

Reinterpreting Authoritarian Populisms: The Elitist Plebeian Vision of State

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Biography

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Abstract

Authoritarian populists offer a vision of state. This ideologically-fixed imaginary provides an electoral-authoritarian template for how to shape states once in power. Yet not all those called populists are populist. Some are elitist plebeians. They construct themselves as ‘the moral elite’ above which fights for ‘the people’ below against ‘the corrupt.’ I argue that elitist plebeianism contains a distinct vision of government as elected guardianship. Like populists, elitist plebeians advocate extending executive power. Yet they envisage this not as the realization of the people’s will, but as the projection of accountability downwards. To them, divisions of power are acceptable as divisions of guardian-labour. Rival opinions are not illegitimate, just irrelevant, but opposition is intolerable. Therefore, studies of populist authoritarianism should be revisited. Elitist plebeian visions of state may have been misread as authoritarian populist ones. I examine President Magufuli (Tanzania) as an exemplar and identify other potential elitist plebeians worldwide.

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‘If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary’ (Hamilton, Madison and Jay, 2001: No. 51).

Many populists articulate an electoral-authoritarian vision of state. They make claims about ‘the people,’ their will and representation which fix the ideal form which the state ought to take and the state-shaping agenda through which that ideal can be realized. Scholars analyse this vision under the terms ‘authoritarian populism’ (De la Torre, 2021), ‘populist constitutionalism’ (Blokker, 2019) and ‘a new form of representative government’ (Urbinati, 2019). However, scholars are increasingly revisiting studies of populists, and re-evaluating whether all those analysed as populist truly *are* populist (De Cleen et al., 2018; Fraser, 2017). One sort of discourse, to which populism is often mis-ascribed, imagines ‘leaders of the people,’ but attributes elite features to them. Populism, defined as a thin-centred ideology or discourse, constructs a struggle between ‘the people’ below and ‘the elite’ above. If leaders are discursively imbued with elite characteristics as much as, or even more than ‘the elite,’ the constructed struggle ceases to be one of below versus above, and so ceases to qualify as populist.

Elsewhere, I have developed a distinct concept to capture these not-quite-populisms: elitist plebeianism (Paget, 2021a). Elitist plebeians, as I define them in that article, construct ‘the people’ below and ‘the elite’ above, like populists do. However, they characterize ‘the elite’ as virtuous leaders of ‘the people’ who fight against ‘the corrupt’ located hierarchically between them. Many of those mistaken for populists, I argue there, are better analysed as instances of this hybrid of elitism and populism. In *this* article, I build on that prior work. I ask: what model of state do elitist plebeians envisage and advocate? I argue that the elitist plebeian vision of state differs from both its theorized populist and liberal democratic counterparts. Based on this theorization, I argue that prior studies of authoritarian populist state-shaping ought to be revisited. Not only are many so-

called authoritarian populists not populist at all; they may not articulate *populist* visions of state either. Instead, they may embrace subtly different *elitist plebeian* ones. They should be analysed afresh.

I interpret the subjective forms which these state-shaping agendas take, in the discourses which those aspiring state-wrights themselves express. I locate this elitist plebeian vision of state in two differentiating sets of ideas. The first concerns corruption, specifically where it is and how it should be remedied. Liberal democratic political thought and the republicanism which it incorporates, claims that office-holders anywhere in the state, including at its head, may be corrupted. To guard against this inconstancy of individuals, it turns to the constancy of institutions. It advocates instituting 'legislative balances and checks' to stymy corruption and its source, tyranny (Hamilton, Madison and Jay, 2001: No. 9 and 47). Elitist plebeianism inverts this principle. It claims that the body of the state is corruptible and corruption-prone, but that 'the moral elite' at its head is not. In fact, this 'moral elite' is the ultimate antidote to corruption. Its role is to watch, Cerberus-like, for corruption in the body of the state. Therefore, elitist plebeians advocate reforming the state to enable this projection of accountability downwards from its apex.

The second such difference in principle concerns the relations between rulers and ruled. In populist and liberal democratic theory alike, 'the people' are sovereign. They assert different theories of representation, but agree that representatives' authority comes from 'the people.' Therefore, representatives should act in accordance with their will, and/or opinion respectively (Urbainati, 2006, 2019). In my past work, I am silent on elitist plebeianism's position on representation. In this article, I thicken my theory of elitist plebeianism. I propose that in the elitist plebeian imaginary, 'the moral elite' are guardians. They act in the interests of 'the people.' However, they have superior abilities, and accordingly, they are best able to determine what those interests are. Therefore, they, rather than the people, are sovereign. In other words, like trustees of children, they are responsible for 'the people' but need not be responsive to their wishes (or

will). Accordingly, unlike authoritarian populists, elitist plebeians claim that separations of powers are permitted, but they envisage this as merely the division of guardian labour. Unlike authoritarian populists, but like liberal democrats, elitist plebeians tolerate a plurality of opinion. However, unlike liberal democrats, they subject this to the proviso that these opinions do not contest the wisdom of the guardian rulers. They envisage election as an instrument to select the most-able guardians. They see communication with ‘the people’ not as a means to gain their authorization or interpret their will, but to secure their submission to guardian authority and thereby minimize disruption to guardian rule. Therefore, like authoritarian populism, elitist plebeianism contains an electoral-authoritarian vision of state which its proponents advocate and, in government, may (partially) implement.

Seen through a (so-called) objective perspective, many of the concrete elements of these populist and elitist plebeian authoritarian programmes may seem alike. Nonetheless, they are envisaged differently, suspended, to paraphrase Clifford Geertz, in webs of signification spun by their authors (Geertz, 1973: 5). In an authoritarian populist imaginary, this state-shaping agenda constitutes the reform of the state to enable the realization of ‘the will of the people.’ It disassembles obstacles to rule by the people’s lone representative and eliminates sources of illegitimate opinion (Urbiniati, 2019). By contrast, in the elitist plebeian imaginary, this state-shaping agenda constitutes the reform of the state to enable the guardian-elite to rule wisely on behalf of ‘the people,’ unimpeded by disruption, which they manage and suppress. In short, elitist plebeianism and authoritarian populism contain visions of distinct state-scaping projects. Therefore, studies of authoritarian populisms should be revisited and perhaps reinterpreted. Not only may elitist plebeians have been mistaken for populists, especially populists in power; their visions of state may have been mis-analysed as authoritarian populist, when in fact they are elitist plebeian.

I explore and refine this theory of the elitist plebeian vision of state by returning to the original case from which I abstracted the concept of elitist plebeianism: President of Tanzania John Pombe Magufuli (1959-2021) and the party he led, *Chama cha Mapinduzi* (CCM). During his rule from 2015 to 2021, at least publicly, they spoke as one and so I study them together. I interpret the vision of state which they advocated and envisaged, in the context of the concrete government actions and reforms in which they fact undertook. This agenda is not expressed definitively in any seminal text. Instead, it is expressed in many statements, by many CCM or CCM-aligned actors, in reference to a variety of government actions and reforms. Nonetheless, I find that from these many statements, one can distil a fragmentary (and sometimes contradictory) mosaic of the vision of state which, in their eyes, they were bringing about. I argue that it closely, albeit imperfectly, resembles the elitist plebeian vision of state. Given the similarity between their political thought and that of other post-liberation parties, this vision of state is likely to be mirrored elsewhere in Africa and beyond.

To study political thought is to interpret meaning (Freedon, 1996; Laclau and Mouffe, 2001). Consequently, my analysis of their vision of state is fraught with the innate methodological challenges of interpretation (Geertz, 1973). These challenges are compounded by contradictions between the speech of different CCM actors, differences in their speech over time, meanings which are implicit, meanings which are only evident in context, and my non-fluency in Swahili, the language in which much Tanzanian politics takes place. To meet these challenges, I read texts in the context of other texts; I immersed myself in quotidian discussion of Tanzanian politics over nine years; I reflected on my interpretations and my positionality. The ideas in this article are based on my reading of a body of speech transcripts, YouTube videos of speeches, and tweets by President Magufuli and fellow CCM politicians over that period. I supplement these with a private compendium of over 3,500 newspaper articles, selected for relevance over this period, complemented by the citation of select laws and official documents.

In the first section, I introduce the concept(ions) of populism, how it is theorized, and the authoritarian state-shaping project said to stem from it. In the second section, I rearticulate and elaborate on ideas which I have published elsewhere; I argue that some discourse and thin-centred ideologies are ‘mistaken for populism,’ and I re-present the concept of elitist plebeianism as a better cipher for them. In the third, I develop a thicker conception of elitist plebeianism and theorize the vision of state which, I propose, stems from it. In the fourth, I ground the concept of elitist plebeianism in the Tanzanian case. In the fifth, I interpret the vision of state which Magufuli and CCM articulated.

The authoritarian populist vision of state

There are numerous conceptions of populism as strategy, style and the like (Moffitt, 2016; Weyland, 2001). I draw on the two most prominent and widely adopted such conceptions: the discourse-theoretic and ideational ones. Past work has drawn out the differences between these conceptions, which are indubitably significant. Nevertheless, a set of common ideas is articulated in a body of work which cuts across them. This set of shared ideas form the point of departure for the theory of elitist plebeianism which I rehearse and extend below. These commonalities are nested in a partially-shared ontology. Perhaps the paramount theorist of the ideational conception, Cas Mudde, initially defined ideology in a positivist manner as a system of beliefs. However, subsequently, he situated his study of ideology in Michael Freeden’s theory of ideology (Mudde, 2021). For Freeden, the meanings of concepts are essentially contestable (Freeden, 1996). An ideology ‘decontests’ them and fixes their meanings by arranging them in relation to one another. Such a constellation of concepts provides, in Freeden’s view, an interpretive framework, in reference to which wider systems of meaning are fixed.

The discourse-theoretic perspective originates in the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (2001). Much like Freeden, they understand discourses as incomplete systems as subjective

meanings, which are fixed in relation to key signifiers. Unlike Freeden, they specify that these meaning-systems are fixed through two logics of articulation. These logics begin with a diversity of fighting demands. In the first such logic, these demands, are presented as equivalent and the corresponding demand-makers are constructed as an 'us' which is united in these common demands. In the second, those against whom demands are made are hemmed together and constructed as an antagonist: 'them.' A discourse articulated through these logics sorts every actor into one of these categories. Thereby, it imagines a society divided between 'us' and 'them.' Therefore, there are certainly important distinctions between Freeden's theory of ideology and Laclau and Mouffe's theory of discourse. Nevertheless, each largely agrees on what ideology and logics of articulation produce: incomplete and fragmentary systems of subjective meaning.

There are also significant similarities, amid differences, across ideational and discourse-theoretic conceptions of populism, in what they specify is common to *populist* meaning-systems. In the ideational conception, the populist imaginary divides society into 'the people' and 'the elite,' who are locked in a Manichean (good-vs.-evil) struggle. It constructs 'the people' as homogeneous, moral and in possession of a uniform and infallible will which is sovereign. Equally, it constructs the elite as homogenous, immoral and illegitimate. In the discourse-theoretic conception, the populist imaginary *also* divides the social into 'the people' and 'the elite.' These are the entities as which the heterogeneous 'us' and 'them' are fixed, and therefore are the constructed bodies between which antagonism runs. Therefore, the people-elite divide is a feature of populism on which, amid various differences, ideational and discourse-theoretic conceptions agree.

A subset of works across these conceptions agrees on something further: that populism contains an electoral-authoritarian project. Many in the discourse-theoretic canon, and beyond, emphatically argue that populism is *not* innately authoritarian (De Cleen et al., 2018; Vergara, 2019); nor are many instances of it authoritarian (Stavrakakis and Katsambekis, 2014). However, others argue that it is, and that they are.

Some such studies ask how and when populists in office shape the state, and thereby democracy. They regard this as an empirical question, answer to which are necessarily contingent upon the conjunction of multiple circumstances that enable or disable, incentivise or disincentivise, and stimulate, retard or divert populist state-shaping (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2015; Caiani and Graziano, 2022; Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2012). Accordingly, they maintain that populist authoritarian state-shaping is not reducible to the content of populist meaning systems. They find that while populists often correct deficiencies in democracy, they tend to erode its liberal features (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2012), without which, of course, there is no democracy at all (Urbinati, 2019).

Other studies, in contrast, ask what state-shaping project is fixed in populist meaning systems. This is an enquiry into what critique is advanced, what possibilities are idealized and what changes are advocated in populist imaginaries. As such, it is an attempt to excavate a wider system of meaning which extends beyond those defined in the theories of populism reviewed above. These authors propose, as Urbinati puts it, that ‘the thin ideology of morality ascribed to populism conceals a thick ideology’ (2019: 63). This thick ideology contains a ‘practical template for populist movements and government to follow’ (Urbinati, 2019: 32). Paul Blokker defines populist constitutionalism in similar terms as a ‘constellation of meaning’ which contains both a critique of liberal democracy and a project of constitutional change (2019). Some suppose that all populisms contain such authoritarian blueprints for government (Müller, 2016; Urbinati, 2019). Others conceive of authoritarian populism as a feature which many but not all populisms display (de la Torre, 2021a). Regardless of whether these studies define authoritarian populism as synonymous with populism itself, or as a subtype of it, they analyse this ideologically-embedded agenda by employing one of two methods, or both together. First, they analyse populist speech. Second, they make sense of the actions of populists in office. This body of work includes many studies which adopt the ideational conception of populism (Mudde, 2021). However, it also includes the works

referred to above which all draw extensively, albeit creatively, upon Laclau and Mouffe (Blokker, 2019; de la Torre, 2021b; Müller, 2016; Urbinati, 2019).

Across this body of work, the authoritarian populist vision of government arises from its theory of representation. In the ideational conception, it begins with the theorization of ‘the people’ as homogeneous and the possessors of a uniform, popular will which is sovereign (Mudde, 2021). In the discursive conception, it begins with the mis-representation of ‘the people’ not as the part but the whole of the social: *pars pro toto* (de la Torre, 2021a; Müller, 2016). Urbinati offers perhaps the best theorization of this electoral-authoritarian imaginary. In it, there is a majority: ‘the (true) people.’ This majority does not hold a plurality of fallible opinions. Instead, it expresses a will which is infallible, singular, and sovereign (Urbinati, 2014: 157). ‘The people’ as majority is or ought to be simultaneously ‘the people’ as totality (Urbinati, 2019: Chapters 1 and 2). The leader continuously realizes ‘the people’s will,’ which they alone can interpret and rearticulate through direct correspondence with ‘the people’ (Urbinati, 2014: 128). In sum, a leader becomes the sole representative of a singular and infallible popular will through continuous and direct interaction with ‘the people.’ Thereby, this imaginary disfigures liberal democratic theory; it provides a template for a ‘new form of representative government’ (Urbinati, 2019: Introduction). In that template, ‘obstacles’ (Urbinati, 2019: 8) to the realization of ‘the will of the people’ by the leader are to be removed, inclusive of checks on executive power (Urbinati, 2014: 150). Equally, rival sources of alternate and therefore illegitimate opinion are to be eliminated. Election may be preserved, but its role is to be transformed as one of many avenues through which the leader can interpret ‘the people’s will.’

These conclusions closely correspond to those reached in the studies of populist behaviour in office described above. Nonetheless, the conclusions of these studies remain subtly distinct. Studies of populist behaviour analyse concrete populist state-shaping from the perspective of the analyst. Studies of populist visions of state analyse the templates for action fixed in the perspectives

of populists themselves. Such studies look upon the concrete state-shaping which populists achieve only as a window onto the wider such programmes which they envisage. It is this approach upon which I build in this article.

What is elitist plebeianism?

A question asked with growing frequency in political science is: are those to whom populism has been ascribed really populist? One line of enquiry argues that many movements called 'populist' are far-right first and populist second (De Cleen et al., 2018). Another such line questions whether some political messages meet the definition of populism at all, especially the messages of (so-called) 'populists in power.' I explicate this second line of interrogation. While I have articulated this line of interrogation before (Paget, 2021a), this position is contentious, and rearticulating it is prior to developing the arguments that follow.

Disputes about the ascription of populism as thin-centred ideology and discourse alike focus on two questions: 1) what qualifies as the construction of 'the elite'? 2) how must the 'leaders of the people' be constructed to remain distinct from this elite? For some, writing in the ideational conception, notably Cas Mudde, the answer lies in the concept of morality alone (Mudde, 2021). Populists, he stipulates, need only characterize 'people' and 'elite' as moral and immoral respectively to qualify as populist (Mudde, 2021: 3). However, this underspecifies the concept. Take a hypothetical meaning system which fulfils all of the criteria of the ideational conception of populism as Mudde defines it; it divides society into two entities, characterizes one as moral and the other as immoral, calls them 'the people' and 'the elite' respectively, and attributes homogeneity, *volunte generale* and/or illegitimacy to them as appropriate. Suppose that in this hypothetical, 'the people' were further characterized as wealthy, powerful, educated or otherwise of superior social status; and 'the elite' were characterized as impoverished, powerless, uneducated or otherwise of inferior social status. By Mudde's definition, one would be compelled to designate

this meaning system as populist, even though it turns notions of people and elite on their heads. This exposes that Mudde's definition elides the crucial difference between a meaning system which *calls* an entity 'the elite' and one which *constructs* an entity as 'the elite.' The former is simply a question of the nomenclature deployed in a discourse. The latter is a question of what sort of meanings are made in that discourse, in the judgement of the analyst.

The definition of eliteness, of course, is contestable, and so there are many such possible conceptions of it. Nevertheless, that does not imply that its definition can be fixed in any way while remaining recognizable as some conception of it. I argue that the concept of eliteness has what Freedman would call an 'inalienable element' (1996: 61-3), an aspect that must appear in any conception of the concept 'elite' for it to merit the name. That element is superiority. For a meaning system to characterize an entity as 'the elite,' it must not only call this entity by the name 'elite.' It must construct it as superior in status, whether status in that imaginary is defined in reference to class, power, education or some other properties. Likewise, for a meaning system to bifurcate the social into 'the people' and 'the elite,' it must attribute to them relatively inferior and superior status respectively. This position is compatible with the position adopted by contemporary advocates of the discourse-theoretic perspective. Namely, 'populism is structured around a vertical, down/up or high/low axis that refers to [constructed] power, status and hierarchical socio-cultural and/or socioeconomic positioning (De Cleen and Stavrakakis, 2017).

This clarifies one of the criteria which a meaning system must meet to qualify as populist. To qualify as populist, among other things, a meaning system must imagine a hierarchy of status, and place 'the elite' higher on it than 'the people.' By the same logic, 'the leaders of the people' must not be higher on it than 'the elite.' If they are, the antagonistic divide or Manichean struggle ceases to cut across the that hierarchy of status, dividing those below against those above. Instead, it also runs parallel to it, pitting one constructed elite against another, or even inverts it, pitting 'leaders' above against 'elite' below. Therefore, the meaning system in question ceases to meet the

minimal criteria of populism in ideational and discourse-theoretic terms alike. ‘The leaders’ may speak for ‘the people’ (Pels, 2003), but they are differentiated from them in their own imaginary.

This definitional question becomes particularly acute when considering (so-called) ‘populists in power.’ Perhaps there is some imaginary of hierarchy which truly excludes power. However, most populisms do not employ such imaginaries. As such, if the constructed leaders of ‘the people’ take power, formerly populist discourses about them struggle to reconcile their vilification of the powerful and the positions of power in which they place ‘the leaders.’ There are various methods by which a meaning system may contrive to continue placing the leaders low on that power hierarchy: for instance, they may locate power not in the state, but the deep state; or not in the nation, but the transnational order. Nonetheless, many so-called discourses do not adopt them; they simply transgress the definitional lines I outline above and cease to qualify as populist.

Ascriptions of ‘populism in power’ read as attempts to resolve these contradictions of concept and case simply through a naming hat-trick. The suffix ‘in power’ is suggestive of a distinct variant concept which resolves this definitional contradiction, but no such concept or corresponding resolution is offered. In spite of those important differences between populisms and these deviant discourses, there are also notable similarities. In my past work, I develop a concept to capture these partial populist resemblances: elitist plebeianism (Paget, 2021a).

Elitist plebeianism differs from populism in the way it divides the social. Like populism, it constructs ‘the people’ as an ‘us.’ However, unlike at least the authoritarian populisms defined above, it does not construct them as the totality. Instead, it constructs them as ‘the many;’ it constructs ‘the people’ as ‘plebs’ or as ‘the common people’ (Paget, 2021a: 126; also see Vergara, 2019). ‘The plebeians’ not only exists, as Martin Breaugh theorizes, as a political subjectivity which finds articulation in a moment of emancipatory revolt (2013: 10-1). It also exists as a social category characterized, as Green theorizes, by their status as second-class citizens defined by their lack of

political power (2016: 15 and 29). It may simultaneously be characterized, as Camila Vergara theorizes, by the socio-economic circumstances of their oppression (2019: 18). However, as with populism, ultimately, it may be characterized in a variety of possible ways, as long as it is placed below other entities on a constructed hierarchy of status.

Unlike populism, elitist plebeianism does not bifurcate the social into two (Paget, 2021a: 126). Instead, it trifurcates it into three. Like populism, it constructs an enemy or adversary of ‘the people.’ Also like populism, it places that enemy above ‘the people’ on the aforementioned hierarchy. However, unlike populism, another entity occupies a still higher position on that hierarchy: ‘the leaders of the people.’ They are imagined as hierarchically elevated above ‘the (plebeian) people.’ Their constructed distinction, whatever form it takes, makes them simultaneously ‘the virtuous elite,’ ‘the moral elite’ or ‘the vanguard elite’ (Paget, 2021a: 125-6). Like Vergara’s plebeian dictator, ‘the leaders’ act on behalf of the people (2020). However, unlike it, this ‘moral elite’ is not envisaged as a temporary leader of a crisis government, but a permanent presence at the state apex. As the enemy occupies a space above ‘the people’ but below ‘the leaders’ in this hierarchical imaginary, it is interpellated as ‘the corrupt,’ rather than as ‘the elite.’ This is a tri-alist imaginary of society, with parallels to Machiavelli’s vision of a civil principality in *The Prince*, divided between *popoli, grandi* and a *principe* that takes the *popoli* ‘under his protection’ (Machiavelli, 2000, Chapter IX).

The elitist plebeian vision of state

The above features form the thin(nest) version of elitist plebeianism which consists of this construction of political groups and their friend/enemy relations (Paget, 2021a). Here, I propose a more expansive form which elitist plebeianism can take. In this incrementally thicker conception, elitist plebeian meaning systems further specify how ‘the moral elite’ relates to ‘the people.’ In particular, they fix how one represents the other. Elitist plebeian meaning systems assert a particular ontological conception of what is to be represented and an epistemological argument as

to who ought to be its ultimate author. In democratic theory, the opinions (judgements) of the people are to be represented (Urbinati, 2006). In elitist plebeianism, the *interests* of the people are to be represented. This distinction is significant. The people are, necessarily, the ultimate authors of their will and opinions; therefore, they are the ultimate authorities over what they are. However, the people need not have the ultimate authority over what their *interests* are. Instead, if interests are conceived as determined by circumstance, material or otherwise, then the ultimate authority to designate them belongs to those best able to read those circumstances. Likewise, if they are determined by philosophical enquiry, the ultimate authority belongs to those best able to undertake that enquiry. In elitist plebeianism, such an ability to best determine the interests of ‘the people’ is attributed to ‘the moral elite.’ In the elitist plebeian vision, the superior faculties of this elite – their education, their wisdom, their insight, and/or their ability – enable them to best judge what the people need and what course of action will best deliver it. Their virtue, meanwhile, ensures that this course of action is followed. In other words, elitist plebeianism conceives of representatives as guardians of ‘the people’ (Dahl, 2008, Chapter 4).

At first sight, this may resemble the populist disfigurement of representation. As I outlined above, many theorists of authoritarian populism specify that it makes the leader the sole legitimate arbiter of ‘the people’s will’ (De la Torre, 2021: 196; Urbinati, 2019: 66). Certainly, both authoritarian populism and elitist plebeianism grant authority to the leaders to determine what that-which-is-to-be-represented is. Therefore, in practice, each grants them latitude in the actions which they can justify. However, what they determine and how they determine it remains distinct in each imaginary. In authoritarian populism, the leader is the authoritative interpreter of the will which ‘the people’ have and which they (normally) express (Urbinati, 2019: Chapter 3). In elitist plebeianism, the leaders are the authoritative judges of what the interests of ‘the people’ are, independent of what (perhaps ill-advised) opinion or wishes ‘the people’ express or possess.

Therefore, the conception of representation as guardianship transforms the relationship of authority between people and leaders. In democratic theory, of course, the (sovereign) people authorize representatives. In elitist plebeianism, the guardians have sovereign authority derived from their superior faculties and virtue. Equally, this conception of guardianship transforms the role of election, but not in the way that authoritarian populism does. Elitist plebeianism does not envisage the election as an instrument through which the leaders can access ‘the will of the people’ or celebrate the incarnation of the latter in the former. Instead, it envisages it as a means by which the best leaders can be selected. This is the assignation of an aristocratic role to election which Bernard Manin articulates and traces through historical political thought (1997).

In attributing to citizens the role of selecting best rulers, of course, the elitist plebeian idea of representation partially resemble Jane Mansbridge’s selection model of political representation (Mansbridge, 2009). Like her, elitist plebeianism considers the role of ‘the people’ in part to be the identification of which candidates have the best character and the best abilities. However, unlike her, they do not consider this to be the means by which the principal (citizens) ought to choose an agent (representative) that acts in the way that the principal dictates.

In these regards, elitist plebeian idea of guardianship bears some similarities to the political thought of Edmund Burke (1999). Like the elitist plebeian, he envisages that there are interests (of the nation) which are best determined by the ‘reason and judgement’ of the representatives (Burke, 1999: 13). Also like the elitist plebeian, he makes the role of electors the selection but not the instruction of representatives. Representatives, in short, should be trustees, not delegates. For an articulation and critique of these ideas, see Hanna Pitkin (1967: Chapter 8) and Urbinati (2006: 25-7) respectively. However, he reached these conclusions in a particular historical context. The theory of trusteeship was abstracted away from that context by subsequent thinkers (Jones, 2017: 24-6). For instance, Burke predicated his depreciation of the elector’s judgement and role on the grounds that they could not participate in the deliberations of an assembled parliament. He did so

in a historical moment in which the means of public communication were few, slow and expensive. Likewise, his advocacy of trustee independence was predicated, at least implicitly, on the narrow scope of state action considered possible in eighteenth century Britain. In both these respects, and others besides, his thought differed from elitist plebeianism.

Elitist plebeianism also bears partial similarities to theories of ‘one-party democracy,’ not least those articulated and at least partially instituted in postcolonial Africa by nationalist leaders like Tanzania’s founding-president Julius Nyerere. Nyerere’s thought merits and has received extensive study (for example, see Bjerck, 2017; Molony, 2014; Schneider, 2014; Shivji et al., 2020). So has political thought which idealizes and criticizes him (Becker, 2013; Brennan, 2014; Fouéré, 2014) His ideas about one-party democracy were situated in the wider ‘African socialist,’ nationalist and pan-Africanist thought which he articulated. His thought about one-party democracy, moreover, ought to be read in the historical context of decolonization, nation-building, and the global cold war in which he wrote and spoke (for recent relevant histories, see Roberts, 2021; Bjerck, 2017; and Shivji et al, 2020).

These caveats aside, in brief, Nyerere envisaged one-party democracy as a form of government in which ‘the people’ were sovereign. At face value, this distinguishes it from elitist plebeianisms. However, in substance, these differences are secondary. Nyerere envisaged democracy as the arrival at decisions by deliberation (Nyerere, 1966). He further claimed, at least implicitly, that ‘the people’ would be sovereign if they could (merely) ask questions of their leaders (Nyerere, 1968: 139), and if MPs came to hear their views (Nyerere, 1968: 92). Nyerere also asserted that the role of MPs was (merely) to communicate with ‘the people,’ deliberate on legislation, and ‘keep the Government actively devoted to the people’s interests by their intelligent criticism’ (Nyerere, 1968: 93). Nyerere also saw no legitimate role for organized contestation in multiparty elections (Nyerere, 1966). Multiparty contestation, Nyerere argued, was incompatible

with the national unity required in Tanzania's moment of decolonization (Bjerk, 2015), and unnecessary given the unity which he saw in Tanzanian interests (Nyerere, 1966). Accordingly, he advocated and instituted a regime of single-party elections. In them, party officials and MPs were to be elected after regulated campaigns, in which criticism of the party ideology was prohibited (Hyden & Leys, 1972). In each of these ways, he envisaged a system of government, like elitist plebeian guardianship, in which neither 'the people' nor parliament had power or authority over government. These similarities became more striking in Nyerere's later writings, which were more forthrightly 'paternalist' (Schneider, 2014). There, he wrote that the party ought to determine the 'needs' or 'interests' of 'the people,' and if necessary, explain them to 'the people' (Nyerere, 1973: 32 and 61). Also like elitist plebeians, Nyerere envisaged a struggle against 'the corrupt.' He claimed in 1967 that a class was in-formation which was practising corruption, exploitation and dishonesty upon 'the people' (Nyerere, 1968; Introduction). He presented the actions of his government, in the Arusha Declaration, as an intervention from above to stymy the growth of this corruption (Hunter, 2015). Elitist plebeians, not least those in Tanzania, partially reincarnate these ideas, albeit in multiparty regimes, in a different global moment, and stripped of the accompanying socialist ideologies. Altogether, the elitist plebeian theory of elected guardianship has many intellectual antecedents, but it is not reducible to them.

A distinct vision of state emanates from this thicker version of elitist plebeianism. Like authoritarian populist and liberal democratic visions of state alike, elitist plebeians are animated by the anticipation of corruption. Unlike them, elitist plebeians imagine corruption to arise in the body of the state to the exclusion of the 'moral elite' at its head. Consequently, they differ from liberal democrats in how they propose that corruption be checked. They do not prescribe institutions systems to stymy it. Instead, they envisage 'the moral elite' as the sentinels against it. Therefore, unlike authoritarian populist and liberal democratic theory alike, they advocate that the state be reshaped so that accountability radiates downwards from 'the leaders' at the apex of

government towards the corruptible bureaucracy. Satellites and arms-length appendages should be drawn-in and under its gaze; institutions should be reformed to open and subject them to its scrutiny and punishment; and the apex should be empowered and capacitated.

As elitist plebeians reject the republican-cum-liberal democratic idea that office-holders at the state apex are corruptible, they reject the corresponding state-shaping principle that institutional systems ought to check and balance their powers. In fact, to enable ‘the elite’ to fight ‘the corrupt’ in the body of the state, checks on and impediments to their power should be eliminated. This leads to a similar conclusion to the authoritarian populist prescription that the limits on the power of the executive be dissembled, but with two differences. First, elitist plebeians construct these changes as the enablement of rule by guardians, rather than the removal of impediments to the realization of ‘the will of the people’ (Urbinati, 2019). Second, while elitist plebeians advocate the disassembly of *checks* and *limits* on the powers of guardian office-holders, they tolerate *separations* of powers; such divisions of powers are acceptable insofar as they are conceived as merely the division of labours between members of ‘the moral elite.’ This creates, in elitist plebeian eyes, a set of cooperating arms of elite government.

Unlike authoritarian populists, elitist plebeians tolerate a plurality of opinion. Indeed, they may welcome constructive criticism. Guardians may be wise, but not infallible. As elitist plebeians do not subscribe to the authoritarian populist conception of representation, popular opinion need not be uniform, and diversity of opinion does not challenge some ‘will of the people.’ However, any such solicitation of criticism is merely consultative. Furthermore, this tolerance is subject to a proviso. As guardians know best, their rule best serves ‘the people,’ so while constructive criticism is acceptable, *opposition* to their rule harms ‘the people.’ Therefore, such opposition is illegitimate. The extremity of these authoritarian conclusions depends how the programme of ‘the leaders’ and the interests of ‘the people’ are portrayed. The more important they are, the more intolerable the

harm that opposition to them causes, and the more extreme the authoritarian measures which may be justified to stymie them. These claims form justifications of censorship and the elimination of societal bodies that consistently transgress these boundaries on speech. In the elitist plebeian imaginary, these justifications only gain strength in the context of election campaigns. 'The people' can only select good leaders if they are not diverted by unconstructive criticism of or incitement to oppose the guardian's programme. In the elitist plebeian view, such disputation of their programme can only be based on falsehoods or erroneous opinions. Those authoritarian measures may take similar forms to the dismantling and silencing which it is theorized that populists advocate. Nonetheless, once again, they are imbued with different meanings. Elitist plebeians imagine them as the suppression of self-serving, malcontented or misguided voices that disrupt the selection of and rule by guardians in 'the people's interests.' Authoritarian populists imagine them as the eradication of illegitimate elites whose machinations deny 'the will of the people.'

Relatedly, while the elitist plebeian holds that the sovereign authority of the guardians stands independent of authorization by 'the people,' they nevertheless see a major role for public communication between guardians and people. As rule by the guardians is vulnerable to disruption by unconstructed criticism and misguided opposition, the guardians ought to use public communication as an instrument alongside authoritarian measures to minimize such disruption. First, elitist plebeians advocate and envisage that guardians use it to elicit the enactment of reverence. The interactive political communications of the sort that takes place in election campaigns in particular, through rallies, parades, social media and the like, are opportunities. Through such interactions, elitist plebeians envisage, guardians can invite 'the people' to express their respect and/or admiration for the guardians. 'The people,' they hold, ought to accept those invitations. Such interactions, in the elitist plebeians' eyes, affirm the harmonious but hierarchical relationship between them. Second, elitist plebeians advocate and envisage that guardians use public communication to persuade 'the people' that their actions are indeed in 'the people's'

interests. Through these two methods, in the elitist plebeian's eyes, they can secure the willing submission of 'the people' to their authority. Thereby, they can ensure that their rule is not disrupted, and therefore, that the interests of 'the people' are not harmed. Therefore, in a further sharp departure from Burkean trusteeship, in the elitist plebeian imaginary, independent authority does not entail communicative disengagement. On the contrary, it requires continuous, mediated communicative engagement. Therefore, mediated communication is essential to elitist plebeian guardianship and 'audience democracy' (Pels, 2003) alike.

As part of this persuasive communication, guardians may sometimes, perhaps often, make representative claims as theorized by Michael Saward (2010). A representative claim, as he defines it, characterizes a representative and a constituency, and alleges that there is a correspondence between their characters that makes the former representative of the latter. As a part of the persuasive communication described above, an elitist plebeian guardian might not only claim that they act in the interests of 'the people,' but, for example, that they fulfil the wishes of 'the people.' They may also, of course, actually act in ways which are consistent with other representative claims, whether these claims are articulated or. At first glance, this may seem to the reader to contradict the theory of elitist plebeian guardianship which I have propounded above. However, it does not. Representative claims do not (necessarily) invoke a concept of authority or legitimacy. Therefore, an elitist plebeian politician may even argue that their judgement of what 'the people's' interests happens to coincide with 'the people's' judgement of the same, while simultaneously articulating a theory of elected guardianship. All they need do, in this regard, to qualify as elitist plebeian, is to maintain that their authority arises from their status as best rulers, not from any other way in which they are or claim to be representative of some constituency.

In sum, a distinct vision of state is fixed in elitist plebeian meaning systems. Like the authoritarian populist vision of state, it is distinct from liberal democracy (Urbinati, 2019). Also

like it, therefore, it consists of a democracy-disfiguring and electoral-authoritarian mode of government. However, it simultaneously differs from the populist vision in the division of powers and plurality of opinion it tolerates, the role it assigns to elections and public communication, and what representative relationships it envisages.

‘The leaders’ vs. ‘the corrupt’

I complicate this theory and root it in a real-world case by turning to the presidency of Magufuli and the party he led, CCM. CCM was formed through the amalgamation of two ruling parties. These parties had assumed power after independence from British colonial rule on the mainland (1961) and a revolution in Zanzibar (1964) respectively. CCM proceeded to rule through a formal one-party state until 1992 and a multiparty electoral-authoritarian regime thereafter. Before Magufuli’s presidency, they articulated a system of meaning in which they presented themselves at least implicitly as the ‘paternal’ providers of peace and development in a multiparty democracy (Phillips, 2010) whose morality mirrored that of founding-president Nyerere (Fouéré, 2014). During Magufuli’s presidency (2015-2021), CCM at least partially broke from its prior discourse (Paget, 2021a). However, it did so in a way that doubled-down on that implicit paternalism.

Some argue that this altered discourse exhibited populism (Jacob and Pedersen, 2018; Poncian, 2019) or indeed authoritarian populism (Nyamsenda, 2018). However, this ascription is contested. Granted, he and his party presented themselves as for ‘the people’ (*wananchi*, literally ‘the citizens’). They characterized ‘the people’ as impoverished, powerless and immiserated, or ‘the downtrodden’ (*wanyonge*). Equally, they imagined an ‘enemy’ of Tanzanians: ‘the corrupt’ (*mafisadi*). They characterized ‘the corrupt’ as wealthy, powerful and predatory. ‘The corrupt’ consisted of ‘the rich’ (*matajiri*) who raised prices to consumers, lower prices to producers, evaded taxes, misappropriated land, underinvested, fleeced the state or otherwise predated upon ‘the people.’ Equally, they consisted of senior government officials (*watendaji wa serikali*) and junior civil servants (*watumishi*),

who embezzled, wasted time, shirked work, and/or colluded with ‘the rich.’ Magufuli said that he would fight ‘the corrupt’ (Magufuli, 2015). So far, so populist.

However, Magufuli and CCM made their goal ‘development’ (*maendeleo*). They fixed the meaning of development in relation to an extensive government programme of industrialization and grand infrastructure projects (Ministry of Finance and Planning, 2016). They envisaged that fighting corruption and achieving development would serve the interests of ‘the people’ (Paget, 2021). Magufuli said that ‘I know that many people live a low life... we [CCM] are struggling to bring development for them’ (Kitalima, 2017). In a similar vein, then-Publicity and Ideology Secretary Humphrey Polepole said ‘the foundation of our party is the defence of the downtrodden. We will continue to ensure that it remains a refuge for the voiceless’ (*EATV*, 2016). As these remarks reveal, they did not present themselves as being precisely *of* ‘the people;’ they presented ‘the people’ as exterior to them. They certainly emphasized that many of them were from ‘the people’ in origin; they belaboured that some of them had what they constructed as their humble, even wretched upbringings, not least Magufuli himself. However, they also belaboured their superiority to ‘the people’ and indeed, ‘the corrupt.’

Unlike populists, Magufuli and CCM played-up the power they wielded (Paget, 2021a). Magufuli made a habit of confronting and punishing ‘the corrupt’ in mediatized events. For instance, as he fired one official for unethical behaviour, he said ‘we have to settle this on the spot, once and for all’ (Masare, 2020). He instructed this official’s successor to ‘go and work hard.’ The immediacy and irrevocability of this dismissal communicated the magnitude of his executive power. Similarly, his instruction to the successor, given in the imperative, conveyed his authority over and superiority to them. Other ministers emulated this style (*East African*, 2018). Magufuli displayed his authority over citizens in a similar manner. On one occasion, for example, he

castigated members of the public in mediatized events for their dependence on government handouts (Citizen, 2016).

Magufuli and CCM embraced their positions of authority, because, in their eyes, they were merited. They boasted that they had superior abilities that qualified them to lead ‘the people.’ CCM often belaboured its leaders’ impeccable qualifications and experiences. It often touted Magufuli’s PhD in chemistry, and the direct path that many politicians had taken to CCM leadership from academia (*Citizen*, 2020a). It especially vaunted the expertness and sharp mindedness of its leaders in instances when they supposedly outsmarted and exposed ‘the corrupt’ (*Guardian*, 2017). When Magufuli allegedly discovered manipulation of COVID-19 tests, his supporters celebrated his shrewd scientific methods, and called him, rather polemically, ‘a genius global leader’ (*Daily News*, 2020a). In their eyes, they were also distinguished from ‘the people’ by covert and expert knowledge to which, as holders of high office, they alone were privy (Poncian, 2019). In sum, they characterized themselves as a rulers that were hierarchically differentiated from ‘the people’ by their superior cognitive faculties, information and status. In other words, Magufuli and CCM did not flaunt their lowness, as Pierre Ostiguy proposes that populists do (2017). They flaunted their highness.

In their perspective, these abilities made them the best qualified to determine how development ought to be achieved and how ‘the corrupt’ should be fought. In other words, they not only claimed that development would serve ‘the people’ and that they would deliver it best; they claimed that these were facts beyond legitimate dispute. Their elite status made them the epistemologically best judges of the path to development. Accordingly, Magufuli declared that ‘CCM is the ruling party and will continue to rule forever... [CCM] will continue to bring development for Tanzanians; there is no alternative to CCM forever’ (Magufuli, 2018). This statement has often been read as a declaration of supremacy in power. It should also be read as a

statement about Tanzania's possible futures; there was no alternative forward path to development, and CCM was the party of 'real development' (Magufuli, 2020b).

Accordingly, CCM characterized any criticism of or opposition to their development plans as merely 'politics' (*siasa*). 'Politics,' in their eyes, was the personal, partisan and self-interested competition between leaders (Paget, 2020). Between elections, they said that politics ought to be confined to elections. However, during elections, they said that development should not be contested either. Development, Magufuli was fond of saying, had no party (despite, contradictorily, being innately associated with CCM as above), meaning that it was above 'politics.' Accordingly, he and his allies advocated that party delegates in intra-party elections and citizens in multiparty elections focus on choosing leaders with the best leadership qualities, especially their non-corruption (Giliard, 2017; Guardian, 2020). Therefore, in effect, they envisaged no moment in which CCM's programme of development could be legitimately contested, inclusive of during elections.

In alignment with this imaginary, they presented themselves as morally virtuous. They constructed their virtue in relation to the greed which they disavowed. Magufuli introduced a programme of austerity in government; he presented it as a curtailment of bureaucratic decadence. He imposed strict rules about government cars, saying 'we must make sacrifices' (Makana, 2016). He said 'This is a public service not a gravy train. Anybody who came here to make riches should quit' (Makana, 2016). Sacrifice (*sadaka*) became a common term to describe this frugality in office. These celebrations of abstention and austerity echo common reconstructions of founding-president Nyerere's own fastidiousness (Fouéré, 2014; Becker, 2013). An accompanying feature of this virtue was their hard work. This industrious spirit gained iconic expression in Magufuli and CCM's slogan for the 2015 election: 'only work here' (*hapa kazi tu*). These constructions of virtue and superiority alike became most polemic in eulogies for senior members of government upon their deaths during Magufuli's tenure (*Citizen*, 2020c), not least his own (Jacob, 2021). While CCM

did not, in its own eyes, need to secure popular authorization for its vision of development, it made and took numerous mediated opportunities to present its programme as popular, and in particular, its leaders as revered. This became a particularly prominent theme in how CCM portrayed its election campaign rallies, which it presented as events at which public reverence of leaders was expressed. CCM also chose to portray public sentiment upon Magufuli's death as an outpouring of adoration for their departed leader (Qorro, 2021).

Altogether, CCM constructed itself as a guardian-elite that ruled for 'the people.' For context, this guardian-status was not constructed consistently. At times, Magufuli and his party referred to promises to the public and public wishes. This promise-recalling was especially prominent in the early days of his first presidency (Magufuli, 2015). It receded in prominence in the second (Magufuli, 2020a). Therefore, this guardianship should be thought of as a dominant strain in Magufuli and CCM's thought which became more dominant still over time.

Vigilance from above

The structure of Tanzania's state was already partially consistent with the model of elitist plebeian government when Magufuli came to power in 2015. The authoritarian architecture of the one-party state was partially preserved after the transition to multipartyism. This included its legal instruments to censor media, prohibit protest and censor speech; and its extra-legal means to harm critics, prejudice media coverage, and co-opt associations (Makulilo, 2012; Morse, 2019; Paget, 2017). Nonetheless, in office, Magufuli and his government enacted a series of institutional changes.

Studies in political economy argue that these changes, in part, recentralized control over rent-seeking in the presidency (Collord, 2022; Pedersen et al., 2020). In some instances, Magufuli appointed his lieutenants to head and reform ministries and/or parastatals which held authority over prized fields of state activity. In others, he and his government reduced those bodies or dissolved them altogether; they transferred these bodies' functions to other state bodies which

were already controlled by presidential lieutenants. For example, on Magufuli's instructions, the government dissolved the Cashewnut Board, a license-granting industry regulator. It transferred some of its functions to another such board and transferred its revenue-raising powers directly to the Ministry of Finance. It ordered direct state intervention in cashew-nut buying, and authorized the army to carry this out. Similarly, the government transferred the authority to grant (lucrative) sugar import licenses from the Sugar Board to the Office of the Prime Minister.

In other instances, the functions of dissolved bodies were transferred to new state bodies which could be more feasibly controlled. In this vein, the government divided the Ministry of Energy and Minerals into two ministries, each with a separate minister and permanent secretary to oversee it. Simultaneously, it dissolved the board of the Tanzania Minerals Audit Agency (TMAA). Later, it disestablished it altogether. It transferred its responsibilities to a newly-created Mining Commission, which was given far-ranging licensing and regulatory powers. It gave the power to appoint the members of this commission to the president and the newly created Minister of Minerals (United Republic of Tanzania, 2018).

While these changes did centralize control of rent-seeking, this is not how Magufuli or his party presented them. I argue that their numerous presentations and justifications of these reforms amounts to a fragmentary elitist plebeian vision of state. Magufuli declared a 'war' against corruption (2015). In fact, he made it definitive of his programme of office (Magufuli, 2015). He presented the institutional changes which I have just described as integral parts of that war. They were integral, because Magufuli did not present good governance initiatives as the principal instruments in this war. He presented himself and his lieutenants as those instruments. He said 'my Government will closely monitor conduct of leaders and its executives in order to quickly note who engages in corruption and embezzlement acts. And, once we satisfy ourselves, we will not wait, we will take immediate measures' (Magufuli, 2015).

Accordingly, in the months following his inauguration as president, Magufuli and government leaders dismissed a slate of senior officials. In fact, government leaders proceeded to periodically dismiss senior officials throughout Magufuli's tenure. They did so, as described above, in mediatized events. In the same vein, they repeatedly launched investigations into the ports authority (*Citizen*, 2015; *East African*, 2021), the anti-corruption bureau (*Daily News*, 2018; *Citizen*, 2020b) and the revenue authority (*East African*, 2016; Malanga, 2021). A change in personnel or an ad hoc investigation, in isolation, does not amount to a change in the institutions of government. However, the presentation of these frequent, mediatized dismissals and investigations, like the narration quoted above, constructed a change in the living structure of government: the continuous 'reinstatement of discipline' from above, as Magufuli described it (2015). He said his government would fight corruption by 'improving transparency and accountability' (Magufuli, 2015). Yet in his perspective, transparency was the visibility of state activities to the apex of the state, and accountability was the intensification of 'supervision' and intervention from above (Magufuli, 2015).

Magufuli and his party presented the institutional changes described above as integral components of that emanation of discipline from the top. Each was initiated in ostensible response to the discovery of corruption. Before the dissolution of TMAA, Magufuli received reports in a televised event which purportedly connected it to mass tax evasion by mining multinationals. The Cashewnut Board was dissolved amid allegations of collusion with cashew nut exporters. Sugar Board powers were transferred and licenses frozen in a crackdown on tax evasion. The facts of these cases are disputed. Many of them seem to have been fabricated by the state. Nevertheless, through them, Magufuli and CCM wove an imaginary in which corruption was endemic to institutions in the body of state. In this context, overhauling state organs and drawing them under the scrutinizing gaze of the apex was a necessary component of the war on corruption.

In fact, Magufuli and CCM envisaged a wider set of institutional changes as part of the same war-effort. Magufuli's government multiplied and strengthened a set of bodies which they presented as responsible for investigating and punishing corruption. It established a set of courts dedicated to hearing corruption-related cases. It repeatedly reformed the Prevention and Combating Corruption Bureau (PCCB) and portrayed these reforms as attempts to augment its capabilities (*Citizen*, 2020b). Magufuli and his government reorganized the state's legal service. They created two new bodies: the Office of the Solicitor General and the Director of Public Prosecutions. They presented these reforms as attempts to increase the capacity and authority of state officials in these priority areas, and relieve the Office of the Attorney General (Kapama, 2021). Altogether, they created what they presented as a well-resourced and motivated machinery that would root-out corruption (*Daily News*, 2020b). Magufuli said upon receiving reports from the PCCB and the Controller and Auditor-General 'thank God we have all government leaders with all the resources [they need]' (*Daily News*, 2020b).

More widely, CCM advocated and envisaged a relationship between state bodies and society which was congruent with the theory of elitist plebeian guardianship articulated above. Consistent with the vision of division of powers as division of guardian labour, Magufuli called for the better resourcing of the Parliament and the Judiciary alike. Consistent with the nominal tolerance of a plurality of opinion, and therefore unlike populist constitutionalism, Magufuli often at least outwardly welcomed the expression of 'constructive' opinions in numerous forums, especially from citizens, businesses and media (*Daily News*, 2017). In fact, the more he trusted other bodies, the more he welcomed their criticism. In the 2020 election, which was heavily rigged, 97% of the directly elected MPs were from CCM. He told Parliament, in a manner reminiscent of Nyerere, that it should offer 'constructive' criticism (Takwa, 2020). Similarly, he often invited petitions from the stage at rallies, and asked to hear the views of businesspeople at forums. There

was room for a diversity of opinion, but only among those that accepted the wisdom and virtue of the regime.

Despite this outward tolerance of diversity of opinion, Magufuli and CCM fulfilled the authoritarian potential of the elitist plebeian model of government. They led a sharp authoritarian turn. This programme began before Magufuli took office, but accelerated during his tenure and in particular in the 2020 election (Paget, 2021b). They justified this authoritarianism on the grounds that, as above, their programme would serve the people by achieving development, (unconstructive) criticism of that programme was false and opposition was merely ‘political’ action intended to disrupt that programme and achieve personal gains (Paget, 2020)

Elitist plebeianisms worldwide

I have illustrated that Magufuli and his party envisaged a programme of institutional reform which resembled the elitist plebeian state-shaping template theorized above. This exemplifies these ideas and provides a concrete anchor for them, while also complicating them. Tanzania, though, is unlikely to be the only such case where states are remade in an elitist plebeian mode.

In Venezuela, Hugo Chavez’s constitutional reform and wider state-shaping was analysed as a paradigmatic instance of authoritarian populism (De la Torre, 2016). However, his successor Nicolás Maduro offered a vision of government reform which resembles elitist plebeianism. He constructed enemies of ‘the people’ below him and his government in ‘the bureaucracy’ and ‘corruption’ (VTV, 2021b). The fight against corruption, he suggested, was vital, because ‘socialism is not possible if corruption exists’ (Meza, 2014). As part of the ensuing ‘grand crusade’ against corruption (PSUV, 2013), he raised a new state apparatus to project accountability downwards. He created an anticorruption agency, answerable to himself and endowed it with extensive resources and capabilities ‘I need honest warriors,’ he explained (Meza, 2014). He passed congruent anti-corruption laws in 2021 (VTV, 2021a). More widely, he reorganized the state. In what Javier Corrales calls ‘function fusion,’ he transferred state activities to state bodies more

directly under his control (2020). His vision of these reforms as part of the ‘battle’ against corruption is reminiscent of the elitist plebeian state-shaping template. So is the hardening authoritarianism of the vanguardist regime he led (Corrales, 2020).

In southern and eastern Africa, other (post-)liberation regimes analysed as populist (Melber, 2018) speak in elitist plebeian terms and articulation elitist plebeian visions of state. A notable example is the government of President Emmerson Mnangagwa of Zimbabwe. He leads a party that liberated Zimbabwe from white supremacist rule. Like CCM, this party-regime has long constructed itself as the guardian-rulers of ‘the people,’ and invoked its leadership in the liberation struggle to justify its elevation to this status (Tendi, 2013). Upon his ascension to the presidency in 2017 after a palace coup, Mnangagwa declared that corruption would no longer be tolerated (Sithole-Matarise, 2017). ‘On these [anticorruption] ideals, my administration declares full commitment, warning that grief awaits those who depart from the path of virtue and clean business’ (*The Chronicle*, 2017) Moreover, he discursively located corruption in the bureaucracy. He continued ‘To our civil servants, it cannot be business as usual... Gone are the days of absenteeism and desultory application’ (*The Chronicle*, 2017).

Mnangagwa articulated an elitist plebeian vision of institutional, and indeed constitutional change. His government created anti-corruption courts (Mundopa, 2021). The constitutional amendment of 2021 gave the president a greater role in judicial appointments, including to these courts (Chimwamurombe, 2021). In parallel, his government created a Special Anti-Corruption Unit, which operated from within the Office of the President. He portrayed these measures as part of the reinstatement of discipline in government from above. More widely, Mnangagwa extended Zimbabwe’s already considerable authoritarian practices and apparatus. Altogether, the case of Tanzania is unlikely to be idiosyncratic; many visions of state analysed as authoritarian populist may in fact be elitist plebeian.

Conclusion

Not only do the movements often called populist, as I have argued elsewhere (Paget, 2021a), contain (at least) two ways of constructing the social. They also contain at least two visions of state. In the elitist plebeian vision, rulers are ‘guardians of the people.’ They rule in ‘the interests of the people,’ which they, not ‘the people,’ know best. In this vision, plurality of opinion is tolerable in principle. However, unconstructive criticism is not; opposition to guardian rule certainly is not. Elitist plebeians justify an authoritarian programme to censor such dissent and thereby minimise disruption to orderly government. They envisage public communication as a complementary instrument by which submission to guardian authority can be secured. In this vision of state, people do not have authority over rulers. Nevertheless, they do choose them. Election is envisaged a means by which good rulers can be selected, not a means by which people subordinate their rulers to their opinions or will. Accountability flows down from the head to the body of the state, not horizontally between branches of government. In pursuit of this vision, elitist plebeians advocate dissembling checks and limitations on the power of the apex and tolerating divisions of power as divisions of labour. They advocate refashioning the state: extending the monitory and punitive capabilities of the apex, drawing in arms-length bodies and appendages, and intensifying supervision and intervention.

The world is beset by a wave of autocratization. The argument which I have developed here throws a new light on this wave. Many studies attribute much contemporary autocratization to authoritarian populism (De la Torre, 2016; Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2012; Rogenhofer and Panievsky, 2020). However, if some of these ideologies, and the accompanying state-shaping projects, have been designated as populist in error, then the propellants of contemporary autocratization should be reconsidered. Some of the regimes overseeing projects of autocratization may be enacting not authoritarian populist visions of state, but elitist plebeian ones.

In this article, I expose new ambiguities in how the concept of populism is defined and applied. Not only, as others have argued, do some definitions of populism leave ambiguous what qualifies as the construction of ‘the elite,’ and thereby stretch the concept (Paget, 2021a). Some studies have applied the concept of populism without critically reflecting upon what conception of representation is fixed in it. Until they do so, and accordingly refine the concepts they apply, they will continue to misdesignate both elitist plebeianisms, and elitist plebeian visions of state.

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