

Andrey Makarychev (ed.): *Multifaceted Nationalism and Illiberal Momentum at Europe's Eastern Margins*

New York 2021: Routledge, 162 pp.

While the CEE post-communist transition had been forecast from the outset as sinuous if not doomed altogether [Offe 2004], the Euro-success of the early 2000s [Vachudova 2005] was perceived to be so far-reaching that the recent 'backsliding' [Greskovits 2015; Vanhuysse 2019], both resulting in and caused by the exit of young human capital and the 'angry voice' of the rapidly ageing remaining population segments [Vanhuysse and Perek-Bialas 2021], appeared as a major shock. The conundrum was in fact twofold: not only were the challenges to liberal-democracy more than fleeting episodes, they were also quite varied, porous in nature, and difficult to fully dissect (p. viii). Attempting to shed new light on the umbrella concept of 'populism' used to designate a wide array of phenomena related to CEE 'backsliding', Andrey Makarychev's co-edited volume argues that understanding the 'transformation of illiberal nationalism from a marginal phenomenon into a universally recognized challenger' can only be done through an in-depth reconsideration of 'politicisation' itself (pp. 2–3). In this line of thought, across eight dense chapters almost all the contributors detail how 'populism' can essentially be both an exogenous threat to democracy itself and an intrinsic part of electoral competition (p. 3). The volume shows that while the notion of populism mostly reflects a specific form of popular appeal, disentangling the nature of its content requires understanding the call for a 'radical re-politicisation' of the conventional Western-European order 'grounded in technocratic policies of administrative and managerial elites' (p. 2).

Broadly speaking, the book argues that the momentum behind all varieties of 'populism' is formed by two individual strands of it, which are interweaved and redefined

in a contingent fashion: 'on the one hand, it reasserts the virtues of nation-state-based politics against global elites and supranational institutions; on the other hand, it militates against the liberal project with its cosmopolitan values' (p. 1). Yet, according to Makarychev, existing studies do not fully dissect how this discursive hybridisation essentially revolves around a 'trans-ideological agglomeration of different forms of resistance' to the Western teleology of 'politics' (p. 2). The crux of the issue is that particularly from the vantage point of CEE states, which can be construed in a way as 'newcomers' to the ebb and flow of global capitalism and liberal democracy, a 'political order' is not immutable. More concretely, if in Western Europe a long-term structuring and layering has gradually kept some issues out of 'politics', in Eastern Europe the multiplicity of challenges in the aftermath of communism and then after 2008 made the political order malleable, to the point of it being contingently defined (pp. 1–3). This fundamental difference generates a series of crucial distinction between 'Western' and 'Eastern' variations of illiberal nationalism such as: the different role(s) ascribed to ethnic legacies and to migration; the interaction between nationalism and democracy; and a highly specific 'decolonisation' narrative built on the putative 'second-class' status of CEE member states (pp. 3–5).

While the emphasis of the book is clearly on agency and discourse, the individual chapters also offer a more layered analysis of the co-constitutive relationship between actors, structure, and process in shaping the nature and reach of populism. Although the list of contributors contains an impressive array of well-established scholars, within the modest confines of this review not all chapters can be given the consideration they are due. Let me thus provide an overview of three key chapters: Daniel Hegedüs's study of Viktor Orban's multi-layered anti-EU rhetoric; Monika Ga-

briała Bartoszewicz's comparative study of Poland and the Czech Republic; and Taras Kuzio's analysis of non-EU CEE variations of populism.

Daniel Hegedüs uses a case study of Fidesz's long-term success in Hungary to challenge the main assumption of existing studies, namely that multiple incumbency is typically followed by electoral losses for populists (p. 56). Concretely, the existing consensus in the literature is that given specific structural weaknesses, populist parties can only maintain power through a 'mainstreaming' process, which involves various forms of drifts towards the centre (pp. 57–58). Drawing on Moffit's conceptual framework wherein a crisis is not exogenous and immutable but internal and 'performed', Hegedüs demonstrates that Fidesz resorted to an 'externalisation strategy', which bypassed the need for 'mainstreaming' by outsourcing the 'them–us' dichotomy that typically wins populist electoral appeal (pp. 60–61). In this line of thought, the chapter argues that Fidesz essentially conserved its electoral appeal by shifting the focus of 'existential and moral conflict existing between "the People" and the elites, to the existential and moral conflict between "the People" and "the others"' (p. 58). This was particularly effective at overcoming the incumbency challenge as it allowed the party to both consolidate its infrastructure and crucially to 'occupy elite and government positions, while in the same time also keeping their radical populist claims' (p. 58).

Concretely, between 2010 and 2015 the key topos was the way in which 'speculative capitalism' allowed "liberal capitalist elites in Hungary to alter work relationships in a manner that directly pre-empted 'national revival' (pp. 61–62). This framing allowed Orban to label a variety of the putative actors in 'global capitalism' as the 'others' to which the existential 'them–us' dichotomy could be externalised (p. 63). By introducing, in 2012, the amorphous con-

cept of a 'freedom fight', Orban opened up a vast conceptual space for potential existential threats, which shifted seamlessly between economic terrain and the fluid grammar of nationhood (pp. 64–65). The ensuing narrative thus revamped the otherwise heterogeneous 'Hungarian nation' and the 'hard-working people' into very narrow and 'homogenous categories ... in existential conflict with the public enemies' (p. 66).

While harkening back to the initial anti-liberal position, Fidesz's 2015–2018 narrative mostly emphasised the 'cultural and biopolitical survival of the Hungarian nation' in the specific context and aftermath of the refugee crisis (p. 68). Furthermore, on a more fundamental level, if the crucial concepts of the 2010–2015 narrative required more-or-less stable content, the key topoi of the 2015–2018 stance on nationhood have more often than not been defined 'in a negative way, as a reference to the absence of the imagined doomsday that would have been by the public enemies' (p. 71). Essentially, by coupling questions from the economic fields with new ones from the terrain of ethno-cultural survival, Fidesz managed to conserve its electoral appeal through the same type of populist radicalisation that had swept it into power (p. 69). By identifying liberal multiculturalism as the key failure of the global political status quo, Orban externalised the source of a putative perpetual crisis – while internally the 'public enemies' were stopped, they were (re)labelled as being part and parcel of a more global structural problem that now impeded the development of the nation (pp. 69–70).

Pursuing a comparative analysis of Poland and the Czech Republic, Monika Gabriela Bartoszewicz identifies the distinct sequences of elite recruitment that underpin the rise of 'celebrity politics' as a distinct facet of CEE populism (p. 100). Starting with classical theories on political elites, the author essentially seeks to un-

derstand how, in the context of Poland's and the Czech Republic's weak post-socialist institutions, representative democracy and the massification of politics have facilitated 'celebrity politics' (p. 102). By focusing specifically on parliaments, arguably the key drivers of mass politics and the post-socialist transition, Bartoszewicz shows that although 'celebrity presence' remains relatively minor in absolute terms, it essentially demarcates a novel phenomenon (pp. 103–105). On the whole, both Poland and the Czech Republic passed through an initial stage of 'politics as a vocation' and a second wave of 'politicians with skill, not zeal', both fully explicable as a result of the post-communist transition (p. 106). Within a pan-European 'surge of anti-establishment parties', Bartoszewicz argues that the third wave consists of 'charismatic politicians, who see politics neither as a mission, nor as a profession, but rather as an opportunity' (p. 108). Against this background, the author argues that populism can be defined not just as a fluid ideology but as a 'unique form of political emotion' that allows the framing and subsequent institutionalization of 'extraordinary measures' to deal with putative 'security concerns' (p. 108). Democratic representation failed to fully consolidate the 'symbolic and instrumental links between social groups and elites', so celebrity populism, predicated on a sharp division between state and society, filled in a highly specific void (p. 110). In both Poland and the Czech Republic this gap has typically been formed by the way in which a 'professionalisation' trend yielded representative elites who, in 'living off politics', appear disconnected from the interests of 'the people' (pp. 109–111).

For Taras Kuzio, the Ukrainian case both reconfirms and deviates from the main tenets of European populism: on the one hand, it does not include clear stances on anti-immigration, Islamophobia, EU-blaming, or typical ethno-national-

ism; on the other hand, it does feature anti-globalism, anti-establishment in the shroud of anti-corruption, authoritarian tendencies with anti-reformism at its core, a fluid approach to political ideologies, and the discursive trope of 'perpetual crisis' (p. 116). Clearly, the legacy of a protracted and meandering post-communist transition is crucial in such a hybridisation, which Kuzio in fact shows to be the common denominator of populism in Europe more broadly (pp. 117–118). For instance, because the 1990s generated weak political parties that were typically driven by oligarchs, ideology in general plays such a weak part in Ukrainian politics that it could not easily be incorporated into populist narratives (p. 117). Similarly, given Ukraine's specific geographical position, immigration is simply a common trope rather than an exceptional event that could be incorporated into a narrative of crisis (p. 120).

Arguably the central issue that has shaped Ukraine's unique populist discourse is the legacy of the USSR. Broadly speaking, the USSR underpins a narrative of nostalgia that is vastly different from the one constructed in Europe and the US vis-à-vis a putative pre-immigration nation-state (p. 120). While both narratives gravitate around the idea of loss – the 'losers of [the] transition in Ukraine' and the 'losers of global multicultural capitalism' in Europe, in essence the nostalgia for the USSR is more geographically confined and concretely tied to oligarchs and highly specific energy and trade ties (p. 121). Although the more fluid tropes of 'longing for order' and a Russophile view of history are present, according to Kuzio they are not key conceptual drivers of the discourse (pp. 120–122). Similarly, Ukraine's historical background implies a very specific stance on nationalism, which is neither ethno-centrist nor devoutly anti-American (p. 121). In fact, because present-day Russia is a clear threat for Ukrainian nationalists, most populist

narratives are constructed around a pro-NATO and pro-EU stance (p. 122). Conversely however, the legacy of the USSR has also created the space for Ukrainian populists to use otherwise pan-European tools such as anti-corruption rhetoric, anti-globalisation, an overemphasis on authoritarian politics as more efficient than democratic means, and disillusionment with conventional politics (pp. 122–124).

Summing up, Makarychev's edited volume impresses with its analytical clarity, which sheds new light on the otherwise porous concept of populism. By drawing on multiple conceptual toolkits from the fields of elite theory and discourse analysis, all the chapters unearth new facets of existing explanations and new causal relationships concerning the intricacies of the umbrella concept of 'illiberal nationalism'. Furthermore, by expanding the geographical scope of conventional studies, the book also discusses some of the limitations of conventional studies on European populism and sends out the strong message that, above and beyond a range of core ten-

ets, populism is essentially fluid and contingently defined.

Sergiu Delcea

Central European University, Vienna
sergiu.delcea@gmail.com

References

- Greskovits, B. 2015. 'The Hollowing and Backsliding of Democracy in East Central Europe.' *Global Policy* 6 (51): 28–37.
- Offe, C. 2004. 'Capitalism by Democratic Design? Democratic Theory Facing the Triple Transition of East Central Europe.' *Social Research* 71 (3): 501–528.
- Vachudova, M. A. 2005. *Europe Undivided: Democracy, Leverage, and Integration after Communism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Vanhuyse, P. 2019. 'Silent Non-Exit and Broken Voice: Early Postcommunist Social Policies as Protest-Preempting Strategies.' *Südost-Europa* 67 (2): 150–174.
- Vanhuyse, P. and J. Perek-Białas. 2021. 'The Political Demography of Missed Opportunity: Populations and Policies in a Younger but Faster-Ageing East Central Europe, 1990–2040.' Pp. 373–399 in *Global Political Demography*, edited by A. Goerres and P. Vanhuyse. London: Palgrave Macmillan.