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Populism, counter-democracy, and counter-education. Notes on the imagination about antidote to the crisis of liberal democracy¹

Abstract: Despite the convergence in the wording, the concepts of Ilan Gur-Ze'ev's counter-education and Pierre Rosanvallon's counter-democracy remain independent of each other, but they have a common denominator, which, in my opinion, allows us to look at the complexity of the relationship between education and populism from a pedagogical point of view and perceive its ambiguity. As for populism itself, its media and political understanding most often confronts it with democracy, seeing populism as a kind of threat. In such a context, it is easy to present education in its various form as an unequivocal antidote to the threat so understood. However, some researchers of populism, such as Margaret Canovan, Roger Eatwell, Matthew Goodwin, or Pierre-André Taguieff, recognise the complexity of the relationship between populism and democracy, its ambiguity, which may also help to revise the view on the role of education in preparing citizens to face the populist challenge. Consequently, it can be assumed that the findings of P. Rosanvallon, I. Gur-Ze'ev and M. Canovan allow the question of populism in educational theory and practice to be raised anew. The theoretical perspective I have adopted will allow me, I believe, to develop two propositions: first, that populism is to some extent a development, an increase in the inalienable property of democracy, which in effect turns against itself;

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second, that this property also characterizes education. This is related to what democracy and education promise us, or what we think democracy and education promise us, and which, if they are lacking, do not arouse our enthusiasm or the interest necessary to defend or develop them.

Keywords: populism, counter-democracy, crisis of liberal democracy, counter-education, civic education, theory of education, critical pedagogy.

The distinctive ways of understanding, present both in the public discourse of modern Western societies and in the scholarly literature of the two phenomena of populism² and education, allow them to be characteristically contrasted. In the eyes of the critics of populism (e.g. Mounk, 2018; Müller, 2016; Mudde, Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017. See also: Eatwell, Goodwin, 2018, p. 7-21, 47-70; Moffitt, 2018, p. 1-16), the suspicion of populism is tantamount to recognising that a particular movement, political party or organisation poses a significant threat to the proper functioning of Western liberal democracies, contrary to how the leaders of these movements, parties or organisations and their members or supporters perceive and portray themselves as well as the state of democracy in particular countries. According to critics, populists proclaim, among other things, that they are devoted ordinary citizens of the states which are only nominally democratic. For the fundamental ideas of democracy have been distorted, squandered or simply not realised. This state of affairs is – populist claim – primarily due to socially alienated elites, especially political and intellectual, and state institutions, especially

² It is worth recalling, following the literature on the subject, that the word ‘populism’ is used in different historical and social contexts to denote disparate phenomena. According to Pierre Rosenvallon, this is related to three relatively independent histories of populism: a movement of activists of the Narodnichestvo in Russia, The People’s Party in America, literary populism in France, then it is the history of populist movements and regimes in France, Latin America, and finally a global history of contemporary populism (Rosenvallon, 2021, p. 6-9, 59-103). However, Margaret Canovan uses a classification according to which the seven types she distinguishes can be divided into two intrinsically divergent groups of populisms: agrarian and political. She mentions the following agrarian populisms: farmers’ radicalism, peasant movements, intellectual agrarian socialism. In turn, political ones include: populist dictatorship, populist democracy, reactionary populism, politicians’ populism (Canovan, 1981, p. 3-16). In turn, Roger Eatwell and Matthew Goodwin propose to use the term ‘national populism’ to designate the tendencies inherent in the contemporary Western political space (Eatwell, Goodwin, 2018, p. 62-70). Following Canovan’s classification, this article focuses attention on issues related to political populism in the context of the crisis of Western liberal democracies.

those that are bureaucratic, the other culprits are often found among the strangers – migrants or foreign capital. Hence populists, as the proper representatives of the people and, at the same time, the proper sovereign in democratic regimes, feel morally entitled and obliged to act to restore or implement such conditions in which democracy will be truly for the people and through the people. In other words, they are responding to the crisis of democracy, which they believe is the real cause of the political and social crisis in their countries. They believe that it is only by repairing democracy that political and social life in their communities can be put on the right track.

In turn, critics of such a way of understanding the democratic, political and social reality and the crisis of democracy seem to first of all recognize this populist way of thinking as naive, misleading, and emotionally polarizing and particularistic. Moreover, they consider the self-identification of populists with the people – a sovereign deprived of its proper place in democracies – as a usurpation that distorts the fundamental ideas of democracy. A democracy in which citizens realize the values of freedom, equality and solidarity primarily by recognizing and respecting the procedures and structures for making, implementing and controlling decisions that enable peaceful mediation and coexistence in a politically and socially diverse country. From this point of view, belief in the populist promise of democratic fulfilment is a false belief that needs to be cured by public education, especially school education. For it is there, at school, that we are subjected to social formation, including intellectual and civic formation, and thanks to the social control (handled by science representatives) over the knowledge passed on at school, its graduates will get a proper image of democracy and society, their ideals and functioning. A similar role of knowledge providers and educators in the Enlightenment can be played by other institutions of socialization, including, in particular, the media and other centers of creating public opinion.

This is how education can be understood as an antidote and opposed to populism. Except the populist movements themselves use education for their own purposes. However, in both of these approaches (‘liberal democrats’ and ‘populists’), education is above all a tool, an instrument essentially devoid of other intrinsic properties. Hence, both ‘sides’ can credibly accuse each other of propaganda and of reducing education to it, and education – they claim – should be subordinated to and serve the truth and what is practical and useful in life. The ambivalence here would be that both ‘sides’ can simultaneously associate hope with education and be disappointed by it.

The sovereign power of the people and the promise of a renewal of democracy in an era of organized distrust

Let us try to look at the relationship between democracy and populism from a different point of view. My intention is to articulate, as a consequence, a different understanding of the possible relationship between education and populism (see Włodarczyk, 2022, p. 151-180). Therefore, with this in mind, I will refer here to selected findings by two researchers, Margaret Canovan and Pierre Rosanvallon.

M. Canovan assumes that political populisms should be considered an immanent component of modern democracies. The source of the legitimacy of democracy is indeed related to the sovereignty of the people (*demos* or *populus*), despite all the ambiguity and complexity accompanying this idea (Canovan, 2005, p. 10-39, 91-121). Hence, as M. Canovan claims, referring to the idea of overcoming the crisis of people's rule by populist organizations, parties, social movements and their leaders can be understood as a demand for the renewal of democracy (Antoszewski, 2016, p. 47-90; Canovan, 2005, p. 65-9). This crisis can be made credible, according to M. Canovan, due to the irremovable paradox accompanying democratic regimes and practice. As she explains:

The paradox is this: democracy is the most inclusive and 'popular' form of politics, taking politics to ordinary people, giving them political rights and access to multiple channels of influence. For that very reason this is by far the most complex form of politics, so bafflingly tangled and opaque that the vast majority of its supposed participants can form no clear picture to help them make sense of it (Canovan, 2002, p. 28)³.

Thus, political populism can be considered to be one of the possible collective responses to this state of affairs, in a sense an inalienable component of democracy. This component may take various forms and be characterized by its different intensity, but, more importantly, it cannot be eliminated. It is perhaps worth recalling in this context Pierre-André Taguieff's remarks on the recognisability of populism. For it seems that it is not

³ P. Rosanvallon seems to take a similar view, noting in his introduction to the work: "The progress of democracy, which I write about in this book and in my other books, can only be made by further complicating the system: its institutions, procedures, modes of expression of society and its representation. Conversely, the forces that seek to simplify democracy, ostensibly for its fulfillment, in fact seek to destroy it. They are the basis of populist tendencies and postulates in the world" (2019, p. 10).

every populism that is socially and politically perceived as such, but above all those that reach a certain unspecified degree of intensity, visibility and support (Taguieff, 1995, p. 9-43).

Moreover, the issues of populism as an immanent component of democracy and the power of the people are linked by M. Canovan to political myth and, more specifically, as has already been somewhat mentioned, to the promise of democratic renewal. According to her, it is “the story of how the people have been robbed of their rightful sovereignty, but we rise up and regain it” (Canovan, 2005, p. 127); this has been the principal component of populist politics of the past two centuries.

Inherent in modern democracy, in tension with its pragmatic face, is faith in secular redemption: the promise of a better world through action by the sovereign people. [...] When too great a gap opens up between haloed democracy and the grubby business of politics, populists tend to move on to the vacant territory, promising in place of the dirty world of party manoeuvring the shining ideal of democracy renewed (Canovan, 1999, p. 11).

Focusing attention on this aspect of populism, one can say that it is not a political programme or a way of solving political and social problems that unites or characterises populisms, but precisely the belief in the value of sovereign power of the people, the realisation of which is assumed by democracy.

This relationship between the perception of democracy as a value, protest politics and populism can also be considered in the perspective of P. Rosanvallon’s concept of counter-democracy. It is true that P. Rosanvallon sees populism as a form of a pathology of democracy: “It is a perverse inversion of the ideals and procedures of democracy” (2008, p. 265), nevertheless, on a different level of the functioning of democracy and populism, analysed by P. Rosanvallon, their closer interrelationships emerge. They can be seen clearly when one focuses on what the French historian and philosopher calls counter-democracy⁴. P. Rosanvallon here has in mind here a democracy of dispersed intermediate powers, a type of clearly manifested distrust of democracy in Western societies. In his view, in the post-totalitarian era, counter-democracy has acquired a historically shaped, sufficiently organised form to distinguish it analytically as a separate phenomenon and to appreciate

⁴ The details of the components, historical development and functioning of counter-democracy are analyzed by P. Rosanvallon in the cited work (2008, p. 1-249).

its significance for the development of Western democracies. According to P. Rosanvallon, the essence of counter-democracy is “to make sure that elected officials keep their promises and to find ways of maintaining pressure on the government to serve the common good” (2008, p. 8). The political form he distinguishes, which is not so much the opposite of democracy as one form of democracy opposed to another, institutionalised. Nevertheless, this historically formed and sufficiently organised form of distrust of democracy can oscillate and take a pathological form, such as for example populism; in other words, part of counter-democracy “becomes a compulsive and permanent stigmatization of the ruling authorities, to the point where these authorities are seen as radically alien enemy powers” (2008, p. 268). Moreover, as P. Rosanvallon writes, populists catalyse social anger; “they warn of decadence and pose as guardians of purity, saviors of the nation from political extremes, and prophets of an apocalypse from which they will emerge victorious” (2008, p. 271). As the judge-people they only wish to deal with “the justice of repression, punishment, and stigmatization” (2008, p. 272), aimed against a broad category of ‘undesirables’ and ‘parasites’.

It is worth supplementing P. Rosanvallon’s perception of populism with his findings on the transformations of modern democracies, which, according to him, account for the dynamics of populism’s social and political significance. According to the French historian and philosopher, it is currently difficult for us to see the true reasons for the current disillusionment with the state of democracy or democracy itself, because we have not clearly analyzed the paradigm shift, the global transformation of democracy, which, according to him, consists in the growing influence of the executive branch (Rosanvallon, 2018, p. 5-6). As he states,

We are today so accustomed to taking for granted the supremacy of governing in relation to representation that the dramatic shift of power from the legislature to the executive that has taken place over the last two centuries seems scarcely to be of any interest. Looking at the matter with the eye of a historian, however, one cannot help but see that it amounts to a complete reversal of perspective by comparison with the founding vision of modern democracy, particularly in the form given it by the American and the French Revolutions (Rosanvallon, 2018, p. 6).

Without going into the details of these transformations, which P. Rosanvallon analyzes and discusses at length in his book while offering his interpretation of the theory of governance, he considers the two essential

components of this founding vision to be that “Our regimes are democratic in the sense that power comes from the ballot box at the end of an open competition, and that we live in a legally constituted state that recognizes and protects individual liberties” (2018, p. 1). By contrast, today, according to P. Rosanvallon, citizens of contemporary democracies are not primarily concerned with the relationship between representatives and those who are represented and the interaction between the institutions inherent in the political system. It is more about the relationship between governors and those who are governed, the concrete actions of governments, the day-to-day management of public affairs, decision-making and issuing orders. In other words, the attention of citizens is polarized by the spectrum of evaluating the agency of the executive power, at the ends of which we can place bad and good governance. This applies in particular to counter-democracy, including what P. Rosanvallon takes as its pathological aspect, namely populism⁵.

What is worth emphasizing once again in the context of the findings of M. Canovan and P. Rosanvallon regarding political populism as an immanent component of modern democracy, the promise of its renewal, the increase in the importance of the executive, is the ease or fluidity with which some part of the counter-democracy can degenerate into populism when it radicalizes, rather than controls, its populist potential. The question is, does this transformation proceed in only one direction? Can political populism transform just as smoothly into a fundamentally “acceptable” form of counter-democracy necessary for modern democracies?

Counter-education as a nonrepressive critical pedagogy and the populist potential of education

In the opinion of Ilan Gu-Ze'ev, which he included in the introduction to the work published in 2005, *Critical Theory and Critical Pedagogy Today*, “it is quite ambitious even to articulate the essential elements to the various and conflicting pedagogies that propagate themselves under the banner of ‘Critical Pedagogy’” (2005, p. 7)⁶. It is certainly worth remembering this

⁵ One could venture to say that it is precisely this clear focus of populism on the executive power, together with manifestations of xenophobia, that seems to be important for critics associating populism with authoritarianism or fascism. On the differences and similarities between populism and fascism (Eatwell, Goodwin, 2018, p. 50-62).

⁶ The impressive collection of texts gathered by I. Gur-Ze'ev, prepared, among others, by Michael Peters, Douglas Kellner, Peter McLaren, Michael W. Apple, Elisabeth E. Heilman, Gert Biesta, Nicholas C. Burbules, Jan Masscheleian, Andreas Gruschka and many others, was created as a result of a series of meetings in Oslo, Miami and Madrid organized between

difficulty, which seems to say a lot about the general condition of the critical theory of education observed and diagnosed by him at that time. However, given the characteristics of his proposed concept of counter-education as “alternative critical education” (Gur-Ze’ev, 1998a, p. 463), it is also worth noting the accusations formulated by I. Gur-Ze’ev against various contemporary variants of critical pedagogy. Among other things, he noted that it usually failed to meet the challenges of emancipatory pedagogy and, as a result, was becoming part and parcel of normalizing education (Gur-Ze’ev, 2005, p. 12; see also Gur-Ze’ev, 1998a, p. 463-486), as well as that it abandoned or even disregarded even the standard topics that was regularly dealt with in the framework of environmental education and ecological ethics (Gur-Ze’ev, 2005, p. 22). What is especially important to him, “In their rush to become politically active and relevant in the field of education the Critical Pedagogy thinkers overlooked the essential instincts, ideals, and telos of Critical Theory [of Frankfurt School – R.W.] and Critical Pedagogy, at its best moments, committed itself to ‘realize’” (Gur-Ze’ev, 2005, p. 13)⁷. Here he pointed primarily to the move away from negative utopia and to lost connection to Love of Life (Gur-Ze’ev, 2005, p. 14, 19)⁸. In the context of the widespread hopes associated with the critical theory of education, his assessment of the care for sticking to its own essential assumptions sounded equally disturbing:

Committed to its various positive Utopias in the fields of feminist, multi-cultural, race, class, post-colonial, and queer struggles, the different versions of Critical Pedagogy have more than once become dogmatic, ethnocentrist, and violent. Concurrently, they have become increasingly popular in ever widening academic circles, and decreasingly relevant to victims it is committed to emancipate (Gur-Ze’ev, 2005, p. 12-13, see p. 10).

2002 and 2004 as part of the International Critical Pedagogy Workshop (see Gur-Ze’ev, 2005, p. 34).

⁷ It should be emphasized that for I. Gur-Ze’ev’s philosophy of education, the Critical Theory of Frankfurt School in its versions developed primarily by Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno is a constant point of reference.

⁸ According to I. Gur-Ze’ev, “Critical Pedagogy thinkers forgot that mature Critical Theory was utopian, yet its Utopia was a *Negative Utopia* - not a *Positive Utopia*” (2005, p. 13), and “the erotic telos of Critical Pedagogy insists on poetic, religiously anti-dogmatic, worthy Life as a manifestation of Love, not of fear or of heated ‘critique’” (2005, p. 10). See Gur-Ze’ev, 1998b, p. 119-155; Gur-Ze’ev, 2003, p. 41-65.

Perhaps we are dealing here with a controversial generalization, but it is not insignificant how the variant of critical education developed by I. Gur-Ze'ev responds to the weaknesses of critical pedagogy that he points out. It seems that this is how we can read counter-education, one of the concepts fundamental to his proposal, which he defines as follows:

Within counter-education no room exists for a positive utopia, and it does not promise collective emancipation under present circumstances; rather counter-education suggests possibilities for identifying, criticizing, and resisting violent practices of normalization, control, and reproduction practices in a system that uses human beings as its agents and victims. Counter-education opens possibilities for refusing to abandon human potential to become other than directed by the system and the realm of self-evidence. It enables a chance -which is to be struggled for again and again – to challenge normalizing education in all its versions, including critical pedagogy (Gur-Ze'ev, 1998a, p. 463).

The ascetic ideal of critical education proposed by I. Gur-Ze'ev recommends consistent distrust not only of implemented systemic solutions to the organization of social life, but also of any promise to achieve its partial fulfilment, which he identifies as positive utopias. The desired result of this distrust is not withdrawal, escapism, but engagement and activism, which are fulfilled in resistance to overt and covert forms of violence and emancipation understood as the ever-repeated act of identifying, criticizing and overcoming them. I. Gur-Ze'ev reflects this practice of constantly repeated refusal with the figure of a nomad, a figure who is in constant motion and accepts his homelessness, that is, his aspirations are not dictated by the desire to return or reach a place of home, to possess it. They are determined by and are manifestations of the Love of Life as capable of revealing and experiencing in no other way than in the dialogue of the counter-educator with the world, the Other, including the student, on the path of seeking and making present the good (Gur-Ze'ev, 2003, p. 41-65; Gur-Ze'ev, Masschelein and Blacke, 2001, p. 99-101). Furthermore, love, as the opposite of violence, according to Gur-Ze'ev contradicts "fear, self-forgetfulness, greed and conquest" (2005, p. 24). Love is contrary to the appropriation of the otherness of the Other, which I. Gur-Ze'ev understands according to the thought of Emmanuel Levinas, and to which the appropriation is also led by normalizing education. Thus, for a nomad understood in this way, "a wanderer, an eternal-improviser", the proper condition is "Homelessness without the promise of an emancipatory 'home-returning' project [...]" (Gur-Ze'ev, 2005, p. 29). This condition of

homelessness is clarified by I. Gur-Ze'ev using the figure of the diaspora to denote the original and inalienable foreignness of man as a foreigner not so much deprived of his own territory, but aware of the conventionality of being at home. In this context, it is worth quoting one more quote, in which I. Gur-Ze'ev characterizes his philosophy of contestation and, at the same time, the dangers facing critical pedagogy itself:

Counter-education from the sources of Diasporic Philosophy counters collectivism, combats dogmatism, and opposes all other 'homes'. It refuses any plea or call for recycling, defending or enhancing the present order of things and its realms of self-evidence. Normalizing processes cannot but end up in collectives that surrender themselves to the destruction of the otherness of the Other as a concrete form of 'salvation'. Diasporic existence is anti-collectivist-oriented and anti-dogmatic. [...] The moment such counter-education is self-content and domesticated it will immediately transform itself into nothing but an old-new collective and an old-new form of normalizing education (2005, p. 32, 33).

In the era of mass education and the democratic promise made in the West to every citizen – including the common man, of universal equality, freedom and solidarity, counter-education is, as I. Gur-Ze'ev himself admits, an elitist emancipatory aspiration (2003, p. 58-59, 62; 1998a, p. 486). This is not a matter of historical or cultural boundaries or identification with a particular pedagogy; for example, Socrates' educational practice, contrasting it with the normalizing or even pragmatically and instrumentally oriented critical pedagogy of the sophists, is read by I. Gur-Ze'ev as a paradigm for counter-education (2003, p. 58)⁹. Therefore, we can risk saying that I. Gur-Ze'ev's concept of nonrepressive emancipatory education is not the only one that represents this paradigm. Nevertheless, in I. Gur-Ze'ev's view, counter-education, for which criticism is not a tool but part of a certain way of being, remains demanding and sophisticated. His objections to contemporary variants of critical pedagogy may indicate that he recognizes, as P. Rosanvallon did in the case of the counter-democracy, certain important

⁹ "The Socratic educational endeavor is the diametrical opposite of normalizing education. It is worthy of the name counter-education [...] As counter-education the Socratic project is committed to transcend any realm of self-evidence within whose horizons it is imprisoned, without, on the one hand, claiming to have the truth, and without, on the other, abandoning the commitment to reflection and transcendence" (Gur-Ze'ev, 2003, p. 44).

limits, beyond which organized distrust of education oscillates toward its flawed or even pathological forms. However, it seems that this crossing of boundaries is here the rule rather than the exception. Yet it is critical pedagogy – as a position built on an awareness of the historical and social, including political conditions of education and its own assumptions, and as an approach oriented towards identifying and resisting diverse forms of systemic violence and other social threats, as well as deepening democracy – that first deserves to be the one from which to expect a legitimate and trustworthy antidote to the excesses of populism. However, if I. Gur-Ze'ev is right, only counter-education is a safe antidote, regardless of the type of threat. But is counter-education a promise of a renewal of education and democracy that meets the hopes of those who contest?

Democracy, education and a lesson in populism

Referring to I. Gur-Ze'ev's notion of counter-education, I propose to focus attention on a reading of it that resonates with the perspective proposed by P. Rosanvallon: as that which contributes to the politics of protest and simultaneously somewhat deepens democracy. In this perspective, counter-education is not the reverse of education; it retains the significance of its form opposing another form, which it distrusts.

It can be said that this distrust was already evident at earlier stages of the evolution of Western democracies in the form of a critique of the traditional school or a number of advanced educational activities and initiatives undertaken within the new education movement, for example, reform pedagogy in Germany or progressivism in the United States. If one follows P. Rosanvallon's findings, one may venture to argue that also in education the post-totalitarian era brings about a significant change in the quality and consolidation of the form of social control. The fundamental issue here is the growing number and activity of various types of entities interested in the state and quality of education and at the same time characterised by distrust of its dominant form, their consolidation and, consequently, a regionally perceptible increase in their importance. In this simplified and incomplete characterisation, I would like to draw attention to another characteristic accompanying this distrust of the socially dominant form of education. Counter-education, just like all alternative education, can also be understood as a movement or action to recover what has been lost in 'traditional', normalizing education. Again by analogy, this time with reference to M. Canovan, we can speak of the 'promise of renewal of education'. However,

it should be noted once again that, according to I. Gur-Ze'ev, such a promise cannot be fulfilled other than as a negative utopia.

The promise of educational renewal provides in modern liberal democracies a thread of understanding between the various nominally egalitarian subjects of education under conditions where so much depends on it, its quality and access to it, and no area of ordinary people's daily lives can do without it. It seems understandable that the intense search for educational opportunity in late modernity may be accompanied by a conservative, progressive or other narrative of how the school community, or more broadly the collective participating in formal and informal education, has been robbed by elites and institutions of its rightful, attendant sovereignty, but will rise up and reclaim it. For a truly democratic education should first of all take into account the well-understood good of ordinary students. This story, interestingly, can also be found in various variants of critical pedagogy.

However, it should be noted that Rosanvallon does not equate counter-democracy with populism. Their relationship is of a different kind. A similar approach can be taken to the phenomenon of counter-education. In many cases, this distrust of education becomes radicalised and takes the form of unbridled and permanent criticism of the educational system, extreme condemnation, protest, contestation and rejection of school. In this sense, it can be assumed, a given part of a more broadly understood counter-education than I. Gur-Ze'ev wants to see it¹⁰ radicalises itself by intensifying, rather than controlling, its populist potential. Of particular importance in the context of the issue of populism are those cases in which the anger of parents, their radical criticism of formal education and the accompanying promise of a possible renewal of education led to significant changes in their children's educational careers. For example, a decision to include their children in home education (home schooling), or to choose or set up a school for them,

¹⁰ I. Gur-Ze'ev himself sometimes seems to understand counter-education more broadly, for example, when he writes: "Counter-education, as a negative to institutionalised education, is committed to dialogue, negation and transcendence, and against normalisation. Therefore it answers to the challenge of a prevailing educational practice which serves and represents the current order of things. Counter-education reacts against the closure of possibilities enacted by the prevailing educational formation, in its formal and informal practices, in schools and also in social interaction and within culture at large. Counter-education seeks to defend and empower the reflective potentials of the subject against the self-evidence of the order of capitalism, against those practices of normalisation which secure and develop the present order and present critique, resistance and hope for essential change as irrational" (Gur-Ze'ev, Masschelein and Blacke, 2001, p. 101).

the way of functioning of which would be devoid of the weaknesses of the dominant model of formal education and would implement the ideas of these parents about what the school should be like. The issue of educational populism can be shed some light on those cases in which the competence of parents and school and home schooling organisers was not sufficient to meet the decisions and intentions made, with the consequence that the initiative collapses in a relatively short time. As well as those cases where the disproportion and asymmetry between competences and undertaken educational tasks did not lead to the end of the project, it continues despite this. It also happens that the initiative, contrary to its assumptions, evolves towards the criticised and contested model of education. Many positive scenarios could be evoked here, but those selected and referred to here seem to foreshadow a better insight into how a given part of a more broadly understood counter-education than I. Gur-Ze'ev wants to it radicalises itself by intensifying, rather than controlling, its populist potential. The point is not to put an equal sign between alternative education and educational populism. Or rather, that distrust of normalizing education, the belief that education should be democratic, and the quest to fulfil the promise of a renewal of education underlie both successful educational experiments and failures that have much in common with fully developed political populisms. Perhaps what in education inspires hope and motivates to change the educational world is at the same time what itself has populist potential.

Therefore, according to the proposed reading, the relationship between education and populism can be considered complex. As a consequence, this gives rise to problematising the view that education is an antidote to populism. Perhaps ascetic counter-education as understood by I. Gur-Ze'ev could resist populism, but any other education or counter-education, including critical education, seems to have something of a populist quality about it. Moreover, the possibility of opposing populism not so much to knowledge as to education exists insofar as that these phenomena could be separated. However, if we see the political space and the educational space as mutually contingent and interrelated, and at the same time populism as permeating both the political sphere and the educational sphere, seeing education in general as an antidote to populism may itself be a populist postulate. In the eyes of populists and liberal democrats or simply populist opponents, this instrumental understanding of education can make both parties feel simultaneously disappointed and hopeful about it. They can accuse their opponents of propaganda, and at the same time count on the enlightening power of appropriate informal, school, public, and media education.

Naturally, the problematisation itself of the view that education would be the antidote to populism and the resultant findings need to be further developed. In the name of their announcement, I would like to refer once again to M. Canovan, who unlike many other scholars is able to see the brighter side of populism. In her view, the saving promise of democracy need not be entirely illusory:

it really is the case that people who can manage to believe in the possibility of collective action and to unite behind it can exercise more power than if they give up and concentrate on their private affairs. [...] Unrealistic visions may be a condition of real achievements as well as being a recipe for disappointment. Democracy, it seems, is obliged to face in two opposite directions at the same time (1999, p. 13).

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