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**The Comeback of Populism. Transatlantic Perspectives**, edited by Heike Paul, Ursula Prutsch and Jürgen Gebhardt, Heidelberg, Universitätsverlag Winter, 2019, 296 pp., €38.00 (hardcover), ISBN: 978-3-8253-4635-5

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This volume addresses what is arguably one of the hottest debates in recent years – the rise of right-wing populisms across the Western world in the 21st century – while at the same time framing it through one of its most obvious, but often least understood, consequence, which is the crisis of transatlanticism. The transatlantic project can be best described as the political and cultural imaginary that was actively developed by the United States and Europe in the post-war period of the 20th century and that led to the articulation of discourses of Europeanism, liberal and social democracy, and the investment in a set of ideals shared across the Atlantic, and that built on an already-existing posit of values, cultures and mutual influences. The last decade has made visible – sometimes in shocking ways – the progressive breakdown of this consensus by the rise of right-wing populisms and the resurgence of discourses of hegemonic or ethnic nationalism, retrotopias – to use Zygmunt Bauman’s term – that seek to recover (lost) heritages and identities. In Europe, these have been accompanied by the agitation of Eurosceptic sensibilities, successfully channelled, for example, in the Brexit crisis; more broadly, the populist turn is usually associated to the ascendancy of ‘unconventional’ political leaders like Donald Trump, Matteo Salvini, Viktor Orbán, and Jair Bolsonaro, to name but a few. Despite this recent surge, the contributions to this volume help to locate the notion of populism within a prior and longer history, as well as examine the diverse ideological and political affiliations of other populisms (not always necessarily right-wing or authoritarian) and the nuances that can be observed in different geographical regions of the world. Even if there are at least some stable characteristics that most scholars can agree on, an authoritative definition of populism remains unavailable and, in this sense, this multidisciplinary volume offers varied approaches to the term, to its history, development and application, which results in a comprehensive and rich understanding of the challenges posed by 21st-century populisms.

*The Comeback of Populism* is a substantial volume with fifteen chapters that approach its subject matter from a variety of perspectives and disciplines, from political science, comparativism, statistical analysis, and history to affect theory, gender studies, critical race theory, cultural and media studies, and, importantly, transnational perspectives from Europe, the United States, and Latin America. This latter aspect is, in my view, key, not only because debates of Western populisms have tended to be extremely American-based or Eurocentric (understandably so, given Europe’s troubled history of totalitarian or authoritarian regimes), but also because the current neoliberal, conservative populist regime by Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil may sometimes obscure the long history of left-wing populisms in South America. Especially, when one considers their most recent and simultaneous re-emergence at the turn of the century, with populist and left-wing governments in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador and Venezuela through the 2000s – which also

brings to mind the surge (albeit brief) of grassroots left-wing movements in Europe after the 2008 financial crash, like Podemos in Spain, Syriza in Greece, and – with the necessary caveats – Cinque Stelle in Italy, for example. The volume’s greatest strength lies precisely in this broader perspective, that goes beyond current understandings of populism as an exclusively right-wing phenomenon – a result of its current dominance – and thus widens the debate on populisms to reveal it in its full historical and ideological complexity. As Heike Paul notes in his introduction, one of the aims of the volume is to ‘capture the cultural, political, and economic specificities of the current faces of populism in the West’ (3) because, as the volume makes increasingly clear, ‘[p]opulism in a generic form does not exist’ (9).

The volume addresses some of the most pressing questions in contemporary debates about populism, such as: Is populism a positive or negative phenomenon? Can we define typologies and varieties of contemporary populism? What are the implications of the affective turn in 21st-century politics, of which populism can be seen as a direct manifestation? How do social and digital media contribute to the affective communitization of populist movements? In its ‘mobilization qua the sentimental’ (140), how are narratives of decline used to effectively tap into a vein of cultural indignation, that also resonate with larger myths and traditions? Is populism a transitory or more lasting phenomenon? Who gets to be included in ‘the people’ that populisms allegedly represent? Can we, in fact, actually speak of a ‘comeback’? Or, in other words, is populism inherent to modern democracies, an element of necessary disruption?

The effort to identify and understand the distinctive operation of these 21st-century populisms informs some of the volume’s strongest essays, including Simon Strick’s breakdown of the Alternative Right’s ‘affective economies’ (following Sara Ahmed) and Heike Paul’s analysis of Trump’s use of *Völkskorper*-sentimentalism (literally, the ‘body politic’). Strick offers a compelling account of how the Alt Right creates affective attachments through the circulation, via digital media, of ‘ordinary affects’ and neoliberal discourses of self-improvement, while Paul’s essay examines the affective hold of the fascist and/or nativist rhetoric of the *Völkskorper* and its actualisation by the Trump campaign and administration. Equally suggestive is Donatella Izzo’s reading of HBO’s miniseries *The Young Pope* (2016), a prescient and provocative representation of the convergence of politics and belief in the figure of a powerful charismatic leader.

These, together with many other issues, are expertly dissected by the contributors to the volume, who hail from institutions in the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Italy, and include scholars like Frank Decker, Carlos de la Torre, Akwugo Emejulu, D. Sunshine Hillygus, Michael Hochgeschwender, and Hans Vorländer, among others. The scope and depth of the analyses, as well as their solid grounding in an impressive body of theoretical references – which is also extremely useful for anyone interested in the matter – makes this volume a truly valuable contribution to the current interest in delineating the contours, the past, and the futures of populism in the West. The volume thus contributes to the effort to make sense of this moment of paradigm shift, helping to identify and understand the societal and political challenges that it entails.

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