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The *Populares* and Clodius Publius Pulcher of the Late Roman
Republic in the Context of Modern Populism

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Bachelor Thesis

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Prague, 2022

Declaration:

I hereby declare that the thesis is an original work written by myself, except where due references are made in the text. The thesis was not used to obtain any other title, degree, or diploma.

Acknowledgment:

I wish to wholeheartedly thank Professor Martin Putna, who with due diligence and patience accompanied my work process. I thank him for his motivational words and consideration of my needs, without which I may have not been able to complete this work as successfully. I wish to also thank Professor Frantisek Kalenda, who was my previous supervisor, and put me on the track of writing this thesis.

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Abstract

Modern populism in simple terms is a political ideology that champions the common people against the governing elite. While the term can be traced to pre-modern manifestations, such as the Roman *populares*, it is questionable whether the Roman example can be considered the fully-fledged populist ideology we see today. Using contemporary sources, this paper discusses various methodologies of defining populism, deriving from these an original, concise definition of populism. The definition encompasses nine key characteristics of populism that are later applied to a specific case study of a Roman *populares* leader. The contextual historical situation of the late Roman Republic is then presented, so as to understand what had happened there that allowed for popular politics and the *populares* faction to develop, including an evaluation of different characters of the *populares* that can be considered as further case studies for analysis. The life and politics of the Late Roman Republic's Publius Clodius Pulcher is then outlined as the specific case study chosen in this research. Finally the modern definition of populism is applied to Clodius and the text deciphers the applicability and necessity to analyze ancient Roman demagogues through modern lenses.

Keywords: populism, *populares*, Publius Clodius Pulcher, 'the people', the tribunate, plebeian, reforms and policies

Introduction:

Aims and Scope of the Research

The Roman Republic is an era from which scholars today and throughout history have learned much and continue to do so. It is no coincidence that modern societies owe Rome a great measure of social, political, and cultural legacy. The Republic had flaunted a complex system of governance, which had already encompassed ideas of the division of power amongst governing bodies. Romans spoke in Latin, a language we owe much for the formation of Western languages. The Roman legal system was essential to the formation of modern courts. These phenomena were integral to the foundation of modern democracies. However, without a doubt, today, there exist fundamental differences from the world of the ancients. Therefore, it is paramount to study these precursors to our modern world, to understand where disparities and similarities lie, so that scholars can better assess, and therefore teach, the complexities which underlie our visions of the world we live in today.

One of the most baffling modern political phenomena is populism. A term that escapes concrete definition, populism is a political current that has, over the past century, managed to move mountains. Scholars continue to debate the essence and qualities of this political phenomenon. From popular media outlets to the depths of academic research, the looming of populist movements is current. Therefore, this research takes an original approach in equating a derivation of different sources to obtain a definition of modern populism and apply it to the turbulent times of the late Roman Republic, in which demagoguery was one of the main reasons for its fall.

The word populism has its roots in the Roman *populares*. However, the meaning of the word and its etymological foundation vary significantly regarding the socio-political context in which they exist today and in the past. This project aims to consolidate this gap, to conceptualize whether it is possible to apply a modern understanding of populism to the ancient case of Roman populist movements. Colorful characters of the late Roman Republic, such as the Gracchi, Julius Caesar, and Publius Clodius Pulcher,

can be casually compared to modern populist manifestations by equating appeals to the masses or anti-establishment rhetoric concomitant to modern equivalences. Yet, such cursory analogies concoct a dangerous anachronism; it is imperative to acknowledge that society differed during the late Roman Republic. Representative democracy was not nearly as representative as today, and the army was not an institution separated from the total control of political leaders. This paper does not suggest that ancient Roman populism is the same or very similar to today's populism. For this reason, the methodology here is to, first, find a modern definition of populism, not an obvious task by itself; secondly, to describe the political and social situation of the late Roman Republic; and third, to apply the definition derived onto a chosen case study of a controversial 'populist' character, namely Publius Clodius Pulcher, to observe whether one can at all analyze ancient populism by the standards of modern definitions. Thus, the paper begins by pinpointing the modern populist phenomenon so that specific characteristics can be defined for evaluating ancient populism while remaining true to the fact that ancient Roman society was essentially different from modernity, and therefore any comparisons are made with strict rigidity.

Methodology and Organization of the Research

The organization of this paper is based on three movements. Firstly, following modern research about populism, a comprehensive definition of populism is derived, according to which nine main qualities of populism are presented. This chapter outlines varying debates about the topic, presenting concomitant and clashing methodologies of defining populism, after which the definition and the methodologies that underlie it are outlined.

Second, a detailed narrative of the Late Roman Republic is presented, the problems that plagued it, and the internal struggles that fueled the popular demagogic movements that are here analyzed. The chapter continues by exploring the life and politics of such popular politicians that can potentially be studied in the context of modern populism.

Lastly, the third chapter recounts the circumstances of the specific case study to which the definition of populism is ascribed. Following the

account of the political adventures and scandals of Publius Clodius Pulcher, the fourth chapter applies the definition of populism to his life, systematically proceeding through each of the nine main characteristics of the definition to analyze whether they apply, do not apply, or apply with reservation.

Sources Review

The sources chosen for this research vary, as a large portion pertains to books that deal with modern populism, while another can be found in a totally different area of academia, namely books and articles that discuss the layout of the Roman Republic. Further, several primary sources were chosen to discern an original narrative of Publius Clodius Pulcher's life and actions.

Of the primary sources, Cicero is the most common source, yet not the most reliable, due to his contemporary personal enmity with Clodius himself. In his letters, primarily to his friend Atticus, we find that Cicero divulges his opinions of his enemy's deeds, through which we learn much of the information we now know about Clodius. Thus, to create a faithful narrative, one must take what Cicero says with a grain of salt. To further build upon the story of Clodius, Cassius Dio, Plutarch, Sallust, and Appian are referred to. These historians belong to a different era; thus, there is less reason to think that they would have been too biased in their presentation of the facts.

The secondary literature regarding the definition of populism is collected from rigorous research done by leading scholars on the topic. Of these, many disagree with each other regarding the definition of populism. Thus, the sources aim to provide a comprehensive overview of the literature dealing with the subject.

Regarding the secondary sources that discuss ancient Rome, these were chosen on account that they deal with the main issues of this research, such as the *populares*, the fall of Rome, or the question of representativeness in the Roman Republic. Of these scholars are known names to which further research was ascribed, some are older (from the

1980s or 1990s) and others are much more contemporary. The fact that the subject of Rome is still today discussed so vehemently shows that analyzing an ancient society is no obvious matter.

Chapter I: Defining Populism

While today there is no doubt that populism is widespread, scholarly debates are hard-fought to agree on a comprehensive definition of populism. Paul Taggart describes the problems of defining populism as being rooted in its evasive and changeable characteristics; populists' political programs and policies are varied from country to country and from leader to leader (Taggart, 2000, p.1-2). In this sense, populism is "chameleonic." It inherits other secondary features from different political ideas based on the contexts in which it thrives, denying universal principles that dictate a quintessential definition (Taggart, 2000, p.4-5). Defining populism based on secondary characteristics that describe the policy, style, rhetoric, or other specific attributes of political behavior is problematic in that it cannot capture the wide variety of populist manifestations and derive from it a fully encompassing definition. Thus, many scholars aim to understand populism based on its key, primary elements that can be empirically observed using a generalist approach that ties together a ubiquitous conceptual underpinning to the phenomenon. Defining populism requires a fine line between avoiding too much attention to the specific contexts of populism that may exclude other populisms and, on the other hand, diving too deeply into a general or universal definition that may include political movements that are not populist. For example, appealing to the masses is fundamental to populism, yet many liberal democrats employ this strategy and are in direct enmity with populism. Therefore, as a defining characteristic, the political tactic is insufficient and too general to offer a solution to the problem. On the other hand, if we consider the United States' People's Party and Russian *narodniki* at the end of the nineteenth century, while they both conducted politics that aimed at the countryside, the former was concerned with agrarian radicalism, and the latter with the construction of a romantic narrative of the Russian peasant; if we look at Latin American populism,

then we find a shift to movements concerning the urban working class, revealing the limits of the contextual approach that deals with specificities of populist politics (Taggart, 2000, p. 6).

The first part of this chapter will present different approaches that deal with the methodologies of defining populism, delineating their strengths and limitations. The ideas offered are just a small array of potentially applicable definitional methods that deal with the issue of populism. The second part of this chapter will consolidate a comprehensive definition of populism based primarily on an ideational approach and include elements of the strategic approach to synthesize the primary characteristics of populism.

1.1 Methodological Approaches to Defining Populism

1.1.2 The Ideational Approach

Much of recent scholarship employs the ideational approach to populism. As can be discerned by its name, this approach defines populism as an ideology. It analyzes its “ideas in general, and ideas about ‘the people’ and ‘the elite’ in particular” (Cas Mudde et al., 2017, ch. 2). There are four key concepts to the ideational approach to defining populism: “ideology, the people, the elite, and general will” (Cas Mudde et al., 2017, ch. 2). A guiding principle to populism’s opposition between the people and the elite, an antagonism emphasized by ideologies other than populism, is morality, rather than, for example, class, as it would be in socialism. Populists purport the purity and authenticity of the real people and oppose them to an elite that betrayed the people. Ideational definitions posit that “commitment to ‘the people’ [...] is one of the most common features of populism” (Taggart, 2000, p. 91). Yet, undoubtedly ‘the people’ is a very ambiguous term, and, as Sofia Näsström mentions, the obscurity of the concept has been one consistently exploited in the history of politics, for worse or for better. In this regard, Carlos De la Torre is right to say that “its vagueness, the fact that it can be given alternative and even contradictory meanings, explains why it can be used so efficiently as a mobilizing tool” (Torre, 2015, ch. Introduction). Taggart puts forth the idea that the populists present the

people as a 'silent majority,' distant from mainstream politics, who are stirred into political participation by feelings of necessity "brought on by extreme conditions- by a sense of crisis or collapse" (Taggart, 2000, p. 93-4). This sense of crisis, and the construction of an enemy through the demonization of certain groups, such as the elite, is imagery populists often utilize to mobilize the people, who, in turn, join together in solidarity, despite the heterogeneity of their social groups, to support the populist. Taggart conceptualizes the populist discourse of the people in terms of the heartland, which embodies the positive aspects of everyday life that have somehow been lost to the present, yet is evoked in an imagined territory where a "virtuous and unified population resides" (Taggart, 2000, p. 95). The heartland concept helps elucidate populism's call to power for the people, based on the approach of ideational definitions of populism. Ideational explanations emphasize the people, their mobilization, and their role in populist power. Hence, a bottom-up approach is often used, which will be later criticized in the section addressing methodologies that focus on populism as a political strategy.

The ideational approach necessarily employs the principle of thin-centeredness in the populist ideology, which has a limited scope and does not offer universal long-term or macro solutions to socio-political problems (Cas Mudde et al., 2017, ch. 2). Scholars of the ideational school of populism generally agree on the concept of thin-centeredness and the antagonism between "a reified will of the common people and an evil conspiring elite" (Hawkins et al., 2019, p. 60). Implicit in populism's polarization of the elite and ordinary people is its embodiment of a Manichean understanding of good and evil, which goes against pluralist principles of society. Pluralist political discourse advocates popular sovereignty but is non-partisan in its judgments, accepting the possibility of varying opinions. Some scholars, such as Michael Freeden, initially considered populism a thin-centered ideology but subsequently argued that it differs from ideologies in that its ideas "do not reflect a process of conscious articulation and are not geared toward producing intellectually coherent approaches to politics" (Hawkins et al., 2019, p.60). Therefore,

such scholars consider the terms “discourse” or “discursive frame” more precise. Regardless of the specific form the different ideational theories take, whether they think populism is an ideology or merely a discourse, Cas Mudde rightly suggests that scholarship would benefit from “focusing more on the many similarities between various ideational definitions than on (over)emphasizing the few differences” (Cas Mudde et al., 2017, ch. 2). This paper will employ much of Cas Mudde’s ideas to define populism, hence employing an ideational methodology to the task.

1.1.3 The Economic Approach and its limitations

Before defining populism, it is worth mentioning other approaches in academia that attempt to define populism. One such practice focuses on economic populism, identifying the political phenomenon based on “voluntaristic overspending and similar politically driven spasms of economic irresponsibility” (Kurt Weyland et al., 2017, ch. 3). The economic approach focuses on populists’ policy of short-term wide distribution of economic benefits to maximize support and popularity. This blueprint causes economic and political collapse, resulting in the loss of populist presidents’ support. Economic populism is an approach that was especially popular in the 1980s and early 1990s. However, the attempt at encompassing a wide variety of politicians was soon revealed as problematic.

Further world developments have seen leaders using populist tactics to inspire popularity but advocating for neoliberal reform and cooperation with leaders that support economic orthodoxies, such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. This cast doubt on economic definitions of populism and their general applicability. Evo Morales, for example, was careful when it came to budget spending, while Rafael Correa had avoided fighting certain neoliberal economic principles established by his predecessors. Thus, economic irresponsibility, the main principle essential to economic populism, has failed to provide a unifying and generalizable defining characteristic of populism. Hence, the approach is marginal in contemporary debates (Kurt Weyland et al., 2017, ch. 3).

1.1.4 The Political Strategy Approach

Another approach defines populism according to its political strategy, analyzing the typography of the political actor and their exercise of power, as well as the principal power used to sustain and proliferate their authority (Kurt Weyland et al., 2017, ch. 3). According to the political strategy methodology, the ideational approach is limited in that its notion of thin ideology makes it hard to delimit the concept. Furthermore, although the ideational system allows for an understanding of mass attitudes of populists' worldviews, through its transferable conceptualization of thin-ideology, the people, the elite, and general will, which are generalizable across regions, nations, and different levels of analysis, its specific attention to the people as a source of the populist's power misses the essence of populism, painting a picture of a bottom-up movement, disregarding the cruciality of populist leadership that relies on top-down engagement.

The political strategy method takes a top-down approach, focusing on leadership. Kurt Weyland defines populism as "a political strategy through which a personalistic leader seeks or exercises government power based on direct, unmediated, uninstitutionalized support from large numbers of mostly unorganized followers" (Kurt Weyland et al., 2017, ch. 3). The political strategy methodology concentrates on the populists' personalistic leadership, which directly engages with the populace. The focus is on the extraordinary quality of the leader and their relationship with mass followers, whose interests are promoted by a leader that embodies the "will of the people" (Kurt Weyland et al., 2017, ch. 3). From this perspective, the populist aims to dominate other politicians, fighting the established political circle to rise above it and be seen as a strong leader separate from it. Individual personalistic leaders can emerge from the erstwhile political class. However, as long as they overcome and throw aside their previous supporters, they may tread down the populist path to impose a direct and robust individual leadership. Juan Perón, the archetype of Latin American populism, came from established military cadres, yet he quickly became politically successful by going against his former comrades. Álvaro Uribe was part of Colombia's Liberal Party. Still, during the country's increasing

economic problems and guerilla warfare, he chose a populist strategy and, becoming independent from all established political circles, won the presidency in 2002. These two cases show that “versatile leadership and skillful opportunism are constitutive of populism” (Kurt Weyland et al., 2017, ch. 3).

Principal power concerns the methods capable of sustaining politicians' authority. Populists rely on numbers, criticizing aspects of special weight, the principal power derived from economic elites or military coercion. Populism mobilizes the masses to gather their support, insisting on political equality that combats the privileges of business elites that strongly influence politics. Liberal democracies are based on sectors that fall under special weight, such as “consultations with businesses, interest group lobbying in parliament, and nonviolent protests in the streets” (Kurt Weyland et al., 2017, ch. 3), which populists argue is “an elitist mechanism that provides privileges for the few and disadvantages the people” (Kurt Weyland et al., 2017, ch. 3). The principal power of populists is to maintain their antagonism to the establishment and boost their mass support, thus, often holding elections, rallies, and plebiscites.

The political strategy concept accounts for populism’s extreme unpredictability in exercising power and in policy decisions that are undoubtedly variegated from populist case to case by considering the importance of personalistic leadership, “which allows the leader great latitude for opportunistic calculations and maneuverings” (Kurt Weyland et al., 2017, ch. 3). According to the strategic method that disagrees with the ideational methodology, populism is not considered a systematic ideology dedicated to a specific program, but rather the populist acts based on tactically beneficial whims, which, furthermore, they are free to engage in as long as the individualistic leader concentrates power within themselves, establishing their autonomy. The strategic approach allows to better delimit populism and the relationship between leaders and citizens by emphasizing the actual deeds of the opportunistic political behavior of populists, who are the delegates of the people’s popular sovereignty from a top-down perspective, as opposed to the ideational discourse that takes on a

bottom-down approach, which wrongly mistakes populism for a worldview or an ideology, thin-centered though it may be (Kurt Weyland et al., 2017, ch. 3).

On the other hand, the strategic approach is limited in that it identifies as populist “strategies or ‘direct’ modes of organization that appear across the political spectrum in many different manifestations that we would ordinarily never consider calling ‘populist’” (Moffitt, 2016, ch. 2). Furthermore, not all populists are individualistic and separated from institutions or organizations, as the case of La Pen’s Front National shows (Moffitt, 2016, ch. 2). Additionally, Moffitt argues that the strategic definitions make the mistake of focusing primarily on material aspects of politics, such as policies and historical preconditions that build the charismatic leader’s program, leaving out the fundamental element of populism ‘the people.’ This methodological mishap ignores the central concept that most other approaches agree on, forgetting “the etymological roots of the term, which are primarily based on the Latin *populus*” (Moffitt, 2016, ch. 2).

1.1.5 Populism as a Political Style

Some political scientists that conceptualize populism as a political style, such as Pierre-André Taguieff, argue that it does not ascribe to specific ideological qualities but is instead a kind of mobilization, embodying the element of political action applicable to different ideational frameworks (Moffitt, 2016, ch. 3). According to Margaret Canovan, populists are categorized by their rhetoric that largely depends on appeals to the people (Moffitt, 2016, ch. 3). This rhetoric is based on appealing to the people in a manner that polarizes them against society's establishment and dominant ideas, consequently legitimizing the populist’s political style. Focusing on political style serves to take definitions of populism beyond merely the antagonism of the people against the elite and consider how the appeal to the people is formed and formulated. Canovan posits that populists style their rhetoric to seem democratic through the sense of appealing to ordinary people. Populists’ rhetoric “relies on directness and simplicity, in

terms of the language it is delivered in and the kind of analysis and solutions it offers” (Moffitt, 2016, ch. 3).

Alan Knight defines populism as a “political style, characteristically involving a proclaimed rapport, a 'them-and-us' mentality, and (often, though not necessarily) a period of crisis and mobilization” (Knight, 1998, p. 223). Accordingly, Knight describes a political style as a “way of doing politics” (Knight, 1998, p. 234), by which he moves from the “rhetorical level of analysis [...] gesturing towards the more performative and affective dimensions of politics- hence the ‘doing’ part of politics, not just the words that are delivered” (Moffitt, 2016, ch. 3). Knight focuses on cases in Latin America to show that central to the appeal to the people is self-representation in terms of fashion and cultural preferences presented in public political performance (Moffitt, 2016, ch. 3).

There are three main features of populism as seen through the political style lens. The first is the appeal to the people against the elite. The people are the primary audience of populists and the subject that populists aim to enliven through their performative political style. The populists’ assertion of a dichotomic division, whether between the people and the elite, or a particular other, such as immigrants, is key in creating a sense of crisis that challenges the people's sovereignty and legitimizes the populist’s claim to represent the people. The populist also renders the people the “true holders of sovereignty (Moffitt, 2016, ch. 3), signifying them as “‘the people,’ ‘the mainstream,’ the heartland’ or other related signifiers, to performative gestures meant to demonstrate populists’ affinity with ‘the people’” (Moffitt, 2016, ch. 3).

Another feature that the political style approach identifies in populism is ‘bad manners,’ which can be understood through what Canovan has called the ‘tabloid style’ of populism, or what “Ostiguy has identified as the ‘low’ of a high-low axis” of political rhetoric. (Moffitt, 2016, ch. 3) The ‘low’ includes “use of slang, swearing, political incorrectness, and being demonstrative and ‘colorful,’ which is antithetical to the ‘high’ discourse accompanied by rationality, rigidity, and use of elitist rhetoric. (Moffitt, 2016, ch. 3)

Lastly, populism derives its legitimacy through a sense of crisis, which the populist further generates through performative rhetoric that persuades the people of crisis. The resulting urgency demands decisive action, which serves to simplify the realm of political debate. Consequently, distrust of modern governments that rely on complex “consultations, reviews, reports, lengthy iterative design and implementation” (Moffitt, 2016, ch 3) is generated, contrasted with the politics of populists, who advocate for swift action that offers short-term solutions.

Despite being highly useful in assessing populism across different cases, political style is tricky in the conceptual slippage it shares with other terms such as language, discourse, and rhetoric, making it hard to grasp the notion properly.

1.1.6 Conclusion

This chapter presented various approaches and their methodological procedures to define populism. Much debate revolves around the topic. Moffitt states that the “contested nature of populism... has reached a whole new level of metareflexivity, which posits that it has become common to *acknowledge the acknowledgment*” (Moffitt, 2016, ch. 2) of the contestability of populism’s definitions. Because populism is so widely used, often in a derogatory application to any disliked politician, some scholars consider the term analytically meaningless and opt to abandon the term altogether. On the other hand, the fact that such extensive debate over populism exists shows that “there is something important, promising and resonant about the concept” (Moffitt, 2016, ch. 2). The diversity of the approaches here described and the potential they share in contributing to the topic is a testament to the necessity of addressing populism scientifically to move beyond using the term as a meaningless colloquialism.

1.2 The Definition

1.2.1 Introduction

As a preliminary and basic definition, populism can be considered “a type of politics that claims to represent the opinions and wishes of ordinary

people” (“populism,” Oxford Learner’s Dictionary). A most obvious problem with such a simplified definition is the ambivalence and complexity of the term ‘the people.’ Margaret Canovan comprehensively shows that ‘the people’ understood here as a collective political identity that can provide legitimacy to political projects, such as constitutions, regimes, and policies, amongst other political machinery, carries various meanings. She marks three basic themes of ‘the people’ shared amongst European culture: “the people as sovereign; peoples as nations, and the people as opposed to the ruling elite (what used to be called 'the common people')” (Canovan, 2005, p. 2). Jan-Werner Müller also delineates three understandings of ‘the people’ along similar lines, stating that since Ancient times the term referred to the people as a whole, the common people, and finally, the nation as a whole, seen as a distinct cultural unit (Müller, 2016, p. 22). Canovan asks relevant questions that explore the blurred lines of the concept: how can one ‘people’ “be distinguished from another or from people in general? [...] Are 'the people' part or the whole of the political community?” She also questions the realities of the ‘sovereign people,’ asking if the concept has a clear underpinning or if it is marred in myth (Canovan, 2005, p. 3). What is useful in questioning the term ‘the people’ for defining populism is not specifically the nature of the questions asked, but that the ambiguity they reveal is precisely what can be capitalized into molding ‘the people’ into different forms and often mirages used for political favor. When the populist calls for returning the power from the elite to the people, the elusiveness of the term ‘the people’ is exploited, framing its symbolic identity in polarity to those in power.

Yet, while antielitism seems an intuitive aspect of populist politics, it is also an insufficient category (many political movements have been anti-elitist, but have not been considered populist, such as Leninism). Furthermore, the inherent antielitism brings to question how this political stance is maintained once the populist is in power, a position situated in the ruling class *ad verbum*. Looking back at the basic definition at the beginning of this chapter, the claim to represent the wishes of ordinary people is practiced throughout the realm of representative democracy and

not exclusively by populists. How, then, does populism become what Müller calls the “permanent shadow of representative politics” (Müller, 2016, p. 101)? How is the populist imagination of ‘the people’ different from the commonplace democratic representation of people? Considering these questions, how can we create a comprehensive definition of populism that is not too general that it includes other political mechanisms that are not exclusively populist, and yet avoid too severe a meticulousness that poses the danger of excluding some of the varying forms of populist politics?

1.2.2 The Symbolic Nature of the People and Populism’s Moralistic Imagination

Müller suggests that populism utilizes a distinctly “moralistic imagination of politics,” through which the populist draws imagery of a ‘real people,’ whose purity is morally uncompromised, in opposition to an ‘immoral, corrupt elite’ (Müller, 2016, p. 3). According to this imagined picture, this corrupt elite of the establishment has forgotten the ordinary people and failed to represent them. Formulating their politics through a morally driven antagonism faithful to the ‘real people’ legitimizes the populist’s claim to proper representation of the people. The ‘moral imagination’ with which the populist fuels their political engagement denies self-refutability, as it is a politics based on symbolism rather than on empirical “self-limiting and self-fallible” logic, such as is shown in the reality of official election results, a matter the populist often contests when they are not the victor (Müller, 2016, p. 39).

The supposed ‘real people’ is a group that is a part of the citizenry. The idealized nature of the ‘real people’ is symbolized as “morally pure and unerring in its will” (Müller, 2016, p. 20). This symbolic element of the populist moral representation of the ‘real people’ allows immunity to such empirical political logic described above, that is to say, that this symbolism can be used against the official elections results. In facing loss in elections, the populist may say that the ‘real people’ were unrepresented by the corrupt elite. In power, the imaginary aspect of the ‘real people’ allows the populist to change parts of the institutional order, such as implementing constitutional changes in its name. When something goes wrong, the

populist leader may claim that they acted only by the mandate and according to the wishes of the ‘real people,’ shifting responsibility to the people. (Müller, 2016, p. 31) Furthermore, the populist may claim that their success, and therefore the people’s wishes, has been undermined by the elite or external forces. Since the populist emphasizes that only they can lead and represent ‘the people,’ any opposition, whether political competition or citizens who do not support the populist movement, is marked as not part of ‘the people’ proper; this makes populists necessarily anti-pluralist. The desire to create a polity united as a whole rather than divided, for the ‘real people’ to be one, and the claim that only the populist can represent this united people is also an aspect of populism’s anti-pluralism because the monist principle inherent in such a political model allows no space for social individuation. The notions here discussed reveal vital elements of populist leadership and its creation of a symbolic conception of the people. Namely, this chapter presents how the ambiguity of the term the people is utilized and shown as homogenous and monist, necessitating anti-pluralism based on a moralistic polarity between the real people and the corrupt elite. These guidelines for the definition of populism follow the ideational approach because they primarily present ideas that can incorporate thin-ideological aspects of populism, which is based on the understanding that the people are a critical mobilizing factor for populists.

1.2.3 Three Processes Used by Populists in Power

Müller suggests that there are three political processes common to populist leadership once in power:

The first is the colonization or occupation of the state, in which loyalists are appointed to the leading positions of bureaucratic offices, judiciary institutions, the media, and other such apparatuses, removing their independence and making them partisan. If this option is unsuccessful, the paralyzation of these institutions is implemented (Müller, 2016, p. 45).

Another technique is mass clientelism, in which favors are exchanged for political support. While these first two techniques are not unique to populists, what differentiates them from other politicians is that

they engage in these practices with complete openness while still retaining public moral justification (Müller, 2016, p. 46).

The final technique is discriminatory legalism, which allows supporters of the leadership the full protection of the law while punishing those who do not (Müller, 2016, p. 46).

These processes refer to the political strategy approach, dealing with tactics that delimit the populists' political programs.

1.2.4 Populism as a Thin-Centered Ideology that Appeals to Common Sense and Cultivates a General Will

Cas Mudde and Cristobal Rovira Kaltwasser define populism as “a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic camps, “the pure people” versus “the corrupt elite,” and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people” (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 6). The thin-centered aspect of populist ideology relates to its “restricted morphology,” which avoids comprehensive answers to political issues and instead opts to assimilate into other ideologies (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 6). This explains why in regards to policy, for example, a populist may prescribe to the left or right; what is essential is the moralizing claim of the infallibility of the will of the people, that the policy presented is derived from their sovereignty, that the symbolic representation of the people is maintained, rather than what form the policy takes.

The populist's purported expression of the people's general will is based on the doctrine of “common sense,” by which various popular demands are organized into a united front against a shared enemy. It is usual for a direct approach to be employed in the relationship between the populist and his constituents, as seen by, for example, an emphasis on referenda, the tendency to avoid affiliation with intermediary established political parties, or the use of political language built on addressing the common citizen directly and without complicated elitist formulations, in other words, based on “common sense.” In an act displaying personal affinity with ‘the people,’ “a presumed general will” is cultivated, through

which, on the one hand ‘the people’ are identified according to a ‘monist’ principle of absolute truth and in opposition to those established elites who take away ‘the people’s’ right to exercise that will, and that on the other hand allows the populist leader to claim that they are their authentic representative (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 17-18).

Populists rebel conceptualizing ‘the people’ as consisting of individuals, who can be corrupted and make mistakes, and rather appeal to a singular and ultimate kind of united people aware of what is good for it, unerring in judgment and will, and immune to seduction. Varying demands of different groups of people are synthesized into one focused articulation against its common enemy. A strong identity of ‘the people’ is formed, often in opposition to the status quo. The absolute element of the symbolic general will that the populist claims to represent justifies “authoritarianism and illiberal attacks on anyone who (allegedly) threatens the homogeneity of the people” (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 18). According to Mudde and Kaltwasser, parts of academia believe populism is essentially anti-political, striving for a utopia that harbors no dissent “between, or within, ‘we the people’” (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 18-19). Paul Taggart describes this concept as “the heartland,” an imaginary homogenous community “that is allegedly authentic and incorruptible” (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 19).

1.2.5 The Populist Leader and Mobilization

Mudde and Kaltwasser describe three types of citizen mobilization, which they define as “the engagement of a wide range of individuals to raise awareness of a particular problem, leading them to act collectively to support their cause” (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 42). Relevant to populist mobilization is personalist leadership, through which leaders gather support based on personal appeal, primarily as independent political competitors that are directly in touch with their supporters. Identifying the monist antagonism between the ‘pure people’ and the ‘corrupt elite’ described above, the populist can claim to be “the personification of the people,” becoming the core of political identity (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 43). Common for populist personalistic leaders is crafting an image of strength in action instead of mere promising words. In the face of a sense

of urgency that they often create, the populist shows no hesitancy to make difficult decisions; the anti-intellectualism that accompanies anti-elitist sentiment means that those decisions are often conducted against the advice of experts (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 64). Populists originate from three different social strata: outsiders, who have no affiliation with the elite; insiders, who belong to the highest of the political elite; and insider-outsiders, who are not members of the political elite but have close connections to them. Most successful populists come from this latter category (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 74-75). Regardless of the actual link to the political realm, all populists paint themselves as political outsiders whose aim is to speak for the people, to be their authentic delegates. (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 62-63)

1.2.6 Conclusion: A List of Populist Characteristics

In this chapter, ideas, and strategies fundamental to populism have been described. To summarize, we may identify these main features to be inherent in populism:

1. Populists transform the ambiguous term ‘the people’ into a symbolic identity polarized with a corrupt elite or establishment that has forgotten about them. They appeal to the people by creating imagery of the people as pure and unerring in their will, based on a monist moralism that legitimizes the populist's claim to representation. The symbolic moralizing makes it difficult to falsify the populist's claim and actions based on empirical logic.
2. Populists claim that only they can genuinely and authentically represent the people.
3. Anti-elitism is an insufficient characteristic of populism, which must be anti-pluralist.
4. In power, populists use the political processes of colonization or occupation of the state, mass clientelism, and discriminatory legalism.

5. Populism is a thin-centered ideology that assimilates into other ideologies. This means that the actual form of policies is unimportant and can prescribe either more to the left or the right.
6. Populists organize various popular demands into a strong united front against a common enemy, usually the elite or establishment.
7. Populists employ a personal and direct approach in their relationship with constituents.
8. Most populists mobilize people through personalistic leadership.
9. Most populists are from the insider-outsider group of social strata. They all paint themselves as political outsiders.

Chapter IV will apply these characteristics to Publius Clodius Pulcher to analyze whether a modern definition of populism is compatible with ancient Roman politicians classically considered populist.

Chapter II: The Historical Context

2.1 Turmoil, Tiberius Gracchus, and Rome's Factional Divide:

The late Roman Republic saw tumultuous events that gave rise to a breed of popular politics that opted to address the masses and use them for political favor. A political strategy that beforehand had rarely been used, this new form of what may be called populist strategies had become commonplace and helped split the political realm, culminating in extreme internal violence that was one of the main reasons for the transformation of Rome from a Republic to an Autocracy. Beginning with Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus, politicians had often utilized the energies of the masses for political gains, an activity that highly antagonized much of the senatorial elite, who often viewed such massively popular figures as wishing to attain the supreme power of a tyrant; Gaius Julius Caesar is a case in point. After Gracchus, the political elite became divided into two factions, the *populares*, who operated in the popular people's assemblies, and the *optimates*, who believed in the traditional oligarchic rule of the senate. Until today, historians debate whether this political split had an

ideological basis and the criteria that distinguished one political strategy from another.

In 146 BC, the Romans destroyed both Carthage and Corinth, marking the Republic as the decisive imperial power in the Mediterranean region. While its dominance was now uncontested, internal struggles started to present themselves that would eventually help overturn the Republican government and commence the Caesarian dictatorship and the civil wars that resulted in the crowning of Augustus as emperor more than a hundred years later. This era, called the Late Roman Republic, was ravaged by political violence whose like was not seen since the overthrow of the Monarchy some 500 years earlier. Some of the main reasons for the inevitable introduction of perpetual political violence were economic inequality, a breakdown in traditional political conduct, the polarization of politics, the privatization of the army, corruption, and endemic battles regarding citizen rights, all problems which were repeatedly failed to be properly addressed (Duncan, 2017, Prologue).

Towards the later period of the Republic, soldiers found themselves fighting years-long wars thousands of kilometers from their homes. The conscriptions were especially hard on the lower class, stricken with poverty and whose land had become neglected in their years abroad. On returning home, they found it extremely difficult to revive their lands with the previous productivity they had enjoyed. Wealthy nobles capitalized on the economic agitation of the lower class, buying off their lands. As small plots were combined into large estates, the farming industry became dominated by a few families, sharpening the divide between the poor and rich.

Furthermore, successful wars brought an influx of slaves into Rome, whose free labor was exploited by the same wealthy landowners. As a result, the lower class was not only left without property but also lacking in work (Duncan, 2017, Prologue). Victor Duruy describes the problem well:

"Moreover, these rich did not always respect the possessions of the poor. After having, as praetors or consuls pillaged the world in time of war, the nobles in time of peace as governors pillaged their subjects, and returning to Rome with vast wealth, employed it in changing the

modest heritage of their fathers into domains vast as provinces. These ‘landlords’ were eager to enclose within their grounds lakes, forests, and mountains [...] the ex-consul bought the old soldier’s field or the lands of the impoverished peasant, and soldier and peasant alike hastened to squander in the taverns of Rome the trifling sum received for the sale” (Duruy, 1894, p. 355-356).

Duruy recites an old story of a poor man complaining that having wished to settle elsewhere with his beehives, he found no small piece of land available without a rich man owning the surrounding lands. Among such rich landowners, it was not a rarity to find them owning 20,000 slaves. As such, the regular Roman plebeian would have often found themselves in situations of extreme squalor; districts of Rome that were not embellished with the riches of the elite often comprised of houses made of wood, and fires were common, as well as disease and homelessness. While the ordinary Roman citizen found it increasingly difficult to establish themselves, the politics of Rome became ever more competitive, successful campaigns’ culmination of wealth allowed for dominating powerhouses, and some politicians aimed to solve these internal predicaments by addressing the people, as opposed to conducting politics by means of the regular oligarchic channels, whether they had done so as a strategy for political gain or in accordance with genuine empathy to the suffering plebeians.

The economic inequality that riddled Rome set the stage for necessary reform that, when attempted, was met with opposition almost every step of the way. The agrarian reforms were often topical to several politicians of the *populares* (the Gracchi, Gaius Marius, and Saturninus) and continued to be a highly disputed question of policy within the Roman political realm after the fall of Carthage. In 133 BC, tribune Tiberius Gracchus, supported by reformist senators, crafted the *lex Agraria*, which, in simplified terms, would see the redistribution of land from wealthy men occupying an excess of property to landless citizens, hoping to rebuild the smallholder class. In the past, a third of conquered Italian territory was transformed into state-owned public land. The legal apparatus used to justify the *lex Agraria* and set the parameters of defining excess land was

based on a previously enacted law establishing a limit on how much of this public land could be leased by wealthy citizens, who mostly ignored the property prohibition. Tiberius' reform would see to strict enforcement of the property law, confiscating land that exceeded the limit for redistribution (Stephenson, 1891, ch. 2, sec. 11).

When the reformists presented the *lex Agraria* to the Senate, they were primarily met with resistance, as many of the opposition were wealthy landowners themselves, for whom the bill was disadvantageous. Seeing as they could not hope for the support of the majority of the senate, the reformists decided to present the bill directly to the plebeian Assembly. Roman politics was largely based on a concept called the *mos maiorum*, traditional customs, and ancient code through which they derived their social norms, according to which centuries of political standards were set. Gracchus' bypassing the senate was a direct break with the *mos maiorum*, according to which the standard had generally been for the tribunes to cooperate with the senate (Watts, ch. 4). The senate furthered their resistance by having puppeteered tribune Octavius to veto Tiberius' motions. Repeatedly unable to break Octavius' resistance, Tiberius "decreed a ban on all public activity until a vote could be taken on the new law" (Watts, ch. 4). This having also failed to solve the impasse, Tiberius' announced a vote on which the people would have to decide if he or Octavius were to stay in office. Seeing the overwhelming support of Tiberius, Octavius refused to participate in the vote, and the following day the assembly stripped him of the tribuneship (Watts, ch. 4). Now that the path was clear, the *lex Agraria* was passed, and a land commission consisting of Tiberius Gracchus, his brother Gaius and Appius Cladius was formed for the role of redistributing land. However, the Senate refused to finance the commission, which required extensive resources to recruit "teams of surveyors and other skilled people to determine plot boundaries" (Watts, ch. 4) to assess whether people were holding property beyond the legal limit. Incidentally, during that time, King Attalus III of Pergamum died and bequeathed his land and riches to the people of Rome. Tiberius grasped this opportunity claiming that the concilium plebis should administer Pergamum's wealth and land to fund the land commission. These

actions were novel, as they advocated a kind of “direct democracy in which the old institutional balances between the Senate and the *concilium plebis* would be stripped away” (Watts, ch. 4). The underlying idea behind these revolutionary acts was that true roman liberty could only properly be facilitated by adhering to popular demand and the people’s voice that would sway politics away from the overpowering senatorial elite.

The ensuing year saw Tiberius live in fear for his life. After his office as tribune ended, he immediately sought a second term, hoping that the tribune’s sacrosanctity, which endowed him with legal immunity from bodily harm, would keep him safe. It was common for Tiberius to be surrounded by mobs of supporters, and the threat of violence, though not the actual use of it, was looming. The danger he posed was a tool that Tiberius had used to propel his career. During the days when the votes for the tribunate were cast, a senatorial mob, led by Scipio Nasica, the *pontifex maximus*, came up to Tiberius and clubbed him to death. The revolutionary tribunate of the Gracchan led to the normalization of violence and the threat of it as a tool for political advancement, and his death and policy before that “split a single people into two camps” (Cicero, 1998, p. 16) Following these events, roman politics would be divided between *populares* politicians that followed Tiberius’ footsteps in appealing to the people for political power and the *optimates*, represented by devout republicans that believed in the *mos maiorum*, or the traditional structures of governance led by the senatorial oligarchy.

2.2 Understanding the Populares

Though the epithet *popularis* was first used in 66 BC and the political separation between them and the *optimates* was acknowledged, it is questionable at what point Romans became aware of the internal factionalism these disparate political programs represented (Mackie, p. 49). The most explicit definitional source comes from Cicero in his *Pro Sestio*, where he derives in the civic realm “two sorts of people eager to engage in the people’s business and conduct themselves with more than ordinary distinction therein: one set of these have wanted to be considered and to be,

‘men of the people,’ the other ‘men of the best sort.’ Those whose words and deeds were intended to please the many were considered ‘men of the people,’ whereas those who so conducted themselves that their policies were commended by all the best sort of men were considered ‘men of the best sort’” (Cicero, 2006, p. 83). The term *popularis* has been translated as popular, of the common people, or an adherent of popular policies, while the term *optimatis* has been defined as wellborn and noble, those who are good men, or *boni*. (Mahoney, 2022). Cicero uses the word *popularis* 244 times in his works with negative, neutral, and positive connotations (Tracy, 2009, p. 186). Since Roman politics were fundamentally based on a proto-conception of the people’s sovereignty, through which the legitimacy of the Republic was formulated, in the *Pro Sestio*, Cicero aims to recapture a positive application of the term *popularis* that does not “belong to those reckless revolutionaries who do not care about the republic” (Tracy, 2009, p. 189) claiming that the *optimates* achieve popular acclaim despite not trying to win it explicitly, and hereby they are the true *populares*, who genuinely owe their allegiance to the people’s will. It can be safely deduced from Cicero’s writings that by the time the *Pro Sestio* speech was given, Romans were well aware of the political polarization defined by those more conservatively inclined *boni* (good men) and the *populares* of populist proclivities.

Modern scholarship is generally divided into two groups, the first of which sees the *populares* and *optimates* factional difference as an ideological conflict, while the other does not define the difference based on a fundamental ideational variation regarding policy or strictly delineated programs (Robb, 2010, p. 15). An early theoretical model was presented by Theodor Mommsen in the 19th century and categorized the *populares* and *optimates* as “parliamentary-style political parties, using the word ‘party’ in the full modern sense” (Robb, 2010, p. 15). Mommsen posits that the ‘Conflict of the Orders,’ a historical conflict between the plebeian and patrician class that inaugurated the former’s rights in civic and political life, created aristocratic and democratic parties. The expansion of the aristocratic party gave rise to its “democratic nemesis” (Robb, 2010, p. 16), which in turn culminated in the Gracchan “democratic monarchical revolution”

(Robb, p. 16). It was during these times that the terms *populares* and *optimates* started to be used. Today, political parties are usually divided based on strictly defined policy programs, and opponents of Mommsen's theory suggest that such ideological partitions did not exist in Rome at the time, but rather powerful individuals and alliances between different personages were what created political programs based on opportunistic considerations.

Matthias Gelzer observed that the attainment of political power, granted by popular election, had politicians compete between themselves in bestowing patronage and forming relationships of reliable friendships needed for protection. Gelzer's model saw these forms of cultivating electoral support as based on individual relations rather than a reliance on organized parties. These personal relationships extended "both upwards and downwards in society" (Robb, p. 17). Describing Tiberius Gracchus as a "man of high principles who perished for his 'revolutionary' attempt to improve" (Robb, p. 17) the lives of the plebs, Gelzer suggests that he was an original type of politician, a *popularis*, wishing to address the interests of the common people. The opponents of Gracchus aimed to safeguard the traditional "rule of the nobility and the security of property" (Robb, p. 17), calling themselves the *optimates*. Considering how scarce the actual participants in the political process were, Gelzer concludes that the *populares* aimed to consolidate their authority rather than actually concerning themselves with the will of the people, translating *popularis* as 'demagogue.'

Other scholars such as Friedrich Müntzer and Howard Scullard proposed that divisive political purposes and policies were a matter controlled by groups of family parties, comprising of alliances between powerful families that formed political identities and had particular policy-driven interests in order to dominate society in the face of competition. Scullard identifies "three fairly stable [familial] groups centering on the Fabii, the Aemilii, and the Claudii" (Robb, p. 19) but suggests that after Tiberius Gracchus, family group-based struggles declined and were replaced by the divide between the *populares* and the *optimates*. The *optimates* dominated the Senate, maintaining the oligarchy's power and

forcing their opponents to “seek support from the assembly” (Robb, p. 20). The *populares*, while they did not share a uniform motive, often had similar tactics and backgrounds.

Christian Meier understood that defining Roman popular politics was a difficult matter, seeing as the people had little to no political resourcefulness, and were instead directed by the magistrates; thus, popular politics was the domain of politicians, not the people (Robb, p. 22). Meier argues that the *populares* did not aim to democratize Roman society but were comprised of men that provisionally acted according to popular tactics, often aiming to improve the standing of particular individuals, powerful politicians, or communities, such as veterans or the equestrian class, to whom they owed their allegiance in order to succeed politically. While it was common for the popular politicians to divide the people in antagonism to the senate, “not every issue taken before the people could be classified as ‘popularis’” (Robb, p. 23). Identifying popular claims and slogans that are based on the people’s wish to achieve liberty from the “arbitrary rule of the senate” (Robb, p. 23), Meier differentiates between the pre-Sullan period of popular politicians that seemingly showed genuine concern for the people and the post-Sullan era where popular politics were acts aimed at the manipulation of crowds.

Sallust traces the appearance of political factionalism to the fall of Carthage, after which “Rome began to slide into moral decline as her leaders fell prey to *ambitio, avaritia and superbia*” (Robb, 2010, p. 169), ambition, greed, and arrogance. While Sulla's dictatorship attempted to secure the power of the senate by limiting the capacity of the popular assemblies and its representatives, already in 70 BC, the office of tribune was restored. Sallust saw in the tribunate a watershed for ambitious young men that wished to empower their political standing, attacking the senate and “inciting the people with promises of largesse” (Robb, 2010, p. 169). Sulla’s extreme cleansing of the people’s power and attempt to ensure the senate’s authority furthered the polarization of politics. After Sulla, the *optimates* were keen on dismissing the legitimacy of the popular assembly representatives, and reactions caused counter-reactions (Mackie, 1992, p. 72). While modern academics continue to debate what exactly constituted

the factional divide between the *populares* and *optimates*, it is safe to assume that political polarity existed, and we may be sure that certain politicians and political programs are more inclined to one or the other of the factions.

2.3 The Members of the Populares Faction and their Politics

Since Tiberius Gracchus introduced the capabilities of popular politics to Roman society, many politicians can be considered for the analysis of whether those of the *populares* can be compared or contrasted to modern populist phenomena. Tiberius' brother Gaius had been ten years on the aforementioned land commission when in 123 BC, he was elected for tribunate and then reelected the following year. Having stated that his brother appeared before him in a dream, Gaius' association with his brother, the martyred tribune, made him very popular. Gaius' program was far more daring than his brother's, ranging from legislation that would see to bettering the lives of the rural and urban poor, an extensive grain distribution, and the enhancement of the political influence of the equestrians, a class of wealthy citizens that were below the senatorial class (Vanderbroeck, 1987, p. 71). He proposed the *lex Frumentaria*, which saw to state-subsidized grain prices and appealed to the urban plebs "by providing employment through public works, such as the construction of granaries and roads" (Vanderbroeck, 1987, p. 71). He advocated for laws that would require state-funded military equipment for soldiers and drafted a minimum age of recruitment for them.

Furthermore, Gaius re-continued the founding of colonies for landless Romans. One of his more provocative reforms was restricting the senatorial dominance of the judicial institutions; civil cases that had previously seen jurors and judges consisting of mostly elite senators had now to primarily include the *equites* (Watts, 2018, ch. 4). This reform aimed to limit the Senate's ability to monopolize the jury, which allowed the elite to acquit their peers and thus avoid ever being convicted of corruption cases. Another key legislative motion that Gaius supported was extending citizenship to all Italian allies.

However, Gaius' opposition managed to outbid his popularity in the year of his second term, continually proposing fancier measures but never passing them. Elaborately appearing willing to compromise and simultaneously painting Gaius as an extremist, his opponents managed to deny the continuation of his popularity, and by the next year of 121 BC, he no longer managed to attain any political office of import. A consul of the year wished to end the development of one of Gaius' previously proposed colonies. During an official debate about the issue, Gaius called for an unannounced oppositional discussion, and violence ensued between his followers and those of the official event leading to the death of a magistrate. The Senate responded by declaring a state of emergency and allowed the consul Lucius Opimius to act according to any means necessary for the defense of the Republic. The consul then rallied his supporters and killed Gaius and thousands of his followers (Watts, 2018, ch. 4). While a decade earlier, the senatorial mob that marched against Tiberius killed hundreds, now thousands lay dead at the hands of the senatorially sanctioned political violence. The violence that saw the end of the lives of both Gracchi ushered them as symbols of a fundamental conflict between politicians and programs that aimed to reform the republic in apparent support of the people and a political establishment that was willing to use any means necessary to block these reformers. In this regard, it is interesting to take note of how Plutarch begins the *life* of Gaius Gracchus, quoting the Gracchan's often mentioned dream, in which Tiberius appears to him and says, "Why, pray, dost thou hesitate, Caius? There is no escape; one life is fated for us both, and one death as champions of the people" (Plutarch, Life of Gaius Gracchus).

Of the important figures belonging to the *populares*, or, if such a designation should be considered debatable, at the very least acting in provocation to the traditional Republicanism that the *optimates* supported, is Gaius Marius. Hailing from the Roman *equites*, Marius was a *homo novus*, a new man from whose family none had been members of the Senate. Beginning his career under the patronage of the house of Caecilii Matelli, in 119, Marius was elected tribune, during which he proposed to "narrow the pathway leading to the coting urns in which ballots were placed so that no

observers could see the ballots as voters carried them forward” (Watts, 2018, ch. 5). This would ensure anonymity between voters and was very popular. The law incited a public dispute in the Senate, and Marius threatened to have both consuls, including L. Caecilius Metellus Dalmaticus, arrested (Watts, 2018, ch. 5). Because Marius publicly embarrassed a relative from his patron family, his political advancement was jeopardized in the short term. Marius’ rise to political ascendancy occurred in the early 100s when Rome was ripe with anti-establishment sentiments. Since the Metelli were one of the most representative clans of the “corrupt and ineffective Roman establishment” (Watts, 2018, ch. 5), Marius could use his previous scandal with Metellus to portray himself as an anti-establishment politician to gain popularity. He ran a campaign of overt opposition to the corruption, arrogance, and entitlement of the Metelli family that had enjoyed the consular listing for much of the last decade and a half. Using many of his equestrian contacts, Marius convinced many public officials that Metellus was mismanaging the war in Numidia against Jugurtha, purposefully prolonging the war so that he could hold power. Marius insisted that if he were to become consul, he would ensure a swift victory. Sallust would later write that “the general’s (Metellus) noble rank, which before this had been an honor to him, became a source of unpopularity, while to Marius his humble origin lent increased favor; but in the case of both men, their own good or bad qualities had less influence than party spirit” (Sallust, Jugurtha, 73). Romans had become demoralized by the noble families’ domination of the political realm, and the fact that Marius represented a direct opposition to the status-quo allowed for his election to the consulship.

In 107, in response to Marius’s election, a tribune suggested that the people should vote regarding the question of who should take command of the war in Numidia, and Marius won with an overwhelming majority, to which he publicly declared his consulship “‘the spoils’ that the people ‘seized’ from the ‘nobles’ they ‘had conquered’” (Watts, 2018, ch. 5). During this time, Rome had yet to solve the issue of the decreasing amount of propertied citizens eligible for military service, and Marius’ opponents were convinced that he would fail to recruit an army. Marius then broke

from Roman norms and drew recruits from the poorest Roman classes, many of whom consisted of citizens that were eager to join his new army, both because they were his fervent supporters and because they had the most to gain from the conscription. While it was not illegal to conscript landless citizens into the army, Marius, like the Gracchi before him, “decided to put his own personal ambition ahead of his fidelity to the Republic’s norms” (Watts, 2018, ch. 5). Following the Gracchi, Marius was novel in being a *novus homo* to earn the consulship through campaigning in opposition to leading senators, and many politicians followed his line of politics.

Of the known *populares* that took advantage of the climate of factional conflict in Rome was Lucius Appuleius Saturninus. In 104 BC, he served as quaestor overseeing grain import to Rome. Saturninus aimed to ally himself with Marius, to which end he advocated for a law that would allot land to Marius’ veterans from the wars in Africa. In 101 BC, Saturninus was again elected as tribune. As tribune, Saturninus advocated for bills that fit the *populares* description, such as corn distribution laws and agrarian reforms. Working with C. Servilius Glaucia and Marius, Saturninus proposed a bill that saw recently conquered land in Gaul divided among Roman and Italian veterans in the Gallic lands. Of the Saturninus and Glaucia, Plutarch describes them as “men of the greatest effrontery, who had a rabble of needy and noisy fellows at their beck and call, and with their assistance would introduce laws” (Plutarch, Life of Gaius Marius). In order to guarantee the passage of the agrarian bill, Saturninus “added a clause providing that the senators should come forward and take an oath that they would abide by whatsoever the people might vote and make no opposition to it” (Plutarch, Life of Gaius Marius), under threat of expulsion from the Senate for those who refused. The bill was highly popular amongst the people and Marius’ veterans, and attempting to force Senators to abide by a bill introduced through popular tactics that appealed to the people was indeed a controversial act of extreme *populares* flavor that enraged the noblemen of the *optimates*. It is said that “all the senators took the oath in order, through fear of the people” (Plutarch, Life of Gaius Marius), though Metellus refused to take the oath but opted for a path that led to his

voluntary exile from Rome, disallowing those who sympathized with him to raise a faction on his account.

Following these events, the elections of 99 BC saw ensuing violence, as Saturninus was reelected as tribune along with two of his allies whose offices he secured. Glaucia hoped to jump from praetor to consul using violent *populares* tactics, however, when he was faced with a potential loss against Memmius, Glaucia and Saturninus “sent a gang of supporters armed with clubs into the *comitia centuriata* while the voting was going on” (Watts, 2018, ch. 5), and they clubbed Memmius to death. The next day, Saturninus’ opponents and his supporters battled in the streets, and the chaos that followed incited the Senate to pass the *Senatus Consultum Ultimum*, the same state of emergency that had previously legally allowed for unbridled actions aimed at solving the street violence as it did now. The Senate had forced Marius to intervene, and he was faced with an impossible dilemma: on the one hand, he could intervene on behalf of the Senate under the guise of saving the Republic from this impossible standstill, or he could fight alongside the veterans and those populist politicians that had previously been allied to him. His decision, though reluctant, was to summon troops under his wing and accept the Senate’s decree. He marched to where Saturninus and his followers were barricaded, and the latter, trusting that Marius would support their cause, surrendered themselves to him in exchange for safe passage, to which he agreed. Marius, however, imprisoned Saturninus, Glaucia, and their allies in the senate-house, hoping to conduct an appropriate trial. Marius’ attempt to play a middle ground between the opposing popular and elite factions failed, as mobs angry at the populist politicians hurled themselves into the senate-house and their assault resulted in the death of Saturninus and Glaucia. The event’s unconstrained violence symbolized within the political order that the laws of democracy that had previously sustained order in the Republic no longer applied, and even tribunes, with their legal status of sacrosanctity, were not exempt from the carnage.

The cases of the Gracchi, Gaius Marius, and Saturninus illuminate the conflictual political climate of Rome following Tiberius Gracchus. Reforms regarding agrarian law, corn distribution, and debt cancelation,

among other controversial issues, were commonplace in the Roman Republic following the year of 133 BC, and the threat and use of violence involving battles between mobs in the streets of Rome had become the new standard of political action. The narrative of the above-mentioned *populares* characters are but some of many more such figures.

2.4 Conclusion: why Publius Clodius Pulcher?

Further *populares* politicians can be spoken of, such as Marcus Livius Drusus, who wished to expand Roman citizenry to the Italian allies, or Publius Sulpicius Rufus, who, as tribune of the plebs, aimed to pass controversial laws with the help of mob violence. For the purpose of applying a modern definition of populism to the Roman *populares*, this paper will concentrate on the particularly peculiar case of Publius Clodius Pulcher.

While it is possible to attempt to apply our definition of populism to the case of the Gracchi with, perhaps, greater success due to their notoriety as classical Roman *populares*, what makes Clodius particularly interesting is that he hails from one of the most prestigious patrician families, that of the Claudii yet contrived to be adopted into the plebeian class in order to run for tribune of the plebs. Clodius was one of the more colorful and popular characters of the late Roman Republic and had lived a highly scandalous lifestyle. His feud with Marcus Tullius Cicero, a passionate supporter of the traditionalist aspects of Roman politics, and hence the *optimates*, makes Clodius an exciting figure of analysis.

The Gracchi are commonly known as the beginning of the *populares* phenomenon and the ensuing factional difference; Publius Clodius Pulcher is, however, less mentioned in both modern and ancient sources, making for a novel interpretation of his populist strategies distinctly pertinent. The following chapters will be an account that describes Clodius's behavior and politics, and an application of modern populism to his varying actions will be made.

Chapter III: The Life of Publius Clodius Pulcher

3.1 Clodius' Background and Early Career

The Claudians, from which Publius Clodius Pulcher hailed, were one of the most formidable families in the history of Rome, holding their first consulship in 495, at the dawn of the Republic. “According to Suetonius, before the end of the republic, the Claudian name held claim to twenty-eight consulships, seven censorships, six triumphs, and two ovations” (Tatum, 1999, p. 32), and few families could contend with their hard-won prominence. Of the famous Claudians, one may mention Appius Claudius Pulcher, the consul of 143, who allied himself with his son-in-law Tiberius Gracchus. Other may be mentioned, such as Appius' son of the same name, who fathered our Clodius, but what is most important is that Clodius, while harboring great pressures to rise up to his illustrious family's prestige, had certainly the privileges of few other Romans, and relative poverty, as, for example, the Julii had suffered from in the late Republic, was not a concern of his. Certainly, Clodius was compelled to attain the highest degree of greatness in an ever-competitive post-Sullan age, where his proud heritage was impressed on him even in the physical form of the Appian Way, the Appian Aqueduct, or the temple of Bellona, all monumental buildings of everyday Roman life. Yet, in his time, patrician nobles were faced with a certain difficulty in climbing the *cursus honorum*, the traditional, sequential order of climbing the magistracies, as they were “barred from the tribunate, an office useful for acquiring popular or senatorial gratitude, and the plebeian aedileships [...] and while both consuls might be plebeian, only one could be patrician” (Tatum, 1999, p. 38-39).

The first instance of Clodius' public career begins when he was 18, as was appropriate for the initiation into military service, during the Third Mithridatic War in the East, led by his brother-in-law L. Licinius Lucullus during the years 73 to 67. Clodius departed in 74 to the Eastern front with his brother and brother-in-law, but his efforts in the campaign received less

appraise than that of his brother, and Clodius' jealousy "of the young patrician led him to stage a mutiny of Lucullus's troops" (Tatum, 1999, p. 44). The affair was of a personal nature, and probably due to Lucullus's increased unpopularity and Clodius' rank as well as his brother's influence, his reputation was unscathed, also due to the fact that Roman mutinies were often left unpunished (Tatum, 199, p. 48). Clodius further campaigned under Marcus Rex in the province of Cilicia, where he was in charge of a fleet tasked with fighting pirates at sea. At one time, facing defeat, Clodius was captured by pirates but was soon released, probably due to their fear of Pompey's sweeping victories against them. After his release, Clodius continued in the war against the pirates, serving under Pompey's command. It can be concluded that Clodius's early military career was that of an ambitious young patrician seeking distinction and exploiting his family's connections, and, except for the staged mutiny in Lucullus's camp, which was not in itself motivated by nascent political demagoguery as much as personal irritation, was relatively regular. Tatum claims that "what is most remarkable upon review (of Clodius's early career) is the orthodoxy of his methods to advance himself" (Tatum, 1999, p. 61).

3.2 The Bona Dea Scandal and Trial

Clodius' infamy began in 62 when, dressed as a woman, he entered Caesar's house, who, as Pontifex Maximus, the head of the religious order, was that year hosting the Bona Dea, an annually celebrated rite that admitted only women to participate. The earliest historical record of the occurrence can be found in Cicero's letter to Atticus, in which he attests his confidence in Clodius' guilt in the affair.

"I believe that you have heard that Publius Clodius, son of Appius, was caught red-handed wearing women's clothing during the state ritual at Gaius Caesar's house, that a wee servant-girl saved his skin and got him out, and that the incident has caused a mighty scandal. I am sure that you disapprove" (Cicero, 2008, Letter 8, Att. I, 12).

While his actions broke religious conduct, the ensuing trial, the magnitude of which had earned greater renown than even the controversy of Pompey's return to Rome that same year, had more to do with private political feuds than it did with religion. At the time of the preludes to the trial, Clodius had already established himself as a reputable man, if not for his prestigious name, then for his connections with various powerful politicians in the years before. His contacts and followers amongst the aristocracy went a long way in ensuring his freedom in the case of sacrilege of public rites that followed. On one side of the trial were the supporters of Clodius, who saw it to their advantage to help his acquittal, both for the establishment of good terms with the Claudian clan as well as future alliances, should Clodius' reputation be saved, and on the other were the enemies of Clodius, who included the same Lucullus who had been slighted by Clodius during his Eastern campaigns, amongst other prominent politicians, which "emboldened many who had remained hesitant [...] and even Cicero himself may have been influenced by their leadership" (Tatum, 1999, p. 74). Clodius was well aware that the whole affair was incited more by personal politics rather than having to do with religion, and he made this plain through his humbled pleas of "ostentatiously repentant gestures (that) had their effect on many *boni*" (Tatum, 1999, p. 74). In regards to Caesar, whose wife was said to have an affair with Clodius, Cassius Dio writes the following:

"Caesar brought no charge against him, understanding well that on account of his connections he would not be convicted, but divorced his wife, telling her that he did not really believe the story but that he could no longer live with her inasmuch as she had been suspected of committing adultery at all: a chaste woman must not only not err, but not even incur any evil suspicion" (Dio, 2014, Book 37, sec. 45).

What is evident from Caesar's reaction to Clodius's scandal is that the latter was well established, which explains the developments that followed in the trial against him.

The events preceding and during the trial were represented as a conflict between the Senate's authority and that of *populares* rhetoric. The Senate proposed a bill (*rogatio*) be put before the people that would decide on the specific appointment of a praetor to lead a specially constructed trial, in which he would be allowed to choose the jury members himself (Millar, 2002, p. 118). Clodius' supporters construed this "move as an attempt by the Senate to usurp greater authority in *quaestiones* (decisions regarding legal issues) than was its due—that, is he (Fufius Calenus) could quite appropriately claim to challenge the *rogatio* in his role as champion of the people" (Tatum, 1999, p. 76). Fufius Calenus was an ardent supporter of Clodius' cause, and as tribune of the plebs, it made sense to utilize this *popularis* strategy to fight against the Senate's overarching authority; the issue of the Senate's exceeding dominance in judicial matters had historically often been a point of contestation. When the day for the voting of the Senatorial bill came, young followers of Clodius made sure to pressure the participating populace to reject it. "The wooden gangways erected in the Forum, along which each voter proceeded in order, with the purpose that he would be protected from undue influence, were occupied by hired groups of followers of Clodius" (Millar, 2002, p. 118). According to Cicero, Cato came to the voting place followed by many of the *boni*, that is, the good men of Rome, and dismissed the proceedings of the *rogatio*. Cicero, in his letter to Atticus, describes the dissolving of the voting committee as a thankful occurrence, stating that "thanks to this united charge of the optimates, the Assembly was dissolved and the Senate was convoked" (Cicero 2008, Letter 10, Att. I 14). Following this, the Senate passed with an overwhelming majority a decree that urged the consuls to pressure the people to pass the *rogatio* (Millar, 2002, p. 119). Though Fufius at first vetoed the proposal, the *rogatio* later passed through compromise between the tribune and the Senate, deciding that the specialized trial be constituted as previously instructed by the *rogatio*, though the jurors would

now be selected by lot rather than by the presiding praetor. The composition of the jury was tantamount to the conviction of Clodius. Cicero tells us that everything hung on having the jurors being specially chosen, but now that they were selected by lot, he noticed their bankruptcy that, despite his best to offer evidence against Clodius, led to their unreliable tribunal. He describes the jurors as “disreputable senator, bankrupt equestrians, and tribunes not so much moneyed as on the make, as their title implies” (Cicero, 2008, Letter 12, Att. I 16), whose poverty and lack of principle allowed for their corruption by the form of bribery, specifically received from Crassus, one of the richest men in Rome and friend to Clodius. Thus, the trial ended with twenty-five against thirty-one that chose to acquit Clodius.

Clodius’ acts during the Bona Dea rites and his subsequent trial had nearly resulted in the ruin of his reputation. His sacrilege of the sacred ritual may very well have been no more than a result of capricious behavior and rebellious curiosity, yet it was perceived as ignominious disrespect that profaned upon the ancient traditions and values of Rome. Regardless of whether Romans were truly insulted by his irreverent deed, which cannot be taken as certainty, as can be seen by the fact that he still retained many followers during his prosecution, especially amongst the plebs for whom the Bona Dea was not such a holy custom, the controversy was an opportune incentive for his enemies to bedevil Clodius with the most contentious trial of the year. While his future prospects were now rendered limited, Clodius had also developed a hatred for the *boni* hostile to him during the trial, especially Cicero, most zealous in his prosecution. Cicero interpreted Clodius’ intrusion of the Bona Dea as a violation of the most traditional elements that sustained the Republic and that his acquittal threatened to damage its stability (Leach, 2001, p. 336). Clodius was subjected to much humiliation as speeches were given that assailed him as a “murderer, adulterer, and debaucher of his own sister, all before the people” (Tatum, 1999, p. 87). Furthermore, the events demonstrated the lack of support he had in the senate. It is perhaps for these reasons that Clodius ventured on the drastic undertaking of transferring himself from the patrician class to that of plebeian.

3.3 The Tribune Clodius

In January of 60, Cicero writes Atticus that Clodius was seeking transferal to the ranks of the plebeians, and his supporters hoped to bring the issue before the masses in a public vote (Cicero, 2008, Letter 14, Att. I 18). In 59, Caesar and Pompey, who, as ambitious individual powerhouses harangued by Cicero, wished to subdue the power of the senatorial *boni* through Clodius, and knowing that he wanted his revenge against Cicero, helped Clodius secure his transfer to the plebeian ranks through adoption (Watts, 2018, ch. 9). Soon after, on 10 December 59, Clodius was appointed tribune of the plebs (Tatum, 1999, p. 114). While Caesar and Pompey hoped to use Clodius as a puppet for their interests, they would soon find that the newly elected tribune had his own plans for propagating his influence. As tribune, Clodius immediately embarked on a new legislative program that enjoyed much popularity. Firstly, he “rehabilitated the *collegia*” (Tatum, 1999, p. 116), which acted as legal social clubs and entities; the *collegia* will have been essential institutions from which Clodius recruited his support for the later mobs he had gathered. Secondly, he organized for a substantial distribution of free grain. Third, he repealed the *leges Aelia et Fufia*, a law that had previously allowed for magistrates to dissolve assemblies based on unfavorable auspices. The fourth law limited the power of the censors, responsible not only for maintaining census but also for supervising public morals. The two censors had the power to purge the senate of their members, but this new law required that the censors agree with each other regarding the punishment of senators, as well as allowing for senators to defend themselves during the census. Clodius’ program sought to win the support of not only the plebeians but also the equestrian order and senators. The first two laws of free grain and reintroduction of the *collegia* were popularly pro-plebeian, while the fourth law will have certainly been appreciated by many senators (Tatum, 1999, ch. 5).

Clodius’ next program was aimed at executing his wrath against his enemy Cicero. Having perceived his success using *popularis* tactics, it was clear that Clodius “could hardly have found a more appropriate icon at which to direct popular *invidia*” (Tatum, 1999, p. 151), the Latin for

hostility, not to mention the personal enmity that the two had. By this point, Clodius had gathered a significant mob of followers. Clodius proceeded by enacting a law that ensured every citizen's right of *provocatio* (the right for appealing against a magistrate's actions) by forbidding fire and water to anyone that had executed a Roman citizen with trial (Tatum, 1999, p. 153). Cassius Dio regards this law as not directed specifically at Cicero, since it did not contain his name, "but against all those simply who put to death or had put to death any citizen without the condemnation of the populace; yet in fact, it was drawn up as strongly as possible against that one man" (Dio, 2014, Book 38, sec. 12). The passing of this law allowed for Clodius to prosecute "Cicero for putting Lentulus and Cethegus and their followers to death without trial" (Appian, 2016, *The Civil Wars*, Book II, ch. III) during the Catilina conspiracy. Before the trial of Cicero, Clodius had harassed him in the streets, and the former fled the city in voluntary exile. Clodius then demolished the orator's house, "and its foundation was dedicated for a temple of Liberty" (Dio, 2014, Book 38, sec. 17).

3.4 Clodius, his Mob Rule, and Eventual Death

Cicero, however, was soon to be recalled by Pompey, though he himself was responsible for inciting Clodius against him. This was because Clodius began directing his extravagant popular passions against Pompey, insulting him, breaking the consul's rods, and having his mob physically harass the consul's followers (Dio, 2014, Book 38, sec. 17). During the vote regarding the subject of recalling Cicero to Rome, Clodius and his supporters collected gladiators to comprise an abusive mob during the assembly regarding the voting, resulting in many wounded and others killed. Pompey then enlisted the tribune, Titus Annius Milo, to be a figure of contestation against Clodius' violent dealings in the streets of Rome. Milo amassed his own gladiators and followers to comprise a mob that, during this time, came to many blows with Clodius' faction, stirring the whole city with their vicious conflicts. Cicero was successfully recalled with a popular ovation and, in order to get back his property, tried to convince the religious colleges that Clodius' transfer to the ranks of the plebs was illegal, and thus

also his tribuneship, including the decree regarding Cicero's house. By this method, Cicero secured his property as well as the money for constructing his house (Dio, 2014, Book 38, sec. 17).

In 56, Clodius was elected to the aedileship, an office sought mainly in order to secure his position in the face of a trial against the incitement of violence. He promptly proceeded to blame Milo for his procurement of gladiators, though the former himself was to be tried for the very same deed. Though he did not think that Milo would be convicted, Clodius used this method to harass him and his helpers. Cassius Dio describes his *popularis* use of the mob in an interesting story demonstrating the devices used to pester Pompey:

“He had instructed his clique that whenever he should ask them in the assemblies: “Who was it that did or said so-and-so?” they should all cry out: “Pompey!” Then on several occasions he would suddenly ask about everything that could be taken amiss in Pompey, either in physical peculiarities or any other respect, taking up various small topics, one at a time, as if he were not speaking of him particularly. Thereupon, as usually happens in such cases, some would start off and others join in the refrain, saying “Pompey!” and there was considerable jeering” (Dio, 2014, Book 38, sec. 18).

Clodius then turned back to attacking Cicero and speeches, emphasizing the disgrace he had committed by building a house on the foundation dedicated to a temple of Liberty. He even came to the house, apparently wishing to burn it to the ground, though Milo's mob stopped him. Cassius Dio tells us that at some point, Clodius “jumped to the side of Pompey and espoused his cause again” (Dio, 2014, Book 38, sec. 29). Dressed in common clothing, he addressed the populace in support of Pompey.

In the year 52, Clodius met Milo on the street, and the latter killed him. The populace was enraged. The tribunes Rufus and Titus Manatius Plancus took advantage of this and excited them to further uproar.

“They conveyed the body into the Forum just before dawn, placed it on the rostra, exhibited it to all, and spoke appropriate words with lamentations. So the populace, as a result of what it both saw and heard, was deeply stirred and paid no further heed to considerations of sanctity or things divine, but overthrew all the customs of burial and nearly burned down the whole city. The body of Clodius they picked up and carried into the senate-house, arranged it in due fashion, and then after heaping a pyre of benches burned both the corpse and the convention hall” (Dio, 2014, Book 40, sec. 48).

Thus ended the life of Publius Clodius Pulcher, whose infamy with the people he had directed against the figureheads of the Roman *optimates* brought about such fire in the *populi* that the senate-house itself was burned as a result of his great funeral pyre. A vociferous political career that certainly exhibited a character of Roman *popularis*. Does this mean that Clodius’ controversial deeds can be analyzed in the eyes of modern populism? The next chapter will investigate Clodius’ deeds described in this chapter with an attempt to apply to them the definitional characteristics of populism.

Chapter IV: Applying the Definition of Populism to Clodius’ Life

4.1 Roman Populism and ‘the People’

As has been established in the introduction to this paper, applying modern definitions of populism to ancient Roman demagoguery, a more suitable word that does not encompass such ideational or strategic characteristics as modern populism does, cannot be accomplished without an acknowledgment of the societal differences that existed therein. In regards to our definition’s first characteristic of populism which suggests a transformation of the term ‘the people’ into a symbolic identity set in

antagonism to the establishment, it is obvious that Roman politics was well articulated in terms of a conceptualization of a general ‘people.’ The fact that the emblem of the Republic’s governing body was called *Senatus Populusque Romanus* (The Senate and the People of Rome) is suggestive of the fact that Roman politics was considered the politics of the people. Mouritsen tells us that although the Tribunate of the plebs and the Senate were often in dispute with one another, the tribunes would never dare attack the institution itself, but only those they considered to be corrupt oligarchs, while the senators would never dare undermine the office of the tribunes to which they merited the supremacy of the *populus*, but rather they questioned their intentions (Mouritsen, 2017, p. 161-162). The establishment of the Republic was based upon the inauguration of the sovereignty of the people, and it was only the *populus* that could decide on matters of laws, war, and peace, the appointment of magistrates, etc. ‘The people’ were undoubtedly a source of legitimacy to the Roman order. Yet, how much influence the *populus* actually had, and how democratic can Rome be considered is a matter that is debated still today. Most accounts suggest that only an average of about ten percent of the electorate turned up for voting (Feig, 2014, p. 126). If this was the case, then this makes establishing modern parallels to popular movements in Rome extremely precarious as populism is especially a phenomenon of representational politics.

Nevertheless, what can be discerned with confidence is that Romans did incorporate in their socio-political order a concept of ‘the people’. Whether *populares* politicians such as Clodius Pulcher used the notion to gather support and create symbolic imagery in antagonism to the establishment is less certain. The fact that he opted to move to the plebeian order as a method for garnering power shows that Clodius did indeed understand the intricacies of the politics of the *populus* involved in it. Already early in his career, the organization of a mutiny in Lucullus’ army camp was a move that roused the rabble, so to say, against an established powerhouse. The *rogatio*, the law that was considered about organizing a special jury, was viewed as an attempt to secure greater judicial power for the Senate during the Bona Dea trial. Clodius and his supporters fought

vehemently against it, but whether this was because they wished ‘the people’ to have a greater say in judicial matters or because they hoped to avoid what would have otherwise been an almost inevitable condemnation of Clodius is uncertain. Regardless, the push against the *rogatio* can certainly be perceived as anti-establishment.

Most constitutive of an appreciation of ‘the people’ was Clodius’ move to anchor the right to *provocatio* within the Roman citizenry, forbidding executions without trials, and, thus, truly securing the sovereignty of the people in face of injustices carried out by corrupt officials. Furthermore, the bill involved was aimed specifically at what, if not only Clodius, then many Romans viewed as a corrupt elite that had previously unlawfully performed executions during the Catilina conspiracy. This, of course, is especially true in regards to Clodius’ main opponent, Cicero, who was very well established as one of the main spokesmen of the conservative *optimates*, and who had previously led the now illegal executions of the Catilinian conspirators. His consecration of Cicero’s demolished house to a temple of Liberty is also evocative of Clodius’ people-pleasing politics.

It can be concluded that Clodius certainly acted in ways that suggested he wished to be an authentic representative of the people. Only by converting to the plebeian order could he wish to achieve a status of a true *populus* representative, and only by politicizing his actions in the form of appealing to the people could he maintain this. Unfortunately, no record exists of his popular oratory (Morstein-Marx, 2004, p. 31), which means we can only analyze Clodius’ acts by what others stated he had done. In applying populism’s symbolism of ‘the people’ to Clodius, the monist moralism that prescribes a greater ideational status of populism is missing. It is also hard to posit convincingly that Clodius perceived, or at least claimed to perceive, the people as a pure and unerring entity whose will ought to have been beyond doubt. While the general masses of plebeians probably had a sufficient self-perception as a social unit or group separate from the oligarchical elite, it is doubtful that this partition was based on moral grounds. Rather the matter of the plight of the *populus Romanus* most likely consisted in real, rudimentary wishes derived from poverty and lack

of food and property, as opposed to the sophisticated imagery of ‘the people’ and ‘the heartland’ employed in modern populism. While, Clodius was involved in policies that moved to allocate larger political powers to the *populus*, such as the reinstatement of the *collegia*, or the limiting of magistrates’ power to dismiss public assemblies, it is unlikely that Clodius wished to mobilize an ‘unerring’ citizenry, upon which he would instill a moralizing character.

There is, however, no doubt that ‘the people’ was a concept much employed in Roman politics, and not only amongst the *populares*. The extravagance of debates and speeches in the forum, or the lavishness of triumphs and other festivities that bestowed upon the populace the ‘love’ of the Roman politicians in the form of great displays of both Rome’s power and charity towards *populus Romanus* point towards, if not a form of populism, then at the very least the governmental orders’ necessity to accommodate the people. This sort of theater is not so visible in today’s democracies, where, it can be argued, the ‘common people’ are much more aware of a sense of self-identity, and hence populists have to appeal to the masses with much more complex forms of people pampering. Merely the fact that modern and Roman societies exhibit such a difference in voting participation points to the disparaging elements to consider in applying modern populism to Rome: bread and circuses suffice to keep a politically inactive mob happy, but not to appease a politically active citizenship that votes based on real and complex policy issues. What makes the *populares* such as Clodius unique from other Roman politicians is that they appealed to the imagery of ‘the people’ as opposed to an establishment or oligarchical elite; rather than conducting the Roman ‘politics of the people’ from above, they did so through ‘the people’. This is an aspect of Roman demagoguery that is fitting with our modern definition of populism but only in the skeleton it employs, not in the meat or system of ideas on which these different forms of populism are based: ancient formulations of appealing to ‘the people’ were only as sophisticated as ‘the people’s’ voice could be represented and in modern democracies with a significantly more politically active population, populism necessitates complex ideas of nationhood, a ‘heartland’, a moral stimulus.

4.2 The Question of Anti-Pluralism, and the Political Processes of Colonization, Mass Clientelism, and Discriminatory Legalism

Ancient Roman society did not exhibit cultural and political divides in a way that can be easily paralleled to modern nations. When it came to cultural pluralism, Romans were generally accepting of different cultures, as can be seen by the tolerance the political order showed towards different religions, such as Judaism. Apart from that, by the end of the Republic, Roman citizens could include freed slaves that had previously belonged to various nations that were not Roman. While the Republic had factional divides following political, personal, and policy quarrels, this did not involve categorizations along racial or cultural lines, such as can be seen in the modern concept of 'heartland', which involves a self-identity based on an imaginary, homogenous idea of nationhood, often utilized by populists.

The anti-pluralism employed by modern populists is based on a Manichean concept of good and evil, however, Roman demagogues did not discourse their programs based on monist principles of morality, as much as on practicality and political opportunism. Moreover, while the *populares* would appeal to the people, they did not do so on the basis of being adherents to a unified concept of 'the people' proper that could not err in their will, as much as they wished to utilize the populace to advance their political ascendancy. Although arguably, modern populists exploit popular sentiments to gain power just as the *populares* would have done, the moralizing element that necessitates anti-pluralism is missing in the latter.

Furthermore, what proves difficult for considering *populares* movements as anti-pluralist is their stance on Italian allies and their access to Roman citizenship. It was often the case that popular tribunes and other *populares* actors wished to incorporate into the Roman citizenship the Italian allies, as they observed the discontent amongst them. Modern parallels amongst populists are hard to find, as we see the trend pointing towards anti-immigration policies and the dismissal of trans-national corporations. On the contrary, it was amongst the *optimates* that refusal to admit the Italian allies was more common. In this sense, one might consider the *populares* as explicitly pluralist in their political stance. Therefore,

considering *populares* movements as anti-pluralist, in Clodius or otherwise, is fraught with inconsistencies and anachronism.

On the other hand, when assessing the political processes used by populists in power, one may observe the use of state's colonization in Clodius' actions. His use of his followers and mob to interpose in various political proceedings can be quite persuasively interpreted as an occupation of state apparatuses into which loyalists were incorporated. The case of the recallment of Cicero to Rome and Clodius' subsequent harassment and interruption of the voting process exemplifies political colonization very well. The fact that the act was performed so transparently can be paralleled to modern populists' colonization of the state, which is done out in the open.

As for mass clientelism, the process of exchanging favors for support, it is significant that Clodius reestablished the *collegia*. Through these plebeian organizations, Clodius could form connections that helped create links with clients whom he could ask for support and provide favors for. It is through the *collegia* that Clodius collected members for his mob. As many politicians did, Clodius employed intermediaries to pose as a go-between mass followers and the popular politician. It should be mentioned, however, that clientelism was a method used by politicians other than the *populares*. The same parallel can be made with modern politicians, who generally participate in clientelism, which is not exclusive to populists. Although mass clientelism is not primarily a populist strategy, it is the openness with which populists employ clientelism that makes it a populist phenomenon. As this is the case with modern populists, so it is with Clodius and other *populares*, whose followers overtly performed acts of endorsement, for example, in the gang gatherings that had occurred during forum meetings. Therefore, a parallel can be made between the mass clientelism utilized by the *populares* and modern populists.

Once Clodius had established himself as an influential figure in Roman politics, one of his first agendas was to remove Cicero from Rome. Clodius' successful prosecution of Cicero models modern discriminatory legalism, a political process used by populists in which legal favoritism is shown towards allies while enemies are subjected to punishment. Cicero was Clodius' most avid enemy, and most certainly subject to discriminatory

legalism. It was a common theme to exhibit discriminatory legalism throughout the political realm of Rome, as the case of Crassus' support and bribery of the jury to save Clodius, his ally, during the Bona Dea trial shows. To successfully parallel modern and Roman discriminatory legalism in analyzing whether the latter followed the populist method, a comprehensive study of both legal systems would have to be accomplished. The scope of this paper is not sufficient to do so. To conclude, the political processes of colonization of the state, mass clientelism, and discriminatory legalism are all present amongst Ancient Roman *populares*.

4.3 The Thin-centeredness of the *Populares* Program

One of the key characteristics of modern populism is that it takes the form of a thin-centered ideology. Accordingly, populism does not prescribe a specific political program, but is evasive in its policies, hence the thin-centeredness. Following the developments of the *populares*, one finds that their program was usually consistent. Several policies were consistently propagated by the *populares*, such as free grain distribution, the incorporation of the Italian allies into the Roman citizenry, or limiting senatorial dominance in judicial institutions. Clodius also undertook a journey of policy-making that was in accord with previous *populares* programs. In this sense, the Roman *populares* were rather very centered in their political behavior, though discussing the faction as following an ideology is problematic. Again, one must question how much political opportunism was a leading factor in the choice of appealing to the people rather than an ideological basis.

4.4 Accommodating Popular Demands, and Employing Direct Relationships with Constituents

Another elementary factor in populism is the organization of various popular demands into a strong front in polarization with a common enemy. Clodius' reforms often aimed to accommodate the popular demands of plebeians. His free grain distributions and reintroduction of the *collegia* were especially pro-plebeian and satisfied common sentiments that urged

for these reforms. With the *leges Aelia et Fufia*, Clodius managed to limit elitist magistrates' power to dismiss public assemblies using unfavorable auspices. By doing so he challenged the establishment and sustained the power of the plebeian assemblies, the cornerstone of 'the people's' sovereignty. Clodius' challenge to Cicero, Pompey, and other prominent senators of the *optimates* that represented the established elite is also exemplary in its organization of his political power against a common enemy. Cassius Dio tells us of when during a public assembly, he enjoined his followers to cry Pompey's name whenever Clodius would ask the crowd about who was at fault regarding several instances that had gone wrong. Rowdy jeering followed, and the tactic was successful in tempting popular sentiments against a common enemy in a manner that appealed to the common people.

Clodius employed a tactic of political rhetoric that was exceedingly personal and direct with his constituents. The very fact that he had converted to plebeianism is sufficient evidence of this. Furthermore, when Pompey was in Clodius' and the people's favor, the latter had dressed in common clothes and addressed the crowd as a tactic to gather support for him. By constantly surrounding himself with his followers Clodius was often in direct contact with his constituents. Therefore, in both the categories of approaching his constituents directly and in appealing to popular demands against the establishment, Clodius' politics can be comparable with modern populists.

4.5 Personalistic Leadership and Insider Group of Social Strata

It was well known that Clodius was a talented orator. Apart from this, dressing in common clothes, and his rallying of the populace are cases that point towards the mobilization of his followers through personalistic leadership. On the other hand, while modern populists usually hail from the insider-outside group of the social strata, those who are within the elite, but not of the highest status, Clodius comes from the most distinguished of the Roman elite. Modern populists always paint themselves as political outsiders. By converting to plebeianism, Clodius shows that he too wished

to create the mirage that he is from the political outside, and does not belong to the established, corrupt elite. Furthermore, not all modern populists are from the insider-outsider group, and some do start their careers from the very top of the social echelon, and therefore, only because Clodius comes from the latter does not exclude his comparability with modern populists. Therefore, of the two categories, Clodius's politics can be successfully approximated in the case of modern populism.

4.6 Conclusion

The characteristics that define modern populism were here methodologically applied to the *populares* in general and Clodius specifically. The following table presents a concise culmination of the analysis and determines succinctly whether the characteristics apply, do not apply, or apply with reservation.

Populist characteristic	Reasoning	Verdict
1. The use of the term 'the people'	Roman society utilized a notion of 'the people', but, since their voice was highly limited as compared to modern democracies, the imagery used by <i>populares</i> and Clodius was far less sophisticated, and did not encompass the moralizing element that today unites masses under populist leaders.	Applies with reservation
2. Claiming to truly and authentically represent the people	Clodius' conversion to plebeianism suggests his wish to affiliate with 'the people' in order to represent them. Although he had the possibility to succeed in the traditional methods of conducting politics, he wanted to establish himself through the plebeian assemblies. This suggests that he saw himself as an authentic representative of the people.	Applies
3. The necessity of anti-pluralism	The <i>populares</i> and Clodius often advocated for the inclusion of the Italian allies into the Roman citizenry, and it was the <i>optimates</i> that consistently acted against it. Roman society was not divided along racial and cultural lines as it is today and did not necessitate a moralizing, monist principle of the 'heartland, that modern populists utilize.	Does not apply
4. Processes of	Clodius' use of the mobs to suspend voting, his	Applies

colonization of the state, mass clientelism, and discriminatory legalism.	reestablishment of the <i>collegia</i> to which he offered favors for support, and his prosecution of Cicero, his enemy are all cases of these political processes.	
5. Thin-centered ideology	While modern populism is not consistent in policy-making, the Roman <i>populares</i> had a relatively rigorous program that was generally followed, including by Clodius. Because of this, Roman demagoguery did not exhibit thin-centeredness, and neither was it ideological in any sense.	Does not apply
6. Organization of popular demands into a strong front against a common enemy	The legislation the Clodius passed was all appealing to popular demands and mostly covered reforms that were explicitly anti-establishment. Since Cicero and others of the <i>optimates</i> were his most vehement enemies, Clodius can be said to have gathered his supporters into a strong front against a common enemy.	Applies
7. Employing a personal, direct approach to constituents	A great orator, reputedly dressed in common clothing, Clodius had converted to plebeianism as an obvious charismatic gesture with ‘the people.’ Surrounding himself with his followers, he was often directly involved with his constituents.	Applies
8. Personalistic Leadership	His charisma, and ability to mobilize people with displays of affinity with the common <i>populus Romanus</i> shows his personalistic leadership.	Applies
9. Coming from the insider-outsider group	Clodius hailed from the most prestigious of elites. Though amongst modern populists, it is not a rule to belong to the insider-outsider group of the social strata, it is a common trend. On the other hand, Clodius’ conversion to plebeianism displays how he, like all modern populists, wished to paint himself as an outsider to the political elite.	Applies with reservation

The results show that out of the nine main elements of modern populism, five apply to the case of Clodius, two apply with reservation, and two do not apply at all.

Final Remarks

This thesis can be viewed as something of an experiment in thought. That is, the experiment is the application of a modern definition to the case study of Clodius specifically and the Late Roman Republic generally. The results show that there is much merit to such an analysis. The definition has been applied mostly with success, evidencing that there is much we can learn from ancient Roman populism or demagoguery. Furthermore, the definition of populism here derived could have taken a different turn, if different methodologies would have been used. This only proves that there is more research that can be done in the field, applying varying definitions of populism to different cases of Roman populists. The original research can yield both a better understanding of ancient Rome and of modern populism. Furthermore, following the escapades of the Late Roman Republic along these analytic methods can better prepare us for future populist movements. It is fascinating that even two thousand years after, one can look back and understand historical trends through different eyes. Though history has already been written, the scope of historical research is infinite, and we must never neglect it.

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