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On the misinterpretation of the concept of populism in the work of Margaret Canovan

O dezinterpretacji koncepcji populizmu w twórczości Margaret Canovan

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Abstract: The British social researcher Margaret Canovan is nowadays considered to be one of the most important classics of the sociological concept of populism, especially thanks to two works on this subject regarding *Populism* and *The Peoples*. Undoubtedly, the division of populism, proposed by the author, into agrarian and political populism has become the canon of the interpretative allocation of the meanings of the concept of populism. Canovan with great reliability presents the links between populist mobilization of the masses and their disappointment with social functions of political elites, presenting in her writing this dichotomy as a constant component of populism (Canovan, 1981, pp. 9, 139, 297). Reading more carefully Canovan, however, I could not help the impression that the author in her analyses is not entirely objective and even misinterprets the concept of populism. This text is therefore an attempt at some critical interpretation of the ideas proposed by the author. Appreciating the author's huge and unquestioned contribution to the discourse on populism, I also wanted to capture the imperfections of this way of thinking about populism as a social phenomenon. This is important because Canovan imposed a certain interpretative framework, stimulating the discourse on the subject of populism on the one hand, and giving it negative connotations above all and showing it as a destructive force. Avoiding in her analyses the presentation of positive functions of populism, she led to the consolidation of one-sided interpretations of the phenomenon, hence my voice is also an attempt to show the positive social functions of populism.

Keywords: Margaret Canovan, populism, the social functions of populism, reactive populism, emancipatory populism, social elites, mobilization of the masses, people, citizens, sovereigns, nation, democracy

Abstrakt: Brytyjska badaczka społeczna Margaret Canovan uznawana jest współcześnie za jedną z najważniejszych klasyczek socjologicznej koncepcji populizmu, zwłaszcza dzięki dwóm dziełom tej tematyki dotyczącym tj *Populism* oraz *The Peoples*. Bezspornie także zaproponowany przez autorkę podział populizmu na populizm agrarny i polityczny stał się kanonem interpretacyjnej alokacji znaczeń koncepcji populizmu. Canovan z dużą rzetelnością przedstawia powiązania pomiędzy populistyczną mobilizacją mas a elitami społecznymi, które w są motorami powstania populistycznego resentymetu, będącego następnie transferowanymi w powszechną mobilizację mas (Canovan, 1981, s. 9, 139, 297). Czytając uważniej Canovan nie mogłem jednak oprzeć się wrażeniu, iż autorka w swoich analizach nie jest do końca obiektywna a nawet dezinterpretuje koncepcję populizmu. Niniejszy tekst jest zatem próbą pewnej krytycznej interpretacji koncepcji zaproponowanych przez autorkę. Doceniając ogromny a zarazem niekwestionowany wkład autorki w dyskurs dotyczący populizmu, chciałem zarazem uchwycić niedoskonałości tego sposobu myślenia o populizmie jako fenomenie społecznym. Jest to o tyle istotnym, iż Canovan narzuciła pewne ramy interpretacyjne pobudzając z jednej strony dyskurs dotyczący problematyki populizmu z drugiej nadając mu przede wszystkim negatywne konotacje i ukazując tenże jako siłę przede wszystkim destruktywną. Unikając w swoich analizach ukazania pozytywnych funkcji populizmu doprowadziła więc do utrwalenia jednostronnych interpretacji zjawiska, stąd głos mój jest zarazem próbą ukazania pozytywnych funkcji społecznych populizmu.

Słowa kluczowe: Margaret Canovan, Populizm, społeczne funkcje populizmu, populizm reaktywny, populizm emancypacyjny

Populism has again become a subject of keen interest among social scientists, as it is increasingly used as a tool for communication between the masses and the elites (Eatwell, Goodwin, 2018, p. IX). However, I do not intend to focus strictly on the reasons for the renewed popularity of populism in this text, but to show that we should again consider the very definition of the phenomenon. It can only be useful to undertake further deeper analyzes regarding the reasons for the renewed importance of populism as a tool of social communication. At the same time, I believe that in this regard, a second look at the classic interpretation proposed by Margaret Canovan is a necessary step taken in order to make future attempts to diagnose the current situation. That is why, in this article, I would like to take a critical look at the writings of Canovan, one of the most renowned and influential researchers on populism. I want to do it because I believe that, despite the enormous undisputed influence of this author on the discourse of populism, it is necessary to look at her achievements in a critical way, showing where, in the opinion of the author of this text, Canovan makes mistakes in the interpretation of the issue. In a broader context, I would like to investigate whether there is, and to what extent, something that should be tentatively called the democratic potential of populism. Regardless of the political connotations and the forms of its classification, it seems that the thesis about the purely pathological connotation of populism as a simplifying marginal social narrative in contemporary discourses can no longer be sustained. In other words, populism is no longer seen only as an anomaly, as so far has been perceived by many authors, but it becomes or even one can risk the claim that it has become one of the most important tools of political communication and is gaining great importance as a communication norm. Nevertheless, in public perception and academic discourse, it is still difficult to find a balanced debate on populism. Populism is treated only as a style of political action, with an additional negative connotations. The current scientific discourse and its reception contributed to this understanding of the issue. This article is therefore an author's voice showing the need to undertake a new extensive study of populism, not only as a style of political action but also as a social ideology with its unique characteristics.

To present my argument in the most coherent way, I would like to return at the beginning to the definition challenges related to the interpretation of populism.

By definition, Latin noun *Populus*-people used in the context of modern times already have pejorative connotations, because the key category of populism, the aforementioned people, is now, at least partly, a disparaging category. It should also be noted that there is a clear difference in the understanding of the terms people and citizens, and in the colloquial understanding the people are a rather simplifying and at the same time ambiguous category of description. This is connected with the historical meaning of the terms people and citizen.

In pre-modern times, when the public sphere did not yet exist or it took a representative form (Habermas, 1992, p. 10-11) the discourse was conducted within the power elite that exercised absolute control over public affairs, the people were a category used to define broad social strata that had no impact on the fate of the state. What's more, according to Michael Billig, the masses did not identify with the state, and their awareness of their place and social role was extremely limited (Billig, 1995, p. 53-54).

Along with general social progress and the development of the public sphere, initially bourgeois and then civil, the category of citizen (consciously participating in the life of the community, having knowledge of their rights and obligations resting on it) began to displace the category of people, to whom pejorative connotations were increasingly being assigned. As a consequence, the latter more and more acquired the semantic features of the former antonym. It is true that even the romantic notion of the people or peoples had positive emancipatory connotations, but over time the pejorative expressions superseded those positive ones. Looking at both categories today, it is easy to grasp this difference at the level of defining and imposing forms of understanding of the concepts themselves.

The etymological dictionary defines a citizen as a member of the society of a given country, a permanent resident of some area. Citizenship by definition suggests universality associated with belonging to a certain community (Boryś, 2005, p. 378). More specifically, following the dictionary, we can define citizenship as "nationality combined with certain rights and obligations set out by the law of a given country" (Uniwersalny Słownik Języka Polskiego, Tom 3, 2003, p. 65). and the very concept of citizenship as "taking into account the good of the country and the obligations incumbent on its citizens." (Uniwersalny Słownik Języka Polskiego, Tom 3, 2003, p. 65) On the other hand, the term *people* impose many contradictory interpretational possibilities. The definitive people, according to the dictionary, include: "working layers of society, rural population, ethnic group, [...] masses, crowds, lieges, peasants, servants, tribe, nation, society, citizens, subjects, residents (cities, countries, etc.), faithful followers of religion, in the old days males, diminutively folk peoples" (Boryś, 2005, s. 291). Such a broad terminological definition allows for a comprehensive, and as previously noted, often contradictory use of the term. Narrowing the definition of the people, the dictionary describes it as follows: "layers of society made up of wage labor, primarily workers and peasants, formerly mainly of rural population" or as "human community, crowd, people" (Uniwersalny Słownik Języka Polskiego, 2003, s. 679).

The above definition shows one significant definition feature of the *people* as a descriptive category. Low social and cultural competences are allocated to it mainly due to statistically low education and, which is associated with the above, low social status resulting from this fact. Workers, peasants or rural population in general perception as group allocation categories are not associated with the elitist status, on the contrary, these categories are located at the bottom of the so-called ladders of social prestige.

It's similar in principle with the definition of democracy- *demos cratos* - the rule of the *people*, although in the latter case the *people* have now been replaced by the category of *citizens* and more generally with concept of *citizenship*, and this is precisely so as not to give the defined concept negative connotations. One usually returns to the category of *people's rule* at a time when, in political arguments, one wants to discredit the importance of democracy as a political system, in this particular case showing its immaturity.

The category of the people itself has never been completely defined, although, as Margaret Canovan notes, two contradictory interpretations have been allocated to it since Roman times (Canovan, 2008, p. 20-22). On the one hand, the people are identified with the descriptive category of the so-called *commune*, *plebs*, clearly pejorative and referring to it as a discrediting category. In this interpretation, the people are synonymous with thoughtlessness, mass, a crowd deprived of independent initiative, and used by politicians to legalize their power (*ibidem*, p. 21). On the other hand, the people are identified with the sovereign and the concept of citizenship. In this case, consideration of people is an integral element of reflection on democracy as a political system and the will of the people as a guarantor of the legalization of power (the people as a sovereign) in democratic systems (*ibidem*, p. 21).

As the author herself writes:

“The ambiguity of the concept of *populus* is clearly visible in a short fragment of speech [...] in which Cicero easily passes between the inclusive, intergenerational meaning of the word and the meaning relating to the crowd of plebeians standing in front of him in the forum” (*ibidem*, p. 21).

The author's short remark in the footnote to her mainstream considerations reveals definition challenges related to the lack of specificity of the concept of the people / *populus* itself and the possibility of its different, sometimes even opposing interpretations, which largely influenced also future conflicting allocations of this concepts.

Elsewhere, the author clarifies this dialectical distinction of Roman *populus* meanings. Quoting the historian Moses I. Finley, she notes that the Latin word *populus*, like the Greek *demos*, coincides in meaning (*ibidem*, p. 88). Both also have a double interpretative connotation. On the one hand, Greek *demos* meant a general public, but on the other it was a simple people, commonplace, and poor. Similarly for Latin *populus*. *Populus* was defined on the one hand as the general public, that is, as Finley explains: a group of citizens "raised above slaves, women and inhabitants of foreign origin" (Finley, 2000, p. 10). on the other, "in republican Rome, *populus* [...] meant *plebs*, which his aristocratic superiors despised and feared" (Canovan, 2008, p. 88).

The author notes three main reasons for fearing the *commune*:

First: since the people are poor, they can easily be stirred up by demagogues.

Second: because the people are "foolish and stubborn," they are irrational and tend to turn into a mob.

Third: the populist leader could have encouraged the establishment of tyranny (Canovan, 2008, p. 85-86).

It should be noted that the convergence or even semantic identity of both concepts, that is of Greek *demos* and Latin *populus*, is, however, marginalized by the author. At most, she focuses on the definition of *demos*, already described by Aristotle, which, in his view, means on the one hand the general public but on the other those "poor opponents of the rich", i.e. the majority opposed to the social elite (Aristoteles, 2004, pp. 113;119; 123).

In her narrative, however she sharpens above all and transfers to contemporary descriptions the dichotomy presented by the author of *Politics*, in this case using the Latin *populus* to support her theses. Here, however, the dichotomy of meanings is already omitted. As a consequence, *populus* ceases to be identified with the general population and the Aristotelian description of the excluded (poor) against the privileged (elite) will be the dominant subject of her analysis.

In *populus*, the author sees above all a threat to social order, while also more or less consciously discrediting its positive functions, which, in my opinion, are extremely important for discussions about populism today. These are among others: the possibility of an affirmatively used aggregation of social discontent of the discredited majority and the possibility, thanks to grassroots social activities, to repair some malfunctioning mechanisms of social equilibrium. Ultimately, Canovan avoids treating populism as a marker of social sentiment and the marker of stability of political systems, which is neutral by nature, and sends certain signals that politicians should interpret as some kind of cautionary signals suggesting the need to revise the political course or even to review certain paradigms.

For this, however, a positively marked relation to the category of people would be needed, i.e. showing people as a general public capable of making conscious political choices and not just treating them in terms of discredited masses usually used by demagogues of various authority to achieve political benefits, more or less destructive for social life.

Populus (people) or, to clarify the Roman *populus*, *Romanus* (Roman people) has, whether we like it or not, two dialectically different descriptive features that will influence later attempts to define the term in a definitive way. Unilateral showing of the destructive potential of populism, and at the same time disregarding its positive functions of corrective influence on the social system, puts populism among the social diseases, discursively discriminating against its emancipatory potential.

The author, citing British historians Andrew Lintott (Lintott, 1999) and Fergus Millar, (Millar, 2002) writes that in Rome (times of the Republic - P.D.) in which power was divided among elected consuls, the Senate and the people's assembly, aristocratic power contenders

had to seek the support of the people represented by the people's assembly and acting as representativeness of Roman citizens (Canovan, 2008, p. 21).

Populus represented broad social masses from peasant classes to the middle class and included free citizens of Rome [including urban poverty (*plebs urbana*)] who were deprived of the possibility of rapid social advancement, although they had a significant impact on the state's policy. As Millar points out, the people's assembly was an important element of exercising power because of the role of *Tribuni Plebis* (people's assembly) in the political life of the community (Millar, 2002, p. 10). Millar even believes that an open public debate based on the conciliatory principle of deliberation and reconciliation of community matters can be seen as one of the few examples of democracy in action, moreover a more important but less remembered pattern (Millar, 2002, p. 11).

Populus / people, especially those of the late Roman republic described by Millar, was largely dependent on *populares*, i.e. politicians who, as the author notes, "ostentatiously earned their friendship and played on the emotions of the crowd" (Canovan, 2008, p. 21).

Canovan adds that a little later began to identify *populus* with the *commune* (*plebs*), which already included all the lower social strata. Therefore, the people began to be associated with the excluded layers (ibidem, p. 21).

It is largely thanks to the manipulative activities of *populares* that the descriptive definition of the people / *populus* remained synonymous with mindless masses, easily manipulated by simple tricks of sophisticated social actors deriving from this naivety the legitimacy of their political actions. Often, these masses were also connotated with the *commune* and the *commune* with the people e.g. in the works of Gustaw Le Bon (Le Bon, 2006).

Until modern times, in attempts to define the phenomenon, one can find, as one of the distinguishing features of populism, the element of demagogic crowd manipulation. Canovan notes, however, in another publication that populism can be considered as a transitional stage between the pre-democratic societies characterized by subjective perception of social reality, and sometimes the emergence of modern systems of representative democracy. Still, due to its specificity, populism is for the author a meeting of politically discredited elites with the masses at their disposal (Canovan, 1981, p. 139). In this case, the elites, just like in Roman times *populares* act as initiators of social activities, and the masses are a tool for them to exert political pressure.

The later historically defining of populism as a social phenomenon owed a lot to Roman traditions. Especially thanks to the ambiguous (as to the intention and role) of social function of the so-called *populares*, that is- a Roman politicians gaining the favor of the crowds with catchy and usually not fulfilled political promises in later praxis. By using the crowds to achieve certain particular benefits, they did not take into account the interest of the general public but only personal egotism. This custom of Rome's widespread search for

support among the lower strata, often naive and lacking in knowledge and ability to rationally assess the situation, had an impact on the pejorative, in fact, assessment of the populus and its subsequent identification with the commune.

As I mentioned before, the concept of the people was also identified with the concept of the people as a sovereign and the concept of citizenship. In the latter case, however, the very concept of the people and their interpretation is crucial for understanding Canovan's narrative. The title of her book: - *The People* may refer to the concept of conscious citizenship, community identification from ethnic to national to supranational as well as, as Canovan notes, those universalizing humanity (Canova, 2008, p. 10-11). However, Canovan makes many simplifications or even misinterpretation of the facts to then use those to support her narrative.

A good example of the interpretation difficulties facing the author is described briefly, in the author's book, the democratic breakthrough in Central and Eastern Europe in 1989. In her considerations, Canovan refers to a bloodless revolution in East Germany in 1989 and the successive unification of East and West Germany into one state organism. Then the protesters against the Erich Honecker regime chanted the slogan which Canovan presented as, "we are the people,"(Canovan, 2008, p. 9) although the slogan of the manifestation: "wir sind das Volk" - should be translated rather as "We are the nation".

It is true that the noun volk may have different interpretations, but in this particular case it was clearly synonymous with the nation. However, her reflections on the essence of "folk" slogans of 1989 rather obscure the image of the interpretation of the turn of 1989 than contribute to it clarification. Let us remind that the noun volk can mean as follows: a): people (Volk, Leute), b): nation (Nation, Volk) and c): common people (Mob, Pöbel, Volk). Unfortunately, Canovan insisted on the first interpretation, that is on vague definition of the people.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the protesters against the Honecker dictatorship were meant to show that regardless of the artificial divisions imposed along with the outcomes of World War II, Germany is still one nation and wants to unite Germany into one state (Dejneka, 2016, pp. 362-363).

It should be mentioned here that, as is the case with this type of simplification, she forgot to add that in addition to "wir sind das Volk", protesters against the communist dictatorship in eastern Germany also chanted the slogan "Wir sind ein Volk", "We are one people", i.e. "We are one nation." However, they did not want to show that they were a common people or a plebs, but a national community, artificially divided politically, who demanding through collective mobilization of reunification into one state organism (Dejneka, 2016, p. 363). Therefore, despite the fact that the category of volk - people can be interpreted in many ways, in this particular case the context of protests and political

demands were important, and these clearly defined the goal of creating a single political organism on the basis of common national identifications (Dejneka, 2016, p. 363).

However, there is another problem in this case related to the interpretation of this type of activity. Protests in East Germany were massive and extended to many German cities whose inhabitants crowded out onto the streets to participate in them, at the same time giving rise to not only unification processes, but also the processes of rebuilding civil society in Germany. Common people came out on the streets, dissatisfied with the fact that their collective interest as the interest of the national community was discredited for decades and the nation deprived of subjectivity. However, Canovan interprets the described process as a populist revolution in which "the people took matters into their own hands" and voila succeeded.

The question should be asked whether this interpretation would fit into the interpretation of the phenomenon postulated as binding since Roman times, saying that, firstly, the discredited elites use the people to achieve their political goals, and secondly that populism is a transitional stage from subjective to objective. In this particular case, it was the people who opposed their elites, though in the final analysis it was the nation that went the victorious path from subjective to objective treatment as the interest of the nation. The people eventually became an independent sovereign of their freedom.

If one follows Canovan's interpretation, it should be noted that the "folk" of ordinary people had enormous potential aggregating the emancipatory demands of the "people" who carried out a democratic revolt against the elites, who in no way were willing to listen to the voice of "their people." Ultimately, due to the pressure of the "people", elites transferred power to them. In this case, the people proved to be a nation effectively demanding the right of self-determination about their own fate. The people identified with the nation eventually became a sovereign. This, in turn, led to unification and creation of the new political system of the already unified state.

I described a case to show an interpretation problem hidden in Canovan's analyzes. It is of such nature that certain social events described by inaccurate definitions show the disproportionate words and their meanings to describe the studied reality. And this can consequently lead to biased descriptions, as a result, even to discursive discreditation of the meanings assigned to certain concepts. The solution seems to be using precise descriptions that use terms that are clear as to their meaning.

It should be noted, however, that Canovan shows that already in the very naming in English we are dealing with the need to constantly refine the definition of the people, because, as the researcher writes, "the people embrace a whole range of meanings, many of which are incompatible with others", adding, that "some senses are easy to translate into other languages, others harder" (Canovan, 2008, p. 10). Refining her comments and referring to the categorization of Ménye and Surel in this regard (Mény, Surel, 2000), she states,

however, that the three basic meanings of the English term have their equivalents in other European languages. These meanings are of the following kind:

1. People are the same as a sovereign
2. the people are identical with the nation

3. People are the opposite of the ruling elite - this category can be identified with the terms ordinary people or municipalities. In the latter case, allocating both of these meanings to the Common People category (Canovan, 2008, p. 10). The third grouping of giving meaning to the category of people proposed by Menye and Surel is also the main analytical category of the book, hence postulated by the author and present since Roman times, and at the same time a contradictory two-part interpretation of the common people category into communes and ordinary people.

Focusing on this interpretative dichotomy Canovan largely omits the first two categories of understanding the concept proposed in their classification, which in consequence results in that her interpretation can in many cases be considered as unauthorized or as mere over interpretation.

I have already mentioned the simplifying treatment of the convergence of meanings of the words *demos* and *populus*, or even of the 1989 protests in East Germany, according to the Canovan, a populist popular revolt and not a conscious leap of society seeing a historical chance for unification. Defining societies in terms of the people as a sovereign or nation brings with it one more challenge that should be noted at this time. Namely, the connotation of the people with the whole society, i.e. the nation or with the sovereign, may in some cases be clearly pejorative. This is how the category had been interpreted in Central and Eastern Europe.

Political, social and economic dependence of the so-called the Eastern Bloc from Soviet Russia after 1945 by introducing top-down economy systems, a system of real socialism, various types of mutual assistance systems such as the Warsaw Pact or the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, in addition to measurable social and political consequences, it also gave new meanings to the category of people and has become synonymous with the imposed order. For example, the new name given by the Russian occupier for the Republic of Poland, i.e. the name People's Republic of Poland, which the ideologists of the new state intend to emphasize the social inclusiveness of a new political formation and the break of tradition as well as political continuity with the pre-war Polish state and its representation in exile instead of the intended connotation people with sovereign and nation evoked diametrically opposite connotations. The Polish People's Republic was connoted with a sovereign not accepted by the nation, and imposed by the authorities and a regime imposed from above, which the nation must resist. Apart from the facade, usually insignificant clichés, the hidden dictatorship of the Soviet Union was imposed by force. These negative connotations of the people with a false sovereign and

misinterpretation of the category of the nation were common throughout the so-called Eastern Bloc. As the example above shows, allocating categories of people to broader community identifications or defining a sovereign can also be problematic, and the instrumentally used category of people has created an additional important negative interpretation of this category.

Returning, however, to several exemplifications discussed by Canovan, it can be stated that the French Universal Declaration of Human and Citizen Rights refers to the concept of a sovereign, similarly to the American Declaration of Independence, and in both cases an additional interpretative layer is imposed on these two basic interpretations, i.e. nation. The UN declaration of human rights universalizes the category of the individual. Admittedly, Canovan draws attention to this by talking about the extent of the interpretation fields of the categories of people in the introduction to her book, going beyond the categorizations of Menye and Surel. She notes, *inter alia*, that: "within the English-language discourse, the formation of the subject of interest in modern democratic politics was strongly influenced by the fact that" people " also refers to human beings as such, individuals in general." (Canovan, 2008, p. 10). Nevertheless, Canovan herself rather tends to the third category of understanding of the concept of the people and this is even abused by her. She does not seem to fully recognize the linguistic changes and the process that caused that today the use of the category of people as a descriptive category at least nudges the mouse and one could say that it is even pejorative or even unauthorized. Therefore, ultimately, the people are rather in the author's descriptions being seen as this category that evokes rather negative or very blurred definitions interpretations.

It should be mentioned however, that Canovan also sees the emancipatory potential of populism, noting that in some circumstances populism may not be interpreted as a threat to democracy, but as an authentic radical form . This can happen when democracy as a system is widely accepted, but there is also a widespread feeling that its standards are not being respected (Canovan, 1981, p. 172). Even though, the author is extremely skeptical in the development of this positively marked interpretative scenario and, apart from indicating such theoretical possibility, she practically does not present arguments in support of it. Although the author indicates that such an actor acting within the democratic framework of action may be "social movements", but these "are notoriously fluid [...] their duration in time is enabled not by organizational form but by maintaining collective identity after political activity weakened "(Canovan, 2008, p. 159), therefore, the long-term effect of these effects on the system is usually unpredictable. She draws however attention to the fact that what distinguishes populism from democracy is the representativeness of the latter, and the radical form of democracy bypassing the legal procedures characteristic of securing parliamentary democracy systems is simply a threat to them (*ibidem*, p. 104). The necessary condition postulated by Canovan for democratic affiliations of populism, i.e. its application

as so-called a radical form of democracy in stable democratic systems is not as obvious as the author would like.

A good example of this ambiguities are contemporary political or social revolutions that accept various forms of pressure on anti-democratic systems in their actions. For example, the populist revolt in East Germany described by Canovan (Canovan, 2008, p. 153, 160). (and in the broader context of the transformation in Central and Eastern Europe in 1989) was not an attempt to exert political pressure on a democratic system but on an authoritarian one.

Nevertheless, the author must be right that populism can and / or is, however, as the author emphasizes many times, a dangerous tool and skillfully used politically instead of the expected change for the better, it can confirm the status quo. In support of his thesis, Canovan gives examples of populist dictatorships or the introduction of undesirable changes due to the wider public interest through the use of populist rhetoric. In this case, the rhetoric of "majority voice" imposed by ideologists become an uncritical tool for publicizing beliefs contrary to the democratic understanding of social participation (Canovan, 1981, p. 13). Canovan, however, does not display the positive features of the phenomenon. She does not specify in her work too precisely of one of its definitive features that may affect its affirmative assumptions. It is about the feature of populism, which is its definitive property, i.e. the fact that populism appears as a reaction to marginalization, improper consideration in political practice, or even exclusion of the interest of the majority (differently formulated depending on the situational context) by the elites, who, for various reasons, usually perceived by the discredited majority as the particular interests of the elite, do not want to take those interests into account. Populism is therefore the reaction of the majority (taking various forms) to discredit its vital interests.

Canovan identifies the majority with everyone who does not form an elite (Canovan, 2008, p. 83), so her dichotomous division is essentially simplistic. In addition, populism is above all, according to her a threat to representative democracy (ibidem, p. 104). Contesting the democratic safeguards developed by democracy systems over its development, such as representativeness, tripartite division of power, minority rights, a legislative process that is spread over time, populism is, in her opinion, an attempt to push through participatory democracy the characteristic of the late Roman Republic such as public debate or direct pressure, today, in societies whose level of specialization is much higher than in the societies of the ancient world. However, Canovan does not interpret populism as a warning signal, in other words the proverbial litmus test, showing the irregularities of social life that need correction. Even if such a correction occurs, it consists in destabilizing the social system and will not restore its lost stability. Good intentions, but poorly applied actions are a 'recipe' for a social catastrophe and this understanding of populism prevails in Canovan reflection on populism. Canovan is consistently sticking to this one sided interpretations and in

consequence discrediting in any way the positive connotations and social functions of this phenomenon.

In my opinion, however, populism as a social phenomenon has another invariable defining feature. It is the abovementioned general opposition to social processes that create anomalies or even pathologies that affect the functioning of the system. One should look at them and take corrective action. It can be, for example, a clearly defined opposition against the social status quo, against social underdevelopment and its consequences, rapid social change outside the framework of accepted changes, or opposition against social or political elites that do not represent communities (i.e. us citizens) defined here as a majority.

It must be admitted, however, that the author is partly right in drawing a pessimistic picture of the phenomenon, especially regarding the categories of populism she proposed, i.e. reactionary populism or populism of politicians. Admittedly, these categories in many places are convergent or even identical and rather obscure the entire definition process rather than make it more transparent. On the other hand, however, it has repeatedly happened that attempts to correct the functioning of social systems destabilized them and did not restore their lost stability of functioning. For example, the instrumental use of Italian dissatisfaction after the outbreak of World War helped Mussolini to take power in Italy, and in the face of the great crisis of the late 1920s and 1930s, the social masses brought Hitler to power. In both cases, the reference to the unifying slogans of unity and national cohesion above class divisions were used by cynical demagogue leaders to seize all power and authorize social systems. Also contemporary right-wing populism, which is often the reaction of a social group dissatisfied with the current state of affairs, looking for easy solutions to the problem without asking about its causes, connotes a negative perception of the phenomenon in social discourse. This is the case, for example, with German Pegida and its anti-immigration rhetoric looking for easy solutions and clear lines dividing us - the community and their - strangers, without asking about the structural sources of the migration challenge (Dejneka, 2016, pp. 362-363).

Therefore, one should ask again how to read Canovan? The answer is simple and is this - critically. Talking into consideration all above presented argumentation author of this article concludes that although Canovan present one important site of dialectical interpretation of the phenomena unfortunately she biases on another.

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