media and various content distributors, the media have seen their audiences shrink and have had to move to digital content, placing themselves on a level footing with other sources of information. Traditional journalism has become blurred in a world that lacks benchmarks or adequate quality assessment, at the same time, becoming increasingly dependent on social media content.

This necessitates the adoption of stable frameworks that strike a balance between freedom of information and security within the cultural and democratic framework, in the face of the challenges posed by technological dynamics applied to social media. These are by no means minor issues, given that their regulation affects Western heritage and puts strain on the system.

⁵³ KRAUS, Arnoldo. "Posverdad." *El Debate*. 15.01.2017. <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/entrada-de-opinion/articulo/arnoldo-kraus/nacion/2017/01/15/posverdad>

For example, let us consider the suspension of such prominent news outlets as Russia Today and Sputnik News, at the behest of the European Council shortly after the invasion of Ukraine in 2022. This decision was subsequently upheld by the Court of Justice of the European Union, given the clear alignment of news coverage on both channels with Moscow's positions and their capacity to influence public opinion, which they could manipulate for the benefit of a foreign state.

8. POPULISM AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS.

The rise of populism is linked to the crisis of the democratic model, arising from the "Twilight of Ideologies" and "post-politics". On a larger scale, this has led to the liberal order being called into question, first at the national and subsequently at the international level. This manifests itself in the clash between liberal and illiberal regimes which, partly due to circumstances, have forged a network of alliances, thereby shifting the conflict to a global scale.

In short, a country's foreign policy is an extension of its domestic policy and is therefore inseparable from it. This is all the more true in a democracy, where continuity and consistency are especially essential. However, it sometimes happens that a particular country's foreign policy serves not so much its own interests or values as the domestic agenda of a populist leader and his personal interests. Consequently, a state's policy may undergo a complete and incongruous shift, making it difficult to predict. This, or even the mere possibility of it, generates uncertainty at a global level.

8.1. National-populism.

Populism is often closely linked to nationalism. They are certainly distinct concepts; both incomplete or porous, that is to say, not defined clearly and definitively, making interactions even more likely, but they are not entirely independent of one another. As a matter of fact, they share quite a few values, starting with their emotional if not anti-rational nature.

Schiller called nationalism a "bent twig", an ideology of identity; that is to say, it finds its foundation in a certain collective identity. This "takes the neutral facts of a people –

language, territory, culture, tradition and history – and turns them into a narrative [...] it takes ‘minor differences’ – which are in themselves irrelevant – and transforms them into major distinctions... the most striking feature of the narcissistic gaze is that it only looks at the Other to confirm its difference”.⁵⁴

We are essentially dealing with a political principle, a theory of legitimacy which holds that there must be consistency between national unity and politics, bringing together sentiment and action to this end.⁵⁵ The identifying characteristics are “relatively neutral”, but they contain a mythical element; they are “emotionally charged” and, furthermore, are constructed through a selective narrative of the past, featuring elements of grievance and victory which serve as a backdrop against which new actions are judged. There is a transfer of the sacred from religion to the nation as well as to ideology.⁵⁶

Nationalism is neither universalist nor rationally symmetrical; in fact, it may be perceived as the group-level expression of the human tendency to make exceptions, especially when it comes to oneself. This has made nationality an attribute of every human being. Consequently, nations are a natural phenomenon, far removed from contingency.⁵⁷

That said, it is worth noting that nationalism is not a single idea, but rather a complex set of ideas to which disparate and even contradictory realities are added. There is a form of nationalism for every idea of the nation.

Populism is part of this logic and serves to articulate it. The difference between the two terms lies in the fact that, whilst nationalism is based on the ‘inside-outside’ logic, populism adds to this the “top-bottom” conflict, that is, between the people and the elites⁵⁸.

Following this logic, “national-populism” is a discourse that articulates the frustrations of the people-nation along the vertical axis of populism. In other words, it pits the people against elites, whether national or international. It thus refers to the political primacy of

⁵⁴ IGNATIEFF, Michael. *The Warrior's Honor*. Editorial Taurus, Madrid 1999, pp. 54-55.

⁵⁵ GELLNER, Ernest. *Nations and Nationalism*. Alianza Editorial, Madrid 2008, pp. 67 et seq.

⁵⁶ GLOVER Jonathan. *Humanity*. Ediciones Cátedra, Madrid, 2001, p. 203.

⁵⁷ GELLNER, Ernest. *Naciones y nacionalismo*. Op. cit., p. 68.

⁵⁸ FERNÁNDEZ-GARCÍA, B.; VALENCIA SÁIZ, Á. “Populismo y nacionalismo en Europa Occidental: una propuesta de análisis para su estudio”. In VALENCIA SÁIZ, Á.; FERNÁNDEZ GARCÍA, B. (Eds.) *En los márgenes de la democracia liberal: populismo, nacionalismo y radicalismo ideológico en Europa*. Comares, Granada, 2022, pp. 71-93).

national identities within the international context, aligning the two spheres.

Within this context, national-populist actors claim to embody and represent the sovereignty of the people, who are defined in strictly national terms, in opposition to elites and power structures based abroad, which are presented, once again, as undemocratic, oligarchic and corrupt, but also as dominating national elites who act as their subsidiaries. Such discourses may prove particularly appealing in opportunistic crisis situations and serve to exonerate those in power by projecting blame onto external actors⁵⁹.

Populism is thus a by-product of nationalism in that it leads to an overemphasis on national identity. To this end, it also draws on the mythologisation of the past and of traditions. This explains its protectionist and conservative nature. It also accounts for its opposition to any community-based project or multicultural approach that might dilute the nation.

8.2. Anti-globalism and anti-regionalism.

Globalisation has brought about a shift in the world order, and within this context, the West has experienced a loss of relative power as a result of the “rise of the rest”, as Fareed Zakaria calls it. In terms of purchasing power parity, according to the World Bank in 2023, China accounted for 18.76 per cent of global GDP, the US for 14.8 per cent, and the EU for 14.68 per cent.

There is a backlash against the system of rules that has brought about this change, with calls for a return to power politics as a means of overcoming an undesirable trend resulting from the current multilateral regulatory framework. Within this geopolitical context of the West’s loss of relative power, populism may even be a triggering factor.

But it is also true that globalisation has caused an internal rift in countries such as the United States. This is the result of the unequal distribution of the benefits and burdens of globalisation. This has become a particular source of grievance for a section of the population and, consequently, sparked protests which are exploited by populism.

⁵⁹ FERNÁNDEZ-GARCÍA, B.; VALENCIA SÁIZ, Á. (2022). “Populismo y nacionalismo en Europa Occidental: una propuesta de análisis para su estudio”. In VALENCIA SÁIZ, Á.; FERNÁNDEZ GARCÍA, B. (Eds.) *En los márgenes de la democracia liberal: populismo, nacionalismo y radicalismo ideológico en Europa*. Comares, Granada, 2022, pp. 71-93).

The “losers of globalisation” claim that there has been a loss of control, but also of the people’s autonomy to set national economic and employment policy. From this, they infer what is, in effect, the hijacking of both democracy and national sovereignty itself.

National populism also considers that multilateral or community projects entail a reduced decision-making capacity of the nation-people and, as such, constitute an undue restriction on the power of the state⁶⁰. The resulting tensions within regional organisations such as the European Union are evident.

As a result, during Trump’s second term and up until January 2026, the United States has ceased funding 31 UN organisations and 35 global organisations, including USAID and the World Health Organisation (WHO). It has also withdrawn from a number of treaties, including the one linking it to Canada and Mexico, which will now have to be renegotiated on an annual basis, introducing further uncertainty into the system.

However much it may be a process of cultural rationalisation imposed by the dominant culture – which is, after all, Western – globalisation entails an exchange from which a degree of cultural blending inevitably arises, however minimal that may be. And hence, once again, the reactive and anti-globalisation nature of populism, even in the West, which is the very cultural hub around which it unfolds.

Populism similarly opposes the cultural hybridisation advocated by globalisation; and, it also opposes migration flows, using xenophobia to foster mistrust amongst the population. Mistrust, let us remember, is a powerful sentiment. In doing so, it also gains support. And this is despite the fact that such migration – which is a factor of interpenetration and cuts across the “inside-outside” logic – responds to a strong demand for labour from national economic actors, especially in the West, which, moreover, stems from the demographic problems it faces.

We are facing a postmodern form of tribalism that has succeeded in shaping the West’s political agenda. It is part of the backlash against policies aimed at resolving humanity’s common problems, from Covid to the environment. Thus, the absence of a specifically national responsibility or a clear allocation of blame is often highlighted, together with the costs arising from national efforts in this regard or their asymmetrical nature. This hinders

⁶⁰ ARANDA BUSTAMANTE, Gilberto. “Populismo, política exterior y alianzas transnacionales”. *Política y Sociedad, Ediciones Complutenses*, 20 June 2025

any intended global agreement and impedes any solution to the problems posed by what are known as the “global commons”: cyberspace, outer space, the environment or the high seas.

It is a reactionary movement (entirely in keeping with the Hegelian nature of globalisation) against “liberal cosmopolitan commitments”; that is, against cultural and lifestyle tolerance, international cooperation, fundamental rights and freedoms, etc. It is a “traditionalist” or conservative reaction opposed to the predominance of post-materialist, cosmopolitan and liberal values⁶¹.

In this context and by way of example, it is worth mentioning the thinking of Alexander Dugin. He offers a critical synthesis of liberalism, postmodernism and Marxism, which he interweaves with classical fascism to distil a whole political theory from this combination. Thus, drawing on the concept of “Dasein” [being] formulated by Martin Heidegger, he moves from the individual to the collective, to the “people”, and from there to “our people”⁶².

The Russian people are faced with a messianic mission: to oppose the global and universalist liberalism that is destroying the world. In his view, liberalism has no place in Russian thought and is being imposed to justify a consumer society that offers nothing of value, just as neither postmodernism nor the ideological ecosystem of the New Left do⁶³.

In Dugin’s view, what they offer the Russian people is extraordinarily precarious and devoid of any future. According to him, these foreign ideas are destroying society, which is why he calls for a “crusade” against liberalism and neoliberalism, postmodernity, post-industrial society, globalisation and their logistical and technological foundations⁶⁴.

In this way, he reframes and lends coherence to a populist alternative by weaving the present together with Russia’s own traditions and history. In doing so, he reaffirms Russian identity at a time when it is being undermined and reinforces a national civilisation while emphasising the existence of a powerful self-identity, the Eurasian one,

⁶¹ ARANDA BUSTAMANTE, Gilberto. “Populismo, política exterior y alianzas transnacionales”. *Política y Sociedad, Ediciones Complutenses*, 20 June 2025

⁶² GALCERÁN, Montserrat. “Los intelectuales de Putin: Alexander Dugin, lector de Heidegger”. *El Salto*. 17.03.2022.

⁶³ Ibidem.

⁶⁴ Ibidem.

and does so through a call to action:

“There is no barrier to the integration of the vast Eurasian space surrounding Russia, as these areas were politically, culturally, economically, socially and psychologically united over the course of many centuries. The western border of the Eurasian civilisation lies slightly further east than Ukraine’s western border, which is why the newly established state is unviable and fragile⁶⁵”

In short, the fact that populist parties uphold shared values and proposals, as significant as the very questioning of liberal democracy itself, acts as a mutual attraction and, consequently, fosters alliances. Thus, their anti-liberal agenda is not confined to the national sphere; rather, despite their individualism and tautological nature, through emulation they forge new international and regional alliances that are incompatible with multilateralism and global governance. This in turn fuels the notion of a clash between liberal and illiberal orders, which also extends to the international arena.

The populist agenda, expressed in national terms through slogans such as “America First”, emphasises the full and unrestricted use of national power and a willingness to make, at most, transactional concessions. However, the populist agenda transcends the national sphere and seeks ideological affinities to forge alliances internationally or even promotes national parties of a similar persuasion.

The result is a certain convergence amongst populist leaders across the West in the transformation of foreign policy. Moreover, European populist movements have forged links with their American counterparts, forming what sometimes appears to be a united front, despite their inconsistencies.

This has led to the establishment of new thematic agendas, geographical priorities and anti-liberal discourses that hinder or undermine international consensus in areas such as the environment, migration, trade and peace-building processes, thereby demonstrating the impact of populist discourses and practices on foreign policy⁶⁶.

They constitute a centrifugal force and act as a magnet for all those who oppose certain

⁶⁵ Ibidem.

⁶⁶ ARANDA BUSTAMANTE, Gilberto. “Populismo, política exterior y alianzas transnacionales”. *Política y Sociedad, Ediciones Complutenses*, 20 June 2025

policies within regional and even global organisations, helping to coordinate their efforts and reinforce their narratives.

9. CONCLUSIONS.

Democracies incorporate an element of inequality that stems from the doctrinal inconsistencies, fictions and assumptions underpinning their legal and political structure.

Populism presents itself as an expression of Rousseau's general will. It thus represents an attempt to address these shortcomings and restore people to their natural power.

But populism is not strictly speaking an ideology but rather a political strategy. It is not right-wing or left-wing; rather, it cuts across the entire political spectrum, even though it is especially useful to the extremes due to the inherently radical nature of the methodology it espouses: a confrontation between the people and the elites. It steers those who employ it towards these extremes by sheer logical consistency.

The problem is that such a restoration comes at the cost of undermining the institutional architecture that acts as a counterweight to power; and also of the institutions that serve to hold society together. Democracy is the rule of the majority with respect for the minority. And it is no minor matter that democracy requires a loyalty to which populism is unwilling to commit.

The "Twilight of Ideologies" that has accompanied postmodernity has led to a narrowing of the scope for politics and its hollowing out. Populism thus involves the mobilisation of a chain of heterogeneous demands unified by an floating signifier that serves to overcome the "post-politics" against which it reacts, despite emerging in its wake.

Populism's relationship with democracy is therefore difficult, not because it is opposed to democracy as such, but because it opposes the existence of limits on the will of the people, which leads it to clash with everything that implies permanence, that is, with institutions and the state apparatus. In any case, the result is the weakening of society, beyond specific levels or aspects concerned. Additionally, if it flourishes, it leads to the practical erosion of democracy due to the presence of authoritarian tendencies associated with political action.

And such policies serve to enshrine those who promote them. However, neglecting

society's fundamental interests undermines the future legitimacy of populist leaders, if not rendering them a prisoner of their own previous decisions.

Communication strategy is one of the cornerstones of populism. In this new politics, the conventional narrative which was once anchored in an ideology that tied everything together and explained it all has disappeared. Data and verifiable stories, however open to interpretation, have been replaced by fragmented narratives based on a vague plot, which employ a black-and-white logic to polarise the political landscape and assert themselves on issues that are not the actual cornerstones of real politics and which, in fact, may have nothing to do with it at all.

Narratives are what give meaning to and structure society. Populism thus seeks to take control of the news agenda and turn it into a political agenda, making it an expression of the will of the people, which is embodied in the leaders. By undermining media through disinformation, it eliminates an independent and key mechanism of control within the institutional framework.

Polemological factors are the elements underlying the origins of conflicts, regardless of whether or not they lead to confrontation; confrontations would occur depending on the presence of certain catalysts or triggers.⁶⁷ Thus, their existence makes conflicts possible, and the convergence of several such factors makes them more likely, but does not guarantee them⁶⁸. It is a human phenomenon and, as such, paradoxical and contradictory. And one with its own laws, or lacking any at all.

Populism is a polemological factor insofar as countries can project themselves onto the international stage on the basis of a populist leader's agenda (which may be domestic or even centred on the leader's own persona), thereby introducing uncertainty into that arena.

Within a geopolitical context where the West is losing power as a result of the levelling effect of globalisation, it may act as a precipitating factor and make political governance difficult, especially when the past is considered as better.

It thus takes the form of a counter-movement accompanying the advances of

⁶⁷ FISAS, Vicenc. *Procesos de paz y negociación en los conflictos armados*. Ediciones Paidós Ibérica, Barcelona, p. 43.

⁶⁸ Ibidem, p. 17.

globalisation, transferring its dynamics to the regional and global stage in the form of national populism, which hinders agreements whilst promoting its own alternative agenda. This emulation encourages the replication of similar models in other countries that partner with one another, occasionally despite having conflicting ideological models, and stages a clash between liberal and illiberal democracies that, in any case, weakens the West.

However, it should not be forgotten that populism arises in response to a specific reality: a deficit in political representation inherent in the model of representative democracy.

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