

Benjamin Krämer | Christina Holtz-Bacha [eds.]

Perspectives on Populism and the Media

Avenues for Research



Nomos

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Populist Discourse on Distributive Social Policies: Are the Poor Citizens, Workers, Mothers?

María Esperanza Casullo

South American leftist-populist governments engage in rapid and significant economic downward redistribution; critics mention that the redistribution of income to workers and the poor, through measures which range from setting higher wages to handing out direct and indirect subsidies, is very narrowly aimed at building short-term electoral support for a populist president.¹ More sympathetic views underscore that the gains in poverty and inequality reduction brought about by them tend to be substantive and that their voters belong to overlooked and excluded groups (Heidrich & Tussie, 2008). This chapter is not concerned with the effectiveness of the social policies favored by populist governments, but with the way in which they seek to legitimize them through discourse. Rather, it works on two dimensions. In the first, I will show that the populist discourse on the matter does in fact frame social policy in terms of universal rights and citizenship; themes of retribution and redemption are always also present and in tension with them. I will analyze the links between populist discourse and social policy in one of such governments: that of the former Argentine President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner.²

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- 1 The economic definition of populism has achieved hegemonic status among economists, who denounce the fiscal unsustainability of such policies, which is usually expressed as high inflation and fiscal deficit (Dornbusch & Edwards, 1991). Of course, political scientists prefer to believe that populism is a political, not economic, phenomenon. Moreover, the essential connection between populism and redistribution does not hold for all of its versions but only for the left-leaning ones; right wing populists do not distribute income, or do it upwards. Also, some left-populist governments have a tight control of the macroeconomic variables, for instance, Evo Morales in Bolivia.
 - 2 Cristina Fernández de Kirchner governed from 2003 to 2015; she succeeded her husband, Néstor Kirchner, who was president from 2003 to 2007. After his death in 2010, she was reelected in 2011 and governed largely on her own. It is my claim, however, that her case can be extrapolated to the other three most recent populist presidents of South America: Hugo Chávez of Venezuela, Evo Morales of Bolivia, and Rafael Correa of Ecuador. These three presidents, plus Néstor and Cristina Kirchner of Argentina, made the expansion of social expenditures a cornerstone of

In the second dimension, I will show that the combination of ideological tropes and the construction of a peculiar form of syncretic discourse had two aims: to build a large base of support with the use of targeted tropes and to try to foresee and preempt media criticism of the new social policies. In Argentina, social expenditures are routinely framed by the media as irresponsible, unsustainable profligacy which is wont to enlarge “fiscal deficit.” Cristina Fernández de Kirchner was fond of combining populist forms of discourse with a more technocratic, heavily state-centered defense of public policies (Casullo, 2019, p. 110). In the case under study here (the Universal Sons and Daughters³ Subsidy or AUH in Spanish), President Fernández’s explanation of the new policy were not, in fact, very populist at all—they tried not to antagonize particular social groups and underscored the fiscal rationality of the new policy. However, the mainstream media and the main opposition parties framed it as just another iteration of “fiscal populism,” aimed at buying out votes, using hard-earned tax-payers dollars to reward undeserving the poor, and enlarging the “fiscal hole” of the Argentine state. These findings fall in line with recent research on the topic of media and populism which states that media and social communicators do more than just “reflect” how populist a politician is, but they rather have a considerable degree of agency in choosing to depict, or not depict, certain figures as populists.

1. South American Populism and Social Distribution.

The left-wing populist governments of Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Argentina dedicated significant resources to distributive social policies aimed at reducing poverty and inequality. These policies included investments in education and public health, expansion of public works with a view toward creating employment, and the creation of conditional cash transfers programs (CCTs) such as Bono Juancito Pinto and Bono Juana Azurduy (Bolivia) and the Asignación Universal por Hijo (Argentina) targeted toward school-aged children and their mothers (Arza 2018; Nagels, 2014). Argentina implemented a substantive expansion of social security by expanding the right to a state-paid pension to virtually every adult over

their presidencies. Their policies and discourses were similar, if not identical (Casullo, 2019; Levitsky & Roberts, 2011, pp. 14-16).

³ I have chosen this translation instead of “Universal Children’s Subsidy” to highlight how the official name underscores the fact that children are somebody’s son and daughters (“hijos”).

65 years old; this policy was specially targeted toward women who had never worked outside their home and was a recognition of the economic value of domestic work. (Lustig, Pessino, & Scott, 2013) In Ecuador, Rafael Correa's government also implemented several programs aimed at pregnant women, mothers and children, such as the Bono de Desarrollo Humano (Human Development Bonus) (Araujo, Bosch, & Schady, 2016; Reinhart & McGuire, 2017).

Poverty and inequality did indeed fall in South America during the decade and a half of leftists' tenure; while it is often said that the improvements in the standards of living were purely a result of the export boom, there is evidence to sustain the claim that higher social policy investments led to higher drops in poverty and inequality (CEPAL, 2018; Lustig, Pessino, & Scott, 2013). On the whole, the macroeconomic effects were mixed; Evo Morales in Bolivia achieved remarkable macroeconomic stability, with high growth and low inflation, while the Chavismo in Venezuela ended up with some of the worst economic indicators in the world and oversaw a dramatic decline in the quality of life of the country's inhabitants. Argentina and Ecuador navigated between these two extremes.

This chapter does not try to evaluate the effectiveness of their social programs or their fiscal sustainability. Rather, its objective is to understand the way in which left-wing populist discourse talks about social issues like inequality, poverty, social justice, and social rights, and how these types of discourse lend legitimacy to the actual actions of the state bureaucracy. The argument will be that left-wing populists choose to legitimize these policy interventions by deploying a type of discourse that hybridizes a classical left-wing language of class and universal rights with a right-wing tradition that centers on compassion, private virtue and philanthropy. Populist discourse combines tropes from these two ideological "worlds," but it does so in a unique way. I have identified three characteristics that are particular to populist discourse on social policy: they are "punching upwards" in terms of social antagonism; they reject class cleavages and emphasize the unity of the people; they both negate and reinforce the tension between the spheres of rights, work, and family, and they fall back onto a gendered vision of poverty. They do so, partly, hoping to preempt accusations of fiscal profligacy and irresponsibility by opposition figures and media. However, this strategy is only partially successful, and, as will be seen later, the discourse is tensioned from within by the way in which it hybridizes and combines tropes and ideologies; these tensions often translate into the social policies themselves which can develop in a fragmentary or contradictory fashion.

2. Populist Communication and Social Policies

The most recent wave of left-wing populist governments of South America came to power in the aftermath of the social and economic crisis brought about by the implosion of neoliberal reforms of the previous decade. The final years of the twentieth century were defined by the realization that the embrace of privatization, deregulation, and liberalization (often called the “Washington Consensus”) (Roberts, 2003) did not bring about widespread prosperity in South America; during the nineties, unemployment, poverty and inequality had risen in Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Argentina, even though their GDPs had grown sporadically during that time. The worsening of the standards of living caused the appearance of protest movements across the region;⁴ the escalation of protests and state repression led to a state of “permanent crisis” that had an impact on these countries’ political party systems. The traditional or centrist parties were seen as bipartisan partners in the implementation of a policy of seemingly perpetual “structural adjustments.” They could not or would not represent the widespread social dissatisfaction; this in turn created an opening for charismatic outsiders that promised to end the state dismantling, alleviate poverty, and “punish” the proprietary elites through heavier taxation and regulation (Casullo, 2019, pp- 184-85).

A wave of left-populists coming to power began in 1998 with Hugo Chávez’s victory in Venezuela. Néstor Kirchner, Evo Morales, Rafael Correa, and Fernando Lugo followed. These presidents were elected in part thanks to their promises to put in place more robust social policies geared toward reducing poverty and inequality that were at the very core of the contract between populist leaders and their followers. These themes, however, were not invented by the populist governments out of nothing. In most cases, as authors such as Garay or Velasco have shown, the demands for stronger distribution and heavier regulation and taxation predated the newly elected populist government; they had been central to the anti-neoliberal social movements of the nineties, which not only fought against wider macroeconomic policies but also against market-, NGOs- or philan-

⁴ Such as the “Piquetero” movements of unemployed workers in Argentina, the “Co-calero” or Coca-growers movement in Bolivia from which Evo Morales jumped to politics, or the “Sem Terra” movement of landless peasants in Brazil. Massive protests took place in Venezuela during the Caracazo, in Bolivia during the so-called Water and Gas Wars, and in Argentina in 1995 and 2001. These various protests and riots were met with state-led repression that caused dozens or even hundreds of deaths.

thropy-based targeted social policies and for more universal rights-based ones (Garay, 2017; Velasco, 2015).

When the new governments took hold of the state apparatus, social policy itself became much more politicized; during the previous fifteen years, the presidents and government agencies had at the same time acknowledged the rise of poverty and explained it largely through indirect causes, such as the lack of social capital or lack of marketable labor skills. In line with this, governments largely opted for market-based, targeted, means-tested social programs, which were spearheaded by multilateral institutions such as the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank and several development foundations and agencies (Andrenacci & Soldano, 2006; Casullo, Caminotti, Schillagi, & Tempesta, 2003). These programs combined minimal last-resort assistance with job training.

Once in power, however, the left-populist governments opted for a more openly political discourse when talking about social and economic topics. Distributive policies were presented as something more than simple technocratic problem-solving; they were framed as moral retribution to long-suffering social groups, as evidence of the popular control of the state, and as proof that the state, not the market, was the proper agent of distribution and welfare. The state bureaucracy took an almost heroic meaning, as it was the only actor able to achieve social justice; therefore, all these new social programs were designed and implemented directly by state bureaucracies (whether new or old). The question that interests us here is, *What conceptual framework do populist presidents use when talking about social policy?* The public legitimation of such policies was done using an idiosyncratic blend of discursive tropes and frames. The finding of this chapter is that they chose a hybrid framework, composed as a mix and match of tropes and frames from more traditional left and the right-wing discourses.

3. Populism: A Fourth World of the Welfare State?

Just to simplify my argument, the starting point of the chapter will be the classical classification of the “Three Worlds of the Welfare State” by Gosta Esping-Andersen (1990). In that text, Esping-Andersen talks about the “liberal,” “social-democratic” and “conservative-corporative” frames for conceptualizing and legitimizing distributive policies. I want to focus on two crucial differences between them: the different ways in which the holder of the welfare benefits is defined (citizen/consumer/worker), and the social

sphere in which the benefits are adjudicated or distributed (political institutions/markets/work).⁵

In the social-democratic paradigm, the *political sphere* is the realm in which distributive priorities are set; thus, benefits are defined as *rights* that are politically defined, politically adjudicated and *universal*; the holder of the benefits is the citizen, irrespective of his or her state of deprivation. In the liberal paradigm, the ability to accrue higher degrees of social welfare is thought to depend on the *market*, and the agent upon which the benefits are conferred is the *consumer*; or, to be more precise, welfare occurs to the consumer as a positive externality of their market transactions. The welfare effects of market transactions come from the automatic balancing of supply and demand; politics does not hand out rights or "entitlements" directly but creates "systems of incentives" to influence markets. Finally, in the corporate paradigm, the benefits are associated with the sphere of *work*, i.e., each person's position in the production process and thus the *worker* is the benefit holder. In this last case, for instance, health insurance, pensions, paid vacations, and other rights are dependent on one's position as a *worker*; very often, different classes of workers and owners receive different or "proportional" benefits.

Governments that come to power with a more or less clear programmatic stance often position themselves in one of these "worlds" to explain and justify social policies, and they use the language, metaphors, and narratives associated with them. Social-democratic politicians usually use a language that is based on the notion of rights; typically, they seek to implement social policies that are universal, and they do not make them conditional on a person's state of deprivation and need. Officeholders that espouse a liberal, or better yet, neoliberal ideology opt for market-based solutions—when these do not exist or they are politically unpalatable, they opt to have the state partner with NGOs or private philanthropic associations. Corporatist policies channel state benefits to workers, oftentimes by bringing to the table labor unions and business sectors; a person's ability to become the recipient of a given benefit is dependent upon her or his position in the production chain.

However, South American populists employ discourses that jump from one "world" to the other. They construct their own "tradition" from the

5 Esping-Andersen's trichotomy of welfare can be considered overly simplistic and somewhat outdated. However, his basic categorization is still useful as a heuristic device to understand political discourses in South America, which are usually conducted in simplified, anachronistic and emotion-laden ways.

act of hybridizing and creation. While their discourses on poverty, inequality, and social policy in general can be said to be "leftist," its features set it distinctly apart from the "classical" social-democratic left. Rather, they tend to favor ideological hybridization, and they can mix and match leftist and right-wing traditions with impunity. This hybridization is nowhere more clear than in the realm of social policy. The discourse of South American left-wing populist governments cannot be classified squarely into one of the previous ideological camps, but usually deploys tropes from all of them, along with some new ones.

It is important to begin by noting that the discourse of these governments is overall recognizably *leftist*. They single out and antagonize the same social actors that the left usually does: financial, business, landowning oligarchies, banks, the US government, and technocratic elites. This is made even more clear by comparing them with the so-called right-wing populisms, which can be said to direct their social antagonism in a very different direction: they choose to *punch downwards*,⁶ by singling out as adversaries disadvantaged social groups such as migrants, ethnic minorities, indigenous people, and women. The "punching-upwards" populisms take the fight, so to speak, to the economic, cultural and social elites. I have called the governments or movements that engage in a constant antagonization to the upper classes "punching-upwards populism" elsewhere (Casullo, 2019, pp. 120-21). While these governments do not lack a discernible ideological bent, it is true that its expression does not follow a classic "programmatic" model.⁷

The broader policy goals of South American populists also loosely align with the social democratic tradition; in broad terms, they want to tax the

6 Many authors would, however, argue that right-wing populists also "punch upwards" and are anti-elitist since they attack the elites for letting migrants in, subverting traditional lifestyles, etc. While it would be impossible to develop the argument here fully, I believe it is important to distinguish between the way in which populists antagonize the *political elite* (the *casta*, the *partitocracy*, the "Washington swamp") with the way in which they construct and antagonize a *social Other*, which is the true target of their animosity. The social Other might be located upwards (bankers, international financial organizations, landed oligarchs) or downwards (migrants, ethnic populations, feminists, religious minorities) (Casullo, 2019, pp. 120-123).

7 That is why it is almost impossible or useless to make ideological analysis of South American populisms by reading party manifestos, which either do not exist or are completely irrelevant. Ideology is defined by the public, living words of the populist leaders, which "name" who the adversary of the people is in a moment-to-moment, flexible way.

rich more heavily and use the resources to fund redistributive state-run programs. But there are important differences in how they define these objectives, how they talk about them in public, and how they seek to legitimize them politically; these differences have to do with their rejection of class-cleavages, their ambivalence in defining the right-holder as citizens, workers, or poor people, and the constant use of the "virtuous mother" trope. I will analyze four dimensions of the left-populist discourse on social policy: punching upwards, rejection of class-cleavages, citizens vs. the people, the tension between citizen/worker/family and the use of a gendered rhetoric.

4. Populist Rejection of Class-Cleavages: The Poor as Citizens, as Workers, or as Mothers?

To begin with, there is a crucial difference between populist and programmatic leftist discourse in regard to how to speak about class. As should be obvious, left-populists are very reluctant to speak in terms of *class*, not only in the Marxist sense or even in a sociological, functional one. As has been noted before by Mudde, among others, the idea of the unity of the people is central to any populist discourse; the people must be whole, and factional division is the enemy (Mudde, 2004). However, these governments can be said to be "of the left" because they antagonize the same groups that the left does, broadly speaking. I have said elsewhere that it is preferable to speak of "punching-upwards" populisms than "leftist" ones. These governments "punch upwards" by antagonizing elite groups related to big business, agriculture, media, or finance; it is important to note that they do not single them out *as a class*. First, the antagonism is less structural than moral. It is not that the bourgeois class is determined to be against the people, but they have *chosen* to do so. Because the oligarchy has become traitorous to the people, but it is not sociologically or teleologically determined to be so, populists never lose hope that maybe not all of them are immoral, or they can be convinced to see the error of their ways. From Juan Domingo Perón on, leftist populists combine an antagonization of the upper classes with a plea to them to understand that *it is their actual best interests to be their ally*.⁸ (They never seem to succeed in convincing them, however.)

⁸ See Sidicaro, 2002, pp. 97-110.

Because of this ambivalence, populists do not want the elimination of this elitist social Other, nor do they think it is possible. They need it "eternally," as the Other against which to create and reaffirm ("forever") the identity of their movement. And, finally, left populists are not anti-capitalist, at least, not all of them and not completely. They do not object to the capitalist class *per se*; in fact, most South American left populists view themselves as the true architects and pilots of economic development. What they do object to is the action of a few *immoral* capitalists who take advantage of their vast resources to plot against the people. There are many examples of this logic at work. For instance, populists do not nationalize the press; they criticize it virulently and *ad hominem*. Modernizing populists do not expropriate the landed oligarchs; in left-wing populism, they tax them to the helm and insult them, but they do not seek their political or economic elimination.

Because it is simply impossible for South American populists to justify the expansion of social policies by using full-throated, class-based, social-democratic tropes, the resulting discursive strategy must resort to using and combining different definitions of who belongs to "the people" and is, therefore, due its fair share of retribution.

The populist discourse on social policy fluctuates between anchoring the legitimacy of the distributive policies in the rights of the citizens *vis a vis* the rights of the workers, and the rights of the mothers, in the case of women. This ambivalence is rooted in the very idea of the unity of the people, as mentioned in the previous paragraph. The citizen is individual by definition, and all citizens are equal, so to speak. But the very notion of "the people" presupposes a collective, or at the very least a "solidarity chain" (Laclau, 2005, p. 69) of collective groups; the collective, it is something different and of a higher order than the individual. Oftentimes, the right to the particular benefits being granted by the state is thus connected to the individual's participation in a collective of a "higher" moral order. Thus, anti-poverty policies are often framed in terms of "workers' rights" or "mother's rights" and not of universal citizens' rights.

5. *The Poor as Citizens, as Workers, or as Mothers: The Case of Argentina's "Asignación Universal por Hijo"*

The constant and subtle displacements between the citizen/worker/mother as the proper right-holder are put into stark relief by the history of the Argentine subsidy to infants. While some proto-social policies were implemented before him, much of the Argentine welfare state (such as it was)

was originated or expanded during Juan Domingo Perón's government. Even before him, however, Argentine policymakers were concerned with the need for furthering population growth (or immigration) to provide workers with a labor market that was close to full employment for much of the twentieth century, so some tentative social programs were put in place during the thirties and forties by the conservative governments, hoping to lure more workers. However, Perón greatly expanded social policies. His first government (1945-1955) created some universal programs (free and universal public education, including making public universities free, free and universal public hospitals), but most of the expansion of rights and benefits was done using the corporatist model. Social benefits were made conditional on work, and unions were a close partner of social welfare.

So strong was the corporatist model that all the governments between 1955 and the late seventies continued or even expanded it. (This, while Peronism was banned.) Social rights, such as pensions, health insurance, paid vacations, and severance benefits, were made conditional to the individual's position as an employed person. The "worker" was broadly defined in discourse as a male, able-bodied and, of course, heterosexual home provider and *pater familias*. One of the elements of the corporatist package of worker's benefits was the child's subsidy, which was paid to the father of any child of school age. La "Asignación Familiar" or "Family Subsidy" was received as a supplement in the worker's regular monthly paycheck, not as a state subsidy to be paid directly to the citizen. A consequence of tying the perception of the benefit to work was that unemployed or informally employed people did not receive it, irrespective of how many children they had. As explained by Andrenacci and Soldano (2006), this was largely not seen as a problem, for as long as the labor market was robust, Argentina was close to full employment and the majority of the population was paid through the formal system. Even though it was never framed as such, the system was close to being *de facto* universal.

But the Argentine labor market underwent dramatic transformations as de-industrialization and the erosion of the formal labor markets began in the late seventies. After a coup-d'état in 1976, a debt crisis of 1982, and a hyperinflation in 1989, employment and informality rose dramatically. By the mid-nineties, over one-third of workers had become informally employed—after the economic crisis of 2001-2002, this figure reached fifty percent. When Néstor Kirchner was elected in 2003, unemployment was over twenty-two percent, and almost half of Argentine workers did not have rights to paid vacations, paid maternity leave, state pension, or any subsidy to their children. During the first four years of Néstor Kirchner's administration, when the economy grew and the employment rate recovered, he

tried to recreate the old Peronist developmental formula that relied solely on job creation for welfare; however, while unemployment fell dramatically during the commodities-boom years between 2003-2007, informality did not shrink at a comparable pace. In fact, during the twelve years of Kirchnerist rule, it was never lower than thirty percent.

And, to make matters worse, the financial crisis hit Argentina in 2009 and the commodities bubble burst, and unemployment began to rise again. Cristina Fernández de Kirchner then implemented several counter-cyclical economic and social measures with the goal of stimulating the economy. Among them were two redistributive programs that amounted to the largest expansion of social expenditures in decades. They both signified somewhat of a break with the Peronist corporatist model and an advancement toward something new. The first expansion was the "Moratoria Previsional" or "Social Security Moratorium;" it made it possible for people that had been employed in the informal sector or were housewives or domestic workers to have access to a state pension. This program expanded pension coverage to over ninety percent of the population over 65 years old. (This program was advertised as "Jubilación de Amas de Casa," or Housewives Pensions, and was presented as a recognition of the economic value of domestic work; it tied into the gendered narrative of AUH, which I will discuss later.) The second one was the "Asignación Universal por Hijo," or Universal Sons and Daughters Subsidy. The program was launched in late 2009; it was designed as a complementary system to the Family Subsidy (it was directed toward children and paid the same amount of money per capita) but was specifically targeted to unemployed or informally employed *mothers*. I will focus on the latter, because the discourse used to sell it to the public is a perfect condensation of the populist hybridization when discussing poverty and social rights.

6. The "Asignación Universal por Hijo": From Corporatism to All of the Above

The AUH, or "Asignación Universal por Hijo" (Universal Sons and Daughters Subsidy), was a cornerstone of President Fernández de Kirchner's first presidency. She clearly saw it in this way; notably, she chose not to pass a bill through Congress for this program; instead, she signed an executive order and then she personally announced the new program using a "cadena nacional" (special televised announcement). She meant to underscore the centrality of her own decision-making process; later, the success of the AUH was one of the central elements of her 2011 presidential campaign.

of us who have money, we do not need the AUH."¹² The program falls short of universality, but it is not targeted and means-tested either, because it excludes only the very rich. (The same thing happened with the Social Security moratorium.)

At the same time, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner affirmed her government's commitment to upholding and improving the labor markets, claiming that the children's subsidy would not interfere with the market hiring practices and would not act as a disincentive for parents to enter the labor market—an argument that has been a mainstay of the anti-populist business sectors of the country for at least a century. (She argues that "the broadening of the family subsidy to unemployed and informally employed sectors, who make less than minimum wage, will not compete with the labor market, which is a common complaint of business sector against social welfare.")¹³

We can hear in her words echoes of the old Peronist corporatist rejection of a clear class-based antagonism, and yet another iteration of the classical Peronist trope aimed at trying to convince the Argentine business sector that a more progressive social policy is, in fact, good for them. The overall project of Kirchnerism is defined in her speech as "creating well-paying, decent jobs" and "to add value to our (national) production, to have more industries, more firms, more shops." These are the two first layers of meaning that the discourse is trying to combine: social justice based on a universal concept of citizenship, and a unitarian/corporatist ideal in which all the social sectors are the winners and none is the loser. Moreover, the spirit of this discourse is not antagonistic but *pedagogical*: trying

12 "Obviamente que esto no puede ser para los hijos de aquellos que tenemos la inmensa suerte de poder darles a nuestros hijos todo lo que ellos merecen y todo lo que se les ocurre y tienen ganas. Los que tenemos dinero, no necesitamos asignaciones familiares, esto está muy claro."

13 "En este caso, la ampliación de la asignación familiar a los hijos de desocupados y de sectores de la economía informal que perciban menos del salario mínimo, vital y móvil tiende de la misma manera no a competir en el mercado laboral quitando mano de obra, porque en definitiva lo que pasaba muchas veces con los planes sociales, y se quejaban del sector empresarial, es que no se conseguía mano de obra porque querían seguir con los planes sociales; (...) nuestro proyecto que es lograr trabajo decente para todos los argentinos que es, no tengan dudas, el único instrumento para combatir y erradicar la pobreza. Las sociedades que han alcanzado desarrollo y crecimiento social, ha sido porque han podido generar puestos de trabajo muy bien remunerados y un sistema de seguridad social que ha cubierto a todos los sectores, y hacia eso vamos."

The radical ambiguity and polysemy of populist discourse on issues of rights is perfectly on display here. On the one hand, it is claimed that the new children's subsidy will achieve the near-universalization of rights while using an egalitarian framework of social justice; on the other, the discourse at other times reinforces the old frame that ties children's poverty to motherhood and, while claiming to protect mothers, reinforces the notion that children are mainly the *responsibility* of the mother. It also situates the "problem" squarely in the domestic sphere and, by choosing to keep the structure of two separate "systems" of welfare (one tied to the formal employment of any of the parents, one targeted directly to poor mothers) instead of simply merging the two into one simpler system of direct transfers, ended up reinforcing anti-poor sentiments embodied in the common criticism that poor women "get knocked up on purpose" ("se embarazan por el plan") in order to cash in on their children. However, and as a final point, the policies which were implemented in Argentina achieved a high degree of popularity and institutionalization, as shown by the fact that the neoliberal government of Mauricio Macri (CFK's successor) upheld them while reducing overall public expenditures.

7. *The Media Reception of the Shifting Frames of Populist Discourse*

The ambivalence and polysemy of populist discourse can be found in almost all of the public rationales for social and gender policy. While all the left-populist governments can boast of having had substantive impacts on poverty and inequality, it is important to analyze their specific policies in isolation, because there is a difference between "pro-poor," "pro-women," and "pro-equality" policies (Dingler, Lefkofridis, & Marent, 2017, p. 352). Governments that take pride in their leftist orientation have ended up upholding maternalizing and patronizing definitions, while rightist governments nimbly deploy some elements of the liberal discourse on rights and the feminist discourse on gender to justify xenophobic or regressive policies (Borchorst & Siim, 2002).

brando... no estoy hablando en contra de los hombres, estoy hablando de las cosas que pasan en la vida, que quede claro. Entonces, ¿qué pasa?: queremos que la que cobre la AUH sea la madre siempre, salvo que por decisión judicial quien tenga la tenencia de los chiquitos sea el padre. Siempre, entonces, cualquiera sea que la gestione, lo va a cobrar la madre, salvo que el padre tenga asignado, por decisión judicial, la tenencia y guardia de los niños. Esto es de absoluta justicia."

ulism but also “a producer of populism in itself” (Chatterjee-Doodly & Crilley, 2019, p. 73). The constant shifting of frames employed by South American populists might be an attempt to respond to the fact that, as Chatterjee-Doodly and Crilley argue, “Media actors exert their own agency, and processes of interaction and circulation between them have a substantive influence on the discourses that shape social conditions” (Chatterjee-Doodly & Crilley, 2019, p. 74). At the same time, can it not be the case that if anything a leftist president will do on the social policy front is going to be immediately labeled as extremely populist, there are strong incentives to just become *more populist*? Media and leaders seem locked in a relation of mutually reinforcing antagonism.

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