Chapter 1

The Ambiguity of Latin American "Classical" Populism

THE STUDY OF Latin American populism has a long history. From the pioneering analyses of Gino Germani in the 1950s to the present, different paradigms have been proposed to explain these phenomena that simultaneously attract and repel social scientists. Certainly the main challenge in the study of populism lies in explaining the appeal of leaders for their followers, without reducing the latter's behavior to either manipulation or irrational and anomic action or to a utilitarian rationalism, which supposedly explains everything.

Using a discussion of case studies, this chapter presents a multidimensional approach to the study of what is currently called "classical" Latin American populism. It stresses the analysis of those mechanisms that explain, on the one hand, the appeal of populist leaders and, on the other, the expectations and actions of followers. The selection of case studies is not intended to present an overview of all populist experiences in Latin America nor to analyze all the existing literature. My interest, rather, is to review innovative works on Latin American populism for their conceptual and methodological advances, while examining particular characteristics of populism. In the course of the analysis, I make suggestions for further research.

Before presenting a new approach to the study of Latin American populism, let us examine the different uses of this concept in the existing literature. The term *populism* has been used to refer to all the following phenomena:

—forms of sociopolitical mobilization in which "backward masses" are manipulated by "demagogic" and "charismatic" leaders (Germani 1971, 1978);

—multiclass social movements with middle- or upper-class leadership and popular (working-class or peasant) bases (di Tella 1973; Ianni 1973);

—a historical phase in the region's dependent capitalist development or a stage in the transition to modernity (Germani 1978; Ianni 1975; Malloy 1977; O'Donnell 1973; Vilas 1992–93);

—redistributive, nationalist, and inclusionary state policies. These populist state policies are contrasted with exclusionary policies that benefit foreign capital, concentrate economic resources, and repress popular demands (Malloy 1987). In contrast, from a neoliberal perspective, populism is interpreted as "ill-conceived development strategies" that emphasize growth and income distribution via a strong intervention of the state, but that de-emphasize the risks of inflation, deficit finance, and external constraints (Dornbusch and Edwards 1991);

—a type of political party with middle- or upper-class leadership, strong popular base, nationalistic rhetoric, charismatic leadership, and lacking a precise ideology (Angell 1968);

—a political discourse that divides society into antagonistic fields —the people *(el pueblo)* versus the oligarchy *(la oligarquía)* (Laclau 1977);

—attempts of Latin American nations to control foreign-led modernization processes through the state's taking a central role as defender of national identity and promoter of national integration through economic development (Touraine 1989);

—a political style that implies a close bond between political leaders and led, usually associated with periods of rapid mobilization and crisis, but that emerges in periods of exceptionality as well as at other times (Knight 1998).

The previous enumeration of the uses of the concept of populism seem to confirm Peter Wiles's observation that "to each his own definition of populism, according to the academic ax he grinds" (1969, 166). Given its many different uses and the variety of historical experiences to which it seemingly refers, authors such as Ian Roxborough (1984) and Rafael Quintero (1980) have proposed eliminating the concept from the vocabulary of the social sciences. They base their arguments on case studies that show that populism is not a stage in Latin American development linked to import substitution industrialization (Collier 1979; Roxborough 1984). They also argue that views privileging the importance of charismatic leaders and anomic and available masses have been replaced by interpretations emphasizing the rational utilitarian political behavior of popular sectors (Menéndez-Carrión 1986), or by class analysis of specific populist coalitions (Quintero 1980; Roxborough 1984). Finally, they question the theoretical validity of a concept that refers equally to civilian and military regimes in the region over a span of sixty years, which may, but do not necessarily, espouse anti-imperialist ideologies and in some cases apply distributive economic policies and in others policies that concentrate economic power. If we add to these objections the generally negative attributes of the term, such as manipulation, or a deviation from "normal politics," one might conclude (as did Menéndez-Carrión) that the term *populism* has been "conceptually exhausted" (1992, 200).

Contrary to the premature efforts to ban populism from the vocabulary of the social sciences, this book argues that, despite the misuses and abuses of the term, it is worth preserving and redefining. The phenomena that have been designated as populist have in common

certain characteristics that can be identified and compared by using this notion. Otherwise, "important empirical content can be lost when concepts are discarded prematurely as a result of ambiguity or an incomplete 'fit' across cases" (Roberts 1995, 88). As Laclau points out (1977), populism is not just a sociological concept, but rather an actual experience of people who have defined and do define their collective identities through populist participation as Peronists, *Cefepistas,* or *Gaitanistas.* Finally, authors who abandon the notion of populism in favor of objectivist categories for analyzing social reality cannot take into account realms of populist experience such as the formation of identity, ritual, myths, and the ambiguous meanings of populism for the actors involved.

I see populism as a style of political mobilization based on strong rhetorical appeals to the people and crowd action on behalf of a leader. Populist rhetoric radicalizes the emotional element common to all political discourses (Álvarez Junco 1987). It is a rhetoric that constructs politics as the moral and ethical struggle between el pueblo and the oligarchy. Populist discourse transmutes politics into a struggle for moral values without accepting compromise or dialogue with the opponent. Populist politics is based on crowd action. Crowds directly occupy public spaces to demand political participation and incorporation. At the same time, these crowds are used by their leaders to intimidate adversaries. Mass meetings become political dramas wherein people feel themselves to be true participants in the political scene. Populist politics includes all these characteristics. It is an interclass alliance based on charismatic political leadership; a Manichaean and moralistic discourse that divides society into *el pueblo* and oligarchy; clientelist networks that guarantee access to state resources; and forms of political participation in which public and massive demonstrations, the acclamation of leaders, and the occupation of public spaces in the name of a leader are perceived as more important than citizenship rights and the respect for liberal democratic procedures.

The Structural Preconditions of Populism

The first round of studies on Latin American populism, those of modernization and dependency theorists, tried to come to grips with the experiences of the major republics. In the 1930s and 1940s Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico endured processes of urbanization and import substitution industrialization associated with the emergence of the populist politics of Peronism, Varguism, and Cardenism. Hence Gino Germani (1971), for example, presented the hypothesis that populism is a phase in the transition to modernity. Developing an alternative explanation, authors working within the dependency perspective criticized the teleological assumptions of modernization theory and offered a structuralist argument that linked populism with import substitution industrialization (O'Donnell 1973; Malloy 1977).

Recent scholarship has demonstrated that the fit between populism and import substitution, even in the major republics, is not that neat (Perruci and Sanderson 1989, 34–35). For example, Ian Roxborough (1984) shows that, whereas import substitution industrialization started in Brazil before the 1930s, populist politics was inaugurated in the late 1940s and during Vargas's second term in office (1950–54). Moreover, in countries such as Peru and Ecuador, there is no fit between populism and import substitution. Populist movements emerged long before import substitution industrialization. Nevertheless and in general terms, populism is associated with dependent capitalist development and of the resulting emergence of popular sectors demanding an expansion of closed political systems (Collier 1979; Drake 1982). In this context, I will examine the social conditions that allowed the emergence of *Sanchezcerrismo* and *Aprismo* in Peru in the 1920s and 1930s, *Gaitanismo* in Colombia in the mid-1940s, and Velasquismo in Ecuador in the 1940s in this chapter.

The oligarchical social order typical of Latin America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had been characterized by a combination of "liberal-inspired constitutions (division of the three

powers, elections, and so on) with patrimonial practices and values polarized around a *cacique, patrón, gamonal, coronel,* or *caudillo*" (Ianni 1975, 79). These estate-based societies excluded the majority of the population from political decision making and had relations of domination and subordination characterized by unequal reciprocity. Alexis de Tocqueville's analysis (1961) of how socioeconomic differentiation between rich and poor in traditional societies appeared as naturalized relations of inequality between masters and servants is relevant here. Tocqueville points out that a fixed hierarchical social order is constituted in which generations pass without any change in position. "There are two societies superimposed, always distinct but governed by analogous principles. . . . Certain permanent notions of justice and injustice are generated between them. . . . Fixed rules are recognized and, in the absence of a law, there are common prejudices that direct them; between them reign certain determined habits, a morality" (Tocqueville 1961, 152).

In his study of the 1931 Peruvian elections in which APRA (Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana) was defeated by Luis Sánchez Cerro's populist movement, Steve Stein (1980) analyzes the changes in socioeconomic and political structures during the 1920s and 1930s that brought to an end the so-called República Aristocrática. They included a greater integration into the world market through an increase in mineral and agricultural exports—primarily sugar—and an increasing presence of foreign capital from the United States, which modified the class structure. The state was modernized. The number of public employees increased from 975 in 1920 to 6,285 in 1931, an increase of 545 percent (Stein 1980, 39). Rural-urban migration and processes of urbanization transformed Lima's socioeconomic structure, with a great increase in middle and working classes. Stein also analyzes pressures for political incorporation from those social sectors that were seeking "a shift in politics from a family-style government run by political aristocrats and based on highly limited participation to one of populism, which sought an enlarged power

base in the lower sectors of society" (1980, 49). What Stein leaves aside is an analysis of the worldview, culture, and discourse characteristic of the República Aristocrática, which would necessarily be the frame of reference for explaining the populist eruptions of APRA and Sanchezcerrismo. This is precisely one of the contributions of Herbert Braun's work on Jorge Eliecer Gaitán (1985), which examines the beliefs, culture, and actions of Colombian public figures from the 1930s to the 1950s, as well as the rationality of the crowds' actions in the Bogotazo.

Braun studies the political culture and ideology of the political leaders of the Colombian Convivencia, a period initiated by the administration of Olaya Herrera in 1930 and brought to a close with the assassination of Gaitán in 1948. The political ideals of the Convivencia were based on a precapitalist ethos more moral than economic: "from a Catholic culture emerged an organic, hierarchical view of society that defined individuals by their rank and duties" (Braun 1985, 22). Those who were seen as members of the public sphere were clearly differentiated from those excluded. "Through oratory in Congress and in the public plaza, the politicians attempted to forge a sense of community by instilling moral virtues and noble thoughts in their listeners" (1985, 25). The process of governing "was perceived as the molding of the anarchic lives of followers, the encouragement of civilized comportment, and the raising of the masses above the necessities of daily life so as to ease their integration into society" (1985, 22). Political leaders referred to all those outside public life as el pueblo. This undifferentiated category was seen "more as plebs than as populace, more as laborers than as the soul of the nation" (1985, 28).

Socioeconomic processes such as dependent capitalist development, urbanization, and the growth of the state apparatus resulted in changes in the social structure, with the emergence of new groups seeking incorporation into the political community and questioning the Convivialistas' vision of politics. Braun's analysis of the cultural

parameters through which elites perceived politics permits him to capture the crisis of the oligarchic social order in all its complexity: socioeconomic, political, cultural, and discursive. But the problem with his work is that he analyzes the political leaders of the time without taking into account the pressures, limitations, and opportunities posed to them by the actions of subaltern groups. Only in the final chapters of his work does Braun examine the rationality of the crowds' collective action in the Bogotazo. Prior to this, el pueblo appears in the same undifferentiated way as contemporary elites saw them.

The analysis of past populist experiences should not lead us to commit the all too common error of assuming that populism itself is a necessary phenomenon of the past linked to the transition from an oligarchical to a modern society. Chapter 4 will review the debates on populism and neopopulism sparked by the electoral successes of Alberto Fujimori, Carlos Menem, Fernando Collor de Mello, and Abdalá Bucaram. Populism is more than a phase in the history of Latin America or of nationalist and redistributive state policies, or a form of political discourse. I explore the relationship between leaders and followers and the specific forms of political incorporation in contemporary Latin America. This perspective analyzes the contradictory and ambiguous experiences of popular participation in politics.

To illustrate my approach to populism, I focus on the Ecuadorian case. I analyze the transition from the politics of notables to mass politics, studying how the different mediations between state and society were constructed. As will be illustrated in chapter 2, populist politics in Ecuador originated in the 1940s under the leadership of José María Velasco Ibarra. Ecuador was not at this time experiencing a process of import substitution industrialization. Even so, the oligarchical order was in crisis, as in other Latin American cases. Social actors such as the middle class—which had grown as a consequence of urbanization and state expansion—artisans, and a small proletariat were demanding political inclusion.

Velasco Ibarra took politics out of the salons and cafes of the elites and into the public plazas. He toured most of the country delivering

his message of political incorporation through honest elections. Velasco Ibarra's followers responded to his appeals by occupying plazas, demonstrating for their leader, intimidating opponents, and—when they felt that their will at the polls had been mocked—staging insurrections and rebellions. Velasco Ibarra did not always respect democratic institutions. He assumed temporary dictatorial powers on several occasions, abolishing the constitutions of 1935, 1946, and 1970 with the assertion that they limited the general will of the people that he claimed to embody.

Velasquismo expanded the Ecuadorian electorate from 3.1 percent of the total population in 1933 to 16.83 percent in 1968, but most citizens remained excluded through the use of literacy requirements. Despite such a restricted franchise, Velasquismo cannot be reduced to a mere electoral phenomenon. It was a broader social and political movement, which included both voters and nonvoters (Maiguashca and North 1991). The novelty of Velasquismo was to inaugurate a political style wherein mass meetings, crowd actions, and self-recognition in a moralistic, Manichaean political rhetoric became more important than narrowly restricted representative political institutions.

These two distinct forms of political participation—mass mobilization of el pueblo and limited citizen participation in democratic institutions—illustrate how different mediations between the state and society have historically been constructed. Citizenship, in Charles Tilly's definition, comprises the "rights and mutual obligations binding state agents to a category of persons defined exclusively by their legal attachment to the same state" (1995, 369). The struggle for and the establishment of citizenship rights goes hand in hand with the rule of law and hence with the building and strengthening of liberal democratic institutions. As in other Latin American countries, citizenship in Ecuador has tended to be restricted and to place priority on political and social rights over civil rights; hence populism has become the principal link between state and civil society.

The continuing inability of liberal democratic institutions to provide a sense of participation and belonging to the political community

have contrasted with political participation through populist, non-parliamentary politics. The main legacy of populism then has been to create a style of political mobilization and a rhetoric that link the state and civil society through mechanisms that do not correspond to the rule of law or respect for liberal democratic procedures.

Populist Seduction

Analytically, it is important to differentiate populism as regimes in power (where the analysis of state policies is central) from populism as wider social and political movements seeking power.[1] To understand the appeal of populist leaders and the expectations of their followers, the following variables must be studied: personalistic charismatic leadership, Manichaean discourse, political clientelism and patronage, and the social history of populism.

POPULIST LEADERSHIP

This section discusses those elements of the concept of charismatic leadership that describe populist experiences. Following Weber (1968), charisma is understood as a double-sided interactive social process that allows us to understand how populist leaders are created by their followers and how they have constructed themselves into leaders. The populist leader is identified with the people—el pueblo—understood as the plebs in its struggle against the oligarchy (Taguieff 1995, 38–39). The leader, due to his or her "honesty and strength of will guarantees the fulfillment of popular aspirations and wishes" (Torres Ballesteros 1987, 171). Such leaders represent "the symbolic projection of an ideal. . . . Through social rites of veneration, qualities they do not possess are often attributed to them" (Martín Arranz 1987, 84). In the process, the leader and followers are mystically linked.

Performing what is perceived as an extraordinary deed is one of the elements of charismatic leadership (Willner 1984). Examples of such deeds are Haya de la Torre's championing of Peruvian workers in the struggle for an eight-hour workday in 1919, his efforts for the creation of the Popular University, and his leadership in the fight against the dictatorship of Leguía in 1923 (Stein 1980). Obstacles to success, a leader's personal sacrifice and disinterest, risk taking, and the importance of the leader's actions for the followers are all elements underlying the emergence of such a relationship. Other examples are the role of Sánchez Cerro in putting an end to Leguía's rule and Gaitán's defense of the United Fruit banana workers massacred in 1929.

According to Willner, perceptions of the personal attributes of the leader are the second element of charismatic leadership. In racist societies in which elites treasured their whiteness, the dark complexions—and mestizo origins—of Gaitán and Sánchez Cerro in themselves represented a challenge to traditional social caste relations. Thus APRA's insults about Sánchez Cerro's mestizo features in the electoral campaign of 1930–31 backfired because the triumph of someone who physically resembled them was very important for common people. Herbert Braun (1985) argues that Gaitán presented his physical appearance as a challenge to the political norms of the Convivencia. His teeth were symbols of animal aggression, his dark skin represented the feared *malicia indígena* (Indian wickedness). In sum, the image of "*el negro* Gaitán" as a threat to "decent society" pervaded the press, electoral posters, and caricatures. In addition, in contrast to the cleanliness and serenity of his opponents, during his speeches Gaitán sweated, shouted, and growled, promoting an atmosphere of intimacy with his followers.

Charismatic leaders invoke myths. Through metaphors they are assimilated into icons of their cultures (Willner 1984). The examples of Evita as the Mater Dolorosa and Velasco Ibarra and Haya de la Torre as Christ figures show the preeminence of religion in Latin

America. Marysa Navarro characterizes the myth of Eva Perón in the following terms:

> Blond, pale, and beautiful, Evita was the incarnation of the Mediator, a Virgin-like figure who despite her origins, shared the perfection of the Father because of her closeness to him. Her mission was to love infinitely, give herself to others and 'burn her life' for others, a point made painfully literal when she fell sick with cancer and refused to interrupt her activities. She was the Blessed Mother, chosen by God to be near 'the leader of the new world: Perón.' She was the childless mother who became the Mother of all the *descamisados,* the Mater Dolorosa who 'sacrificed' her life so that the poor, the old, and the downtrodden could find some happiness. (1982, 62)

What Navarro does not analyze is how such myths were generated. To understand the process of mythic construction of figures like Evita, it is essential to examine popular perceptions of them. Such images, interpretations, and meanings are contradictory—on the one hand liberating, on the other based on an uncritical acceptance of the leaders. Moreover, the visions and interpretations of subaltern groups are influenced by official discourses. For this reason, when studying populist myths one must take into account the fact that their meanings are multiple, and that official memory constitutes a reference point from which popular sectors interpret their experiences (Popular Memory Group 1982).

MANICHAEAN DISCOURSE:
EL PUEBLO VERSUS LA OLIGARQUÍA

The publication of *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory* (Laclau 1977) constituted a breakthrough in the study of Latin American populism. Discourse analysis was presented as an alternative to objectivist interpretations and a tool to understand the ambiguity of populism for the actors involved. Through an analysis of speeches

and other written documents by political leaders, Ernesto Laclau examines the crisis of liberal discourse in Argentina and Perón's ability to transform a series of criticisms of liberalism into a discourse in which the people confront the oligarchy. To explain the rhetorical appeal to the people, Laclau demonstrates how this category is linked to the discursive elaboration of a fundamental contradiction in the social formation: "the people versus the power bloc." The particularity of populism is to be a discourse that articulates popular-democratic interpellations as antagonistic to the dominant ideology. These contradictions that cannot be processed within the system imply the possibility of a populist break. That is why Peronism, Maoism, and fascism are examples of populist ruptures.

Laclau's innovative work on populist discourse was partial. Although he shows the importance of studying the shared semantic field within which people struggle to impose their interpretations of a given moment, the analysis remains incomplete. The most common criticism of Laclau has been that he examines the conditions of only the production of discourses. One cannot assume that a politician's discourse easily or automatically generates political identities. Given that not all discourses are accepted and that there are always competing discourses, it is necessary to take into account the conditions of production, circulation, and reception of political discourses (De Ípola 1979, 1983).

Moreover, Laclau does not differentiate the analysis of political discourse from more general discourse analysis. Emilio De Ípola (1979, 949) suggests the following characteristics of political discourse: (1) its thematic is focused explicitly on the problem of the control of state power; (2) its objective is to refute and disqualify the opposing discourse; and (3) it includes a certain calculation or evaluation of its immediate political and ideological results. There are various kinds of political discourses: electoral speeches, government reports, speeches of representatives in congress, resolutions of party assemblies, and so on. To be successful, these discourses must be

received as conforming to reality. Thus it is necessary to take into account the context within which such discourses are given. To understand the success or failure of political discourses, they must therefore be analyzed as events in which the expectations and actions of the audience are as important as the oration, gestures, and rituals of the speaker. Through a discussion of the discourses of Luis Sánchez Cerro, Victor Raúl Haya de la Torre, Jorge Eliecer Gaitán, Evita Perón, and Juan Domingo Perón, I shall analyze the characteristics of populist discourse as a special category of political discourse.

Scholars of populism have demonstrated that political discourses differ from scientific discourses. Because the goal of political speeches is to motivate people to act, well-reasoned arguments are less useful than emotional appeals (Álvarez Junco 1990, 234). As José Álvarez Junco notes, political discourse "does not inform or explain, but persuades and shapes attitudes. . . . It responds to areas of disquiet and problems, it offers reassurance" (1987, 220). Similarly, Braun suggests that "to search for a clear line of argumentation in Gaitán's more political speeches is to misunderstand them. The orations were designed for dramatic effect, not intellectual consistency" (1985, 100). Even Victor Raúl Haya de la Torre, whose political discourses had more substance, "urged those who did not understand the doctrine to 'feel' it" (Stein 1980, 164). More recently, when evaluating his electoral defeat in 1990 to Alberto Fujimori, Mario Vargas Llosa reached similar conclusions.

> The politician goes up onto the platform to charm, to seduce, to lull, to bill and coo. His musical phrasing is more important than his ideas, his gestures more important than his concepts. Form is everything: it can either make or destroy the content of what he says. The good orator may say absolutely nothing, but he says it with style. What matters to his audience is for him to sound good and look good. The logic, the rational order, the consistency, the critical acumen of what he is saying generally get in the way of his achieving that effect, which is attained above all through impressionistic images and

metaphors, ham acting, fancy turn of phrase, and defiant remarks. The good Latin American political orator bears a much closer resemblance to a bullfighter or a rock singer than to a lecturer or a professor: his communication with the audience is achieved by way of instinct, emotion, sentiment, rather than by way of intelligence. (1995, 169)

Populist discourse and rhetoric divide society into two ethically antagonistic fields: el pueblo and la oligarquía. These terms do not refer to precise social categories but rather to a series of social relations; thus it is essential to examine who is included and excluded by these terms in each specific case of populism. El pueblo is positively defined as all that is not oligarquía. Given their suffering, el pueblo is the incarnation of the authentic, the good, the just, and the moral. It confronts the *antipueblo,* or oligarquía, representing the unauthentic, the foreign, the evil, the unjust, and the immoral. The political becomes moral, even religious. For this reason, the political confrontation is total, without the possibility of compromise or dialogue.[2] The electoral campaigns of APRA and Sánchez Cerro in 1930 and 1931 illustrate the moralism, religiosity, and intransigence that characterize populist discourses.

Aprismo was presented as a moral-religious crusade for the regeneration of the Peruvian. *Aprista* political meetings always included the party hymn, the *Marsellesa Aprista:*

> Peruvians embrace the new religion
> The Popular Alliance
> will conquer our longed-for redemption!
> <div align="right">(Stein 1980, 175)</div>

APRA was not only identified as a religious movement during political meetings, but, in addition, whenever two party members met they greeted each other with the messianic phrase, "Only Aprismo will save Peru"—a slogan also printed on electoral posters. Given his sacrifices and persecution, the figure of Haya de la Torre took on an aura

of martyrdom and sainthood. The religiosity of APRA was also reinforced in his speeches through the use of biblical language: he identified his political action with a call to the priesthood. According to Haya de la Torre, political success absolutely required the ability to communicate a mystical sentiment. Such was the mysticism generated by APRA that a campaign song compared the Apristas' suffering and persecution with that of the early Christians:

> Men who suffer
> a cruel pain
> let us make
> APRA a legion.
> March! March!
> brothers in pain!
> Fight! Fight!
> with the banner of love
> with faith and unity . . .
>
> (Stein 1980, 178)

Sánchez Cerro in turn presented his program as the moral and economic regeneration of Peru. When a foreign journalist asked him to elaborate on his plans, Sánchez Cerro responded that only he knew them. The mysticism inspired by this movement was reflected in this popular song:

> When Sánchez Cerro is in power
> We won't work
> 'cause every little thing's going
> to rain on us like the manna from heaven.
>
> (Stein 1980, 105)

Like their political rivals, the *Sanchezcerristas* also made use of religious symbols and language, for instance in the *Credo Cerrista:*

I believe in *"cerrismo,"* all powerful, creator of all the liberties and all the claims of the popular masses; in Luis M. Sánchez Cerro, our hero and undefeated paladin, conceived by the grace of the spirit of patriotism. Like a true Peruvian he was born in Holy Democracy and in the

nationalist ideal; he suffered under the abject power of the *"oncenio";* he was persecuted, threatened, and exiled, and because he gave us liberty he shed his blood in the sacrifice of his being; he descended triumphant from the peaks of the *Misti* (Arequipa) to give us liberty and teach us by his patriotism, rising thusly to Power, glorious and triumphant. (Stein 1980, 108–9)

The intransigence of both Apristas and Sanchezcerristas was expressed through personal insults and identifying the rival with the oligarchy, source of all evil. For instance, the Sanchezcerristas accused Apristas of being anti-Catholic, antimilitary, antinationalist, and therefore against Peruvian values—values that Sánchez Cerro was of course seen to embody. For their part, Apristas used racist arguments to degrade their rival. In doing so, they were illustrating the ambiguous relationship of populist politicians to the popular sectors, who sometimes are praised as the real essence of the nation and at other times are considered to be the embodiment of backwardness. They referred to Sánchez Cerro as "uncultured, illiterate, vain, smelly, dirty . . . a ridiculous, perverse, latent homosexual, mentally retarded and physically an epileptic, a fetid, Black-Indian half-caste whose primitive behavior and simian-like poses and attitudes suggested that a search for his origins would be like following the biological trail of a gorilla" (Stein 1980, 165–66).

Through discourse, populist leaders give new meanings to "key words" (Williams 1976) in their political cultures. Gaitán, for instance, offered his followers the dignity of human beings when he transformed the feared *chusma* (mob) into the *chusma heroica* and the despised *gleba* (servants) into the *gleba gloriosa.* Perón radically changed the significance of the meaning of words used to denigrate subaltern groups—such as the descamisados ("the shirtless"; the dispossessed)—into the essence of true Argentine identity (James 1988b). Perón also expanded the significance of key words of his epoch, such as *democracy, industrialism,* and *working class.* "Perón explicitly challenged the legitimacy of a notion of democracy which limited itself to participation in formal political rights and he extended it to

include participation in the social and economic life of the nation" (James 1988b, 16). The meaning of industrialism was articulated anew within social and political parameters, and the individual workers became instead the "working class." Words like *people* and *oligarchy* acquired concrete meanings with Perón, as opposed to their purely rhetorical use. El pueblo became *el pueblo trabajador*. In addition, the nationalism implicit in the notion of pueblo as Argentine was manifested in concrete acts. For example, the slogan of the first Peronist electoral campaign was "Braden or Perón."[3]

Some populist leaders incorporate into their discourses colloquialisms and other elements of popular culture. Perón, for example, incorporated *lunfardo,* verses of Martín Fierro, and the tragic-sentimental structure of tango. Evita used the language of soap operas and transformed the political into dramas dominated by love. "Her scenarios never changed and her characters were stereotyped by the same adjectives: Perón was always 'glorious,' the people 'marvelous,' the oligarchy *egoísta y vende patria* [selfish and corrupt], and she was a 'humble' or 'weak' woman, 'burning her life for them' so that social justice could be achieved, *cueste lo que cueste y caiga quien caiga* [at whatever cost and regardless of consequences]" (Navarro 1982, 59). Gaitán, through his strong oratorical style, with shouts of *"Pueebloo aa laa caargaa,"* broke with the calm, melodic rhetorical style of his opponents (Braun 1985). Populist leaders often also make creative use of mass media such as radio. Incorporating popular music—*el porro*—Gaitán succeeded in entering the homes of his followers through his radio spots and transmitted speeches.

Discursive populist events are characterized by repetition of a series of rituals. Gaitán finished his speeches with a ritual dialogue with his audience. He shouted "pueblo" and the crowds responded "a la carga."

> Pueblo.
> Por la reestructuración moral y democrática de la república.
> Pueblo.

A la victoria.
Pueblo.
Contra la oligarquía. (Braun 1985, 103)

Durkheimian sociology has interpreted massive political acts as rituals that evoke a sense of belonging. During populist political meetings, elements of the participants' and the leader's identities are activated and reorganized. The audience recognizes themselves in the leader and projects onto him the solution of their demands and aspirations; in addition, they identify with each other. In these populist mass meetings, where the popular sectors feel themselves participants in the political process, the script has already been written. Most of the time, common people are reduced to follow the lines of a drama that has assigned them a central though subordinate role. They are expected to delegate power to a politician who claims to be the embodiment of their redemption.

Braun's description (1985, 93–99) of one of the most important *Gaitanista* meetings illustrates many of these points. On 23 September 1945, forty to fifty thousand Gaitanistas met in Bogota's Circo de Santamaría, awaiting their leader. The caudillo arrived impeccably dressed, accompanied by his wife and father. The audience saw in their leader one of themselves, el negro Gaitán, who started at the bottom and was now running for president of the republic. The serene tone of Gaitán at this meeting contrasted with the euphoria of the spectators and with most of his previous mass political appearances. In a calm dialogue with the audience, he explained the basic points of his political vision: society's organic nature, the moral basis of the social, the necessity of regenerating national values, and the importance of meritocracy. Gaitán referred to the struggle of el pueblo that embodied the just and the good with the oligarquía. He placed el pueblo at the center of history, transcending political parties. And he, Gaitán, was the person able to understand their feelings. The impact of the discourse was manifested in the chants of the crowd as they left the event: *"En el Circo de Santamaría, murió la oligarquía"* (in the

Circo de Santamaría, the oligarchy has died) and *"Guste o no le guste, cuadre o no le cuadre, Gaitán será su padre"* (like it or not, agree or not, Gaitán shall be your father).

MECHANISMS OF CLIENTELISM AND PATRONAGE

Approaches that privilege the concept of charisma tend to ignore the concrete mechanisms of electoral articulation, assigning all explanatory weight to the figure and discourse of the leader. As several authors point out (Menéndez-Carrión 1986; Quintero 1980), this interpretation is only possible if the popular bases are understood as anomic and irrational masses. Studies that employ the concept of political clientelism have discarded the presuppositions of the irrationality of marginal sectors, demonstrating on the contrary their instrumental rationality and the importance of political organizations in the conquest of the vote (Menéndez-Carrión 1986). The usefulness of this perspective is illustrated for the Ecuadorian case in the debate between Martz (1989) and Menéndez-Carrión (1986) about the first phase of Concentración de Fuerzas Populares (CFP) in Guayaquil between 1948 and 1960.

John Martz privileges the concept of charismatic leadership, showing Carlos Guevara Moreno's success in building the CFP. But what Martz cannot explain is why Guevara Moreno lost the leadership of his party. However, Menéndez-Carrión is able to explain both the success and failure of Guevara Moreno, using the concept of political clientelism. According to Menéndez-Carrión, the exchange of votes for goods and services accounts for electoral success. Leadership within the party and therefore control over the political machinery also depend on what particular politicians can deliver. Thus the political actions of popular sectors are in fact rational responses to the precarious conditions—poverty and an unreceptive political system—in which they live.

Although the concept of political clientelism is more useful than charisma in explaining the conquest of votes, it should not become the only frame of reference within which populist appeal is explained, as in Menéndez-Carrión's work (1986). In its emphasis on formal rationality, political clientelism cannot help us to understand the generation of collective identities in populist movements. As many case studies have shown, participation in a political machine does more than merely assure the delivery of goods and services. In addition, the sense of belonging to a movement is instilled. That is why it is important to study not only the material features of the clientelist exchanges (what is given), but also the symbolic dimensions of exchanges (how it is given) (Auyero 1998).

Populist leaders such as Gaitán, Haya de la Torre, and Velasco Ibarra appealed to both voters and people excluded from the franchise. Through their meetings, slogans, and posters their message transcended the restricted electorate. Thus rather than having to choose between political clientelism and charisma as the central explanatory variable in populism, this suggests that both phenomena must be studied, in particular through an analysis of the concrete political processes in which they are joined. The leader articulates values and challenges and creates new political idioms. Political organizations, in turn, articulate strategies for electoral success, as well as creating mechanisms through which solidarities and collective identities are generated. The ways that these processes complement each other in specific cases must be examined.

SOCIAL HISTORY OF POPULISM

A major preoccupation of students of populism has been to understand the actions of the followers of populist leaders. Some authors, like Germani (1971, 1978), have based their arguments on theories of mass society; others have challenged this interpretation with structural

arguments that highlight the instrumental rationality of followers (Spalding 1977; Murmis and Portantiero 1971; Weffort 1998; Ianni 1973, 1975). Recent analyses have gone further by also taking into account the values, ideologies, culture, and actions of subaltern groups (French 1989; James 1988a, 1988b; Wolfe 1994).

Gino Germani's studies of populism (1971, 1978) reflect the impressions made on him by "mass" movements such as Italian fascism, Nazism, and Peronism. Through the lenses of mass-society theories, he interpreted the collective action of Peronist followers as irrational and anomic. Rapid socioeconomic changes such as urbanization and industrialization produced anomic and available masses—mostly recent immigrants—who were easy prey for the demagogic and manipulative powers of Perón, becoming the social base for his movement. This perspective arbitrarily divides collective action and political behavior into normal and abnormal, such that whatever deviates from the theoretically prescribed path of development is denigrated. Hence, populist followers are considered irrational masses deceived by demagogic, overpowerful, charismatic leaders. This conservative understanding of crowds as "masses" does not permit the study of the specific meaning of their politics.

An alternative explanation of working-class support for Perón stresses the formal rationality of the actions of the subaltern (Murmis and Portantiero 1971; Spalding 1977). Unlike previous governments, which had not addressed workers' demands for social security and labor legislation, Perón, as the head of the National Labor Department (1943–45), met labor demands. Moreover, due to his power in the military government, Perón was able to co-opt and repress the labor movement in accordance with his interests. In the 1946 elections and through his first two presidential periods, Perón counted on the support of most of the working class, which acted rationally in supporting a leader favorable to their short-term interests.

In spite of the efforts of writers influenced by dependency theory to understand the rationality of the working class and other subaltern

groups in populism, their interpretations remain trapped in the same paradoxes of their modernization colleagues. Although dependency studies tried to break with false normative assumptions of what constitutes true and autonomous working-class actions, they are still influenced by orthodox Marxist models of class formation. Because an arbitrary rationalism and transparency is imputed to the actions of the supposedly mature and fully formed working class, these authors can not take into account the values, ideologies, and rituals of working classes or other popular sectors in populism. And even when the thrust of the argument is to understand the specificity of working classes in dependent societies, they can not break with a normative prescriptive model of a what a mature working class should be. It is precisely in the study of who the popular sectors are, what they think, how they feel, and how they interpret their actions that the tools of social history are useful (French 1989; James 1988a, 1988b; Wolfe 1994). As an example, consider Daniel James's work on Peronism.

James studies the social history of the Argentine working class between 1946 and 1976, showing how Peronism arose and how the workers contributed its development. Although James recognizes the explanatory power of approaches emphasizing the instrumental rationality of workers, he questions the validity of the economistic vision of history common to such perspectives. Peronism may have responded to the material needs of the working class previously ignored, but that does not explain why this response occurred within Peronism rather than in other political movements that also addressed the workers. "What we need to understand is Peronism's success, its distinctiveness, why its political appeal was more credible for workers—which areas it touched that others did not. To do this we need to take Perón's political and ideological appeal seriously and examine the nature of Peronism's rhetoric and compare it with that of its rivals for working-class allegiance" (James 1988b, 14).

Although working-class militancy was still present, the *década infame* (1930–43) "was experienced by many workers as a time of

profound collective and individual frustration and humiliation"
(James 1988b, 25). This was a time of severe discipline in the factory,
where workers were haunted by the threat of unemployment. Tango
lyrics from this period express the humiliation and cynicism of the
workers. James points out that although traditional tango themes—
romantic betrayal, nostalgia for the past, and the glorification of male
courage—persisted, they were expressed in a new social context.
Lyrics recommended the adoption of the dominant values of the
time: egotism and immorality. They go so far as to propose that in-
stead of being resigned to the injustice of the social order, the alterna-
tive is *la mala vida*—prostitution and crime. James also analyzes how
workers' degradation was expressed through silence. He explains
Perón's political success in his ability to give public expression to
workers' private experiences, in his capacity to affirm the value of
workers' consciousness and lifestyles.

   James (1988a, 1988b) analyzes the popular mobilizations from 17
October 1945 through Perón's victory in February 1946 to under-
stand the contradictory meanings of Peronism. On 9 October 1945,
General Perón resigned from his positions as vice president and sec-
retary of labor. He was arrested on the 13th. On 17 and 18 October, the
workers in the capital and provincial cities staged enormous demon-
strations demanding his release. The festive and carnivalesque[4] spirit
of these events contrasted sharply with the behavior typical of the 1
May demonstrations organized by the Socialists and Communists.
Instead of a solemn, ordered march, on 17 and 18 October the work-
ers sang popular songs, played huge drums, danced in the streets,
costumed themselves in traditional gaucho gear, and wrote Perón's
name in chalk on city walls. The surprise of the leftist press was such
that they did not recognize the demonstrators as workers, but per-
ceived them as marginal and lumpen. For example, the Communist
press characterized them as "'*clanes con aspecto de murgas*' [clans
with the appearance of carnival] led by elements of the '*hampa*' [un-
derworld] and typified by the figure of the *compadrito*" (James
1988a, 451).

The workers attacked institutions that symbolized and transmitted their social subordination. Their principal targets were the cafes, bars, and clubs of the elites. They also threw stones at anti-Peronist newspaper offices and burned copies of such papers. Students were a favorite target. With the cry "*alpargatas si, libros no*" (shoes, not books) many students, especially the sons of the well-heeled (*jóvenes engominados*), were the object of the jokes and at times the violence of the workers. Shouting "*menos cultura y más trabajo*" (less high culture and more work), they threw stones at the universities. "The central column of demonstrators in Rosario was headed by an ass on which had been placed a placard with the slogan 'offensive to university professors and a certain evening paper.' . . . In La Plata during the disturbances of the 18th a group of demonstrators entered a funeral parlor and demanded a coffin which they then paraded through the fashionable area in the center of the city shouting slogans 'hostile to the students and newspapers'" (1988a, 452). Young men made obscene gestures and dropped their pants in front of upper-class ladies. Monuments to national heroes, considered sacred by the elite, were covered with Peronist slogans.

James shows that these actions, which appeared to both elites and the left as acts of barbarism committed by the lumpen and recent migrants to the cities, had a rationality. The workers attacked the symbols marking their exclusion from the public sphere: universities and students, social clubs, and the press. Moreover, their actions constituted a kind of countertheater through which they mocked and abused the symbols of elite pretensions and authority, as well as affirming their own pride in being workers.

The workers marched from the outlying areas to the central plazas. Their presence was seen by elites and middle classes as the eruption of barbarism, of the *cabecitas negras* (the dark-skinned) in places reserved for the high society (*gente bien*). By invading the public plazas—spaces where citizens gather and political power resides—the workers from outlying areas challenged the spatial hierarchy, affirming their right to belong to the public sphere.

The Paradoxes of Populism and Liberal Democracy

I have stressed the importance of studying the complex and ambiguous meanings of populism. Particular emphasis has been placed on the social historical analysis of collective action, as well as on discursive political events. This approach to the study of populism takes into account both the actions and discourses of the leaders and the autonomous actions of the followers. It requires examining the concrete mechanisms of electoral articulation in the context of particular political cultures.

Perhaps the principal effect of populism has been the entrance of the masses into politics. That is why Carlos Vilas interprets populism as a "fundamental democratizing force" (1995b, 98). Populist movements not only expanded the number of voters, they also gave large social groups within exclusionary and racist societies access to a symbolic dignity. Alberto Adrianzén (1998) has argued that the fundamental quality of Peruvian populism has been its antiaristocratic and proplebeian traits. Similarly, the chusma of Gaitán and Velasco Ibarra and the descamisados of the Peróns were transformed into the bearers of the "true" nation in their struggle against the "aristocratic" oligarchical antination. This search for support and legitimation from the people, placing at political center stage sectors previously regarded as undeserving, is to a certain extent irreversible. As shown by the most recent experiences of dictatorship and democratization in the Southern Cone, once the people become activated they cannot be permanently ignored.

The political emergence of previously excluded groups through populism has ambiguous if not contradictory effects for Latin American democracies. On the one hand, in the incorporation of people through the expansion of the vote and their presence in the public plazas, populism is democratizing. On the other hand, this popular activation occurs through movements that acritically identify with charismatic leaders, who in many cases are authoritarian. Moreover,

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the Manichaean populist discourse that divides society into two antagonistic fields does not permit the recognition of the opposition. This latter point suggests one of the great difficulties of consolidating democracy in the region. Instead of recognizing the adversary, accepting diversity, and proposing dialogue—implying conflict but not the destruction of rivals—populists through their discourse seek the destruction of opponents and impose their authoritarian vision of the 'true' national community.[5]