Introduction
Populism and Social Cohesion in Southern Africa and Beyond: Towards a Research Agenda

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This special issue is the outcome of a regional workshop entitled "Populism(s) and social cohesion in Southern Africa: a regional challenge, a global challenge?" that was held in Cape Town, South Africa, 11–12 May 2022.[1] The workshop was co-organized by the Research Institute Social Cohesion (RISC) and the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) and brought together a variety of researchers and practitioners from the Southern African region and Germany in the form of a South-South-North exchange. The central aim of the encounter was to create space and time for a much-needed exchange of experiences and empirical insights on the varieties of political populisms; the different strategies to strengthen social cohesion in Namibia, South Africa, and Zimbabwe; as well as on the evolution of populist socio-political performances over the last years and their regional (and global) implications. The workshop was attended by scholars, practitioners, and activists from across the region, representatives of German political party foundations, and members of the Leipzig section of the RISC. This special issue brings together different workshop contributions, which were further elaborated and put into writing in the aftermath of the Cape Town meeting.

One of the central observations from the joint discussions was the absence of a common definition among the participants regarding the terms "social cohesion" and "populism", even though both termini appear regularly in public discourse within the Southern African region. The exchange clearly highlighted that there is significant variation in what these terms mean in different local and national contexts and how they are being negotiated and filled with meaning. We took this diversity of meanings and perspectives as a productive starting point for a deeper engagement in form of this special edition, in which we invited workshop participants to reflect on these diverse terminologies and fresh empirical observations. This special issue comprises both theoretical and empirical texts in order to advance the conceptual debate as well as to document emerging practices in this field, bringing together scholars and practitioners as well as scholar-activists from Zimbabwe, Namibia, South Africa, and beyond. It was especially important to us to capture not only academic, but also practitioners' and activists' voices from the region.

1. Populisms in Southern Africa

In line with the RISC's research project "Political populism in Southern Africa", this special issue focuses primarily on the former white settler colonies of South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Namibia, three countries that share a similar historical legacy of apartheid, which continues to affect regional socioeconomic and political realities today. This legacy is manifested in high racialized inequality and ongoing societal debates on how "real" (increasingly termed as "economic") justice, reconciliation, and freedom can be achieved.[2] Populists from both the left- and right-wing spectra make use of these entrenched ethnic and racial schisms. The 2017 Bell Pottinger scandal in South Africa and the use of the "white monopoly capital" slogan for targeted smear campaigns against journalists have brought to light how easily racial inequalities can be politically exploited.[3] Against the backdrop of recent xenophobic violence in South Africa against migrants from other African countries, "Operation Dudula" and the "Put South Africans First" campaign have re-energized debates about how to deal with hate speech, within and beyond expanding social media spaces, and how populist discourses relate to violence.[4]

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2   In South Africa, the term "economic freedom" became popular with the emergence of the Economic Freedom Fighters in 2013. However, it has already been used in parliamentary and public debates before that. In Namibia, it also appears frequently in parliamentary debates (see, e.g., Republic of Namibia, Hansards National Assembly, Hon. Deputy Minister of Health and Social Services, National Youth Council Bill, 1 October 2008, p. 156) and has been regularly referred to by the Affirmative Repositioning movement (see, e.g., D. S. Nauyoma et al., Affirmative Repositioning: Awakening a Generation, Windhoek 2016, p. 228).

3   For a detailed geneology of the divisive signifier "white monopoly capital" in South Africa, see A. Beresford et al., Conceptualising the emancipatory potential of populism: A typology and analysis, in: Political Geography 102 (April 2023), pp. 1–15.

4   See, for instance, the "Real 411" initiative against hate speech and disinformation by Media Monitoring Africa in South Africa (https://www.real411.org/) and the "Namibia Fact Check" programme, led by the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) (https://namibiafactcheck.org.na/).

Today, a wide range of actors in the region make use of populist rhetoric that pits an imagined "people" against a (equally imagined) "elite", including factions within ruling parties that launch populist campaigns (e.g. "white monopoly capital"), emerging opposition parties (e.g. the Economic Freedom Fighters [EFF] and ActionSA in South Africa or the Landless People's Movement [LPM] in Namibia), as well as more "established" opposition parties and movements that often engage in forms of minority populism (e.g. the South African Freedom Front plus [FF+]) and non-parliamentary opposition (e.g. the outright white supremacist organization Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging [AWB]). Which movement, party or politician is or is not considered a populist (or considered "more" or "less" populist, if we conceive of populism as a continuum) is, of course, highly debated, also in this anthology. In the specific social, economic, historical, and political context of the former settler colonies and liberation movements turned ruling parties that operate in de facto dominant party systems today, the question arises of how populism, often characterized by a juxtaposition of an "elite" and "the people",[5] can be understood for Southern Africa: Who is "the elite" and who is "the people"?

2. On Terminology and Historicity

Social cohesion has been discussed very differently across time and space.[6] Current debates on populisms und social cohesion are intimately connected, although in different ways. Over the last ten years in Germany, the perception that populism and polarization are on the rise has given way to a broader debate on what is actually holding German society together.[7] Finding answers to this question has become the subject of several policy-oriented research efforts, such as the RISC. In South Africa, on the other hand, a state-led debate on social cohesion has already been ongoing for over 20 years, originating in the quest to overcome the collective societal trauma of apartheid.[8] However, socio-political attempts to address social cohesion in the Global South, such as in South Africa, have so far hardly been acknowledged in global social cohesion literature. The term "populism", on the other hand, has only become more widely debated in the South African public sphere with the rise of the EFF ten years ago, in 2013. The "chicken or egg"-question – which came first, concerns with divisive and exclusionary rhetoric or re-

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5   See C. Mudde and C. R. Kaltwasser, Populism: A Very Short Introduction, Oxford 2017.
6   U. Engel and M. Middell, Gesellschaftlicher Zusammenhalt und Populismus: Überlegungen zur Varianz in Zeit und Raum, in: N. Deitelhoff, O. Groh-Samberg, and M. Middell (eds.), Gesellschaftlicher Zusammenhalt: Ein interdisziplinärer Dialog, Frankfurt am Main/New York 2020, pp. 89–108.
7   See, for example, the frequent interventions by German president Frank-Walter Steinmeier speaking on the "glue" (in German: "Kitt") that holds German society together. See, for example, Deutscher Bundestag, Rede von Dr. Frank-Walter Steinmeier, 12 February 2017, https://www.bundestag.de/dokumente/textarchiv/2017/kw06-rede-steinmeier-493110.
8   The term is, however, much less present in public debates in Namibia and in Zimbabwe. See, for example, C. Blum, Social cohesion im südlichen Afrika: Diskurse, Institutionen und Praktiken, in: M. Middell (ed.), Varianzen des Zusammenhalts: Historisch und transregional vergleichende Perspektiven, Frankfurt am Main/New York 2024 (forthcoming).

flections on what holds us together in the first place – must thus be answered differently, depending on the context.

In academic and policy literature, populism has commonly been conceptualized as either a "thin-centered" ideology,[9] a political strategy,[10] or a discursive (or political) style.[11] It has increasingly been analysed by looking at sociocultural performative elements.[12] The still very limited literature that deals with populism "in Africa" predominantly discusses the term as a political strategy (see, for instance, "electoral populism"[13]; "ethnopopulism"[14]) or as a form of discourse[15] or in exceptional cases as an ideology.[16] Analyses commonly refer to individual leaders (see, e.g., "Mugabeism"[17]) or specific political parties.[18] However, younger and internationally less prominent political parties, such as the newly founded ActionSA in South Africa, which frequently makes use of right-wing xenophobic rhetoric, but also left-wing social movements, such as the Affirmative Repositioning (AR) in Namibia which has recently applied for registration as a political party, have received little academic attention so far. Moreover, comparative analyses within the Southern African region and across the continent, as well as research on populist attitudes that focus on "the led" instead of "the leader", remain an exception.[19]

The recent surge in policy and scholarly interest in populism has also led to an increasing semantic diversity: "competing populisms",[20] "racial populism",[21] and "generational populism"[22] are among the many new terms that have recently emerged and that are enriching the terminological debate. At the same time, despite (and partially because)

9   C. Mudde, Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe, Cambridge 2007; Mudde and Kaltwasser, Populism.
10 K. Weyland, Populism: A political-strategic approach, in: C. R. Kaltwasser et al. (eds.), The Oxford Handbook of Populism, Oxford 2017, pp. 48–72.
11 E. Laclau, On Populist Reason, London/New York 2005; B. Moffitt, The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, and Representation, Redwood City 2016.
12 P. Ostiguy et al., Populism in Global Perspective: A Performative and Discursive Approach, New York 2021.
13 C. Boone, Electoral Populism Where Property Rights Are Weak: Land Politics in Contemporary Sub-Saharan Africa, in: Comparative Politics 41 (2009) 2, pp. 183–201.
14 N. Cheeseman and M. Larmer, Ethnopopulism in Africa: opposition mobilization in diverse and unequal societies, in: Democratization 22 (2015) 1, pp. 22–50.
15 H. Melber, Populism in Southern Africa under Liberation Movements as Governments, in: Review of African Political Economy 45 (2018) 158, pp. 678–686.
16 P. L. E. Idahosa, The Populist Dimension to African Political Thought, Trenton, NJ 2004.
17 S. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (ed.), Mugabeism? History, Politics, and Power in Zimbabwe, New York 2015.
18 See, e.g., S. Mbete, The Economic Freedom Fighters: South Africa's Turn Towards Populism?, in: Journal of African Elections 14 (2015) 1, pp. 35–59 and S. Mbete, Out with the old, in with the new? The ANC and EFF's Battle to Represent the South African "People", in: P. Ostiguy et al., Populism in Global Perspective: A Performative and Discursive Approach, New York 2021, pp. 240–254 on the EFF.
19 For an exception regarding the regional dimension of populism, see Melber, Populism in Southern Africa under Liberation Movements as Governments. For an exception regarding research on populist attitudes, see R. Nyenhuis and C. Schulz-Herzenberg, Failure to launch? The lack of populist attitudinal activation in the 2019 South African elections, in: The Journal of Modern African Studies 61 (2023) 2, pp. 257–279.
20 N. Cheeseman, Populism in Africa and the potential for "ethnically blind" politics, in: N. Cheeseman and C. de la Torre (eds.), Routledge Handbook of Global Populism, London 2018, pp. 357–369, here p. 363, referring to Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Halisi's contributions to the study of populism in Africa.
21 Ibid., p. 362, with regard to Julius Malema.
22 L. Melchiorre, The Generational Populism of Bobi Wine, in: Review of African Political Economy, 12 February 2021, https://roape.net/2021/02/12/the-generational-populism-of-bobi-wine/.

the diverse vocabulary that has developed around populism, the term itself has remained conceptually vague. Nearly every African president (and opposition leader) has been labelled a populist at some moment or another, which begs the question of the purpose of "populist" as an analytical category. Moreover, the way in which the term has been employed with regard to the African context has shifted over time. Looking at early academic articles on "populism in African" written in the 1960s following the first wave of independence, populism did not have a negative connotation, but was intimately connected to the emancipatory struggle. To the contrary, the term was often associated with popular uprisings against colonial powers and resistance to a "capitalist" order. Literature on "populism in Africa" before the end of the Cold War regularly spoke of "agrarian populism"[23] and the "popular will" in the context of revolutions and the fight for independence.[24] Striking are also occasional writings on "white" populism in the context of the Southern African settler colonies.[25] Ian Henderson, for example, analysed the uprising of white farmers against the British South Africa Company in Southern Rhodesia (today's Zimbabwe). He describes the resistance to British imperialism by looking at the bottom of the hierarchy of white Rhodesians (the "less privileged members of the privileged class").[26] Since the 1990s, but especially post-2010, academic articles mentioning "populism in Africa" have multiplied.[27] The term "ethnopopulism" has become particularly trendy in this regard.[28] Ethnic grievances, clientelism, as well as the precariousness of the urban youth have moved to the centre stage of academic discourse on populism.[29] As Ulf Engel and Matthias Middell argue, in contrast to large parts of contemporary Europe, populisms in Southern Africa often aim at the construction or reification of either "racial groups" or "classes".[30] This trend seems to be partly in line with more general developments on the African continent, where variants of ethnopopulism have emerged after the democratization tendencies at the beginning of the 1990s, centring on differently imagined ethnicities and ethnic groups.[31] The diachronic analysis by Engel and Middell furthermore suggests to be cautious when arguing for the *newness* of the

23 See, for instance, M. Kilson, Anatomy of African Class Consciousness: Agrarian Populism in Ghana from 1915 to the 1940s and beyond, in: M. Kilson and I. L. Markovitz (eds.), Studies in Power and Class in Africa, New York 1987, pp. 50–66; E. Green, Agrarian Populism in Colonial and Postcolonial Malawi, in: African Studies Review 54 (2011) 3, pp. 143–164.
24 A. A. Mazrui and G. F. Engholm, Rousseau and Intellectualized Populism in Africa, in: The Review of Politics 30 (1968) 1, pp. 19–32; J. S. Saul, On African Populism, in: J. S. Saul and G. Arrighi (eds.), Essays on the Political Economy of Africa, New York/London 1973, pp. 152–179.
25 I. Henderson, White Populism in Southern Rhodesia, in: Comparative Studies in Society and History 14 (1972) 4, pp. 387–399, here p. 396.
26 Ibid.
27 See, for instance, the results of the search ["populism+Africa"] at Google Ngram Viewer (https://books.google.com/ngrams/).
28 Cheeseman and Larmer, Ethnopopulism in Africa.
29 See, e.g., D. Resnick, Urban poverty and party populism in African democracies, Cambridge 2014; D. Resnick, Populist Politics in Africa, in: Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics 28 August 2019, https://oxfordre.com/politics/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228637-e-699?rskey=K1V1mA&result=7.
30 Engel and Middell, Gesellschaftlicher Zusammenhalt und Populismus, p. 103.
31 Ibid.

populism phenomenon. Anthropologist William Mazzarella argues that what political scientists have more recently termed "populism", namely the (potential) breakdown of "the liberal settlement",[32] has been investigated by anthropologists – using different vocabularies – for a long time.[33]

While case studies and the distinction between different varieties of populism across time and space has increased among political scientists[34] – arguably an important step towards including the Global South more systematically in this corpus of literature – a universalist script still prevails. Although analyses categorize different forms of populism according to regions and/or time periods, they usually do so from a bird's-eye view that engages little with dynamics on the ground.[35] Several research disciplines and projects invest a lot of energy into defining and operationalizing these two concepts with the goal to strive for global comparisons.

Adopting a social constructivist approach and considering populism as well as social cohesion as "floating signifiers"[36] rather than clear-cut analytical categories, this *Comparativ* special issue goes beyond the mere contribution of new empirical case studies to this research field. We see a special added value in bringing in decidedly regional as well as comparative perspectives that do not follow a classic comparative politics script, but that focus on cultural transfer and transnational learning. Against the backdrop of a proclaimed "global rise of populism",[37] inquiries about the local, national and potentially regional uses of and negotiation processes regarding these terms are becoming increasingly vital in order to critically test and nuance their often suggested "global" or universal character. If "social cohesion" and "populism" are to become meaningful analytical tools for critical area studies, global studies and social sciences more generally, honing remains necessary. This special issue thus aims to contribute to the two future avenues in populism research proposed by Jonathan Dean and Bice Maiguashca: first, a conceptual *renewal* in form of adding empirical perspectives, and second, a *reorientation* by moving from looking at populism as a concept to looking at populism as a signifier.[38]

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32   W. Mazzarella, The Anthropology of Populism: Beyond the Liberal Settlement, in: Annual Review of Anthropology 48 (2019) 1, pp. 45–60: "I suggest that, these days, 'populism' is a word that we reach for when we sense the possible breakdown of what I call the liberal settlement" (p. 48).

33   Mazzarella, The Anthropology of Populism: "This article suggests that although there is not much of an explicitly defined anthropology of populism, anthropologists have nevertheless been working for many years on the things we talk about when we talk about populism" (p. 45).

34   See, for example, Kaltwasser et al., The Oxford Handbook of Populism which includes a section covering different world regions, among them Africa (D. Resnick, Populism in Africa, pp. 101–120).

35   See, e.g., H. J. Puhle, Populism and Democracy in the 21st Century, SCRIPTS Working Paper No. 2, Berlin: Cluster of Excellence 2055 "Contestations of the Liberal Script – SCRIPTS", 2020.

36   See Laclau, On Populist Reason.

37   See, e.g., Moffitt, The Global Rise of Populism.

38   J. Dean and B. Maiguashca, Did somebody say populism? Towards a renewal and reorientation of populism studies, in: Journal of Political Ideologies 25 (2020) 1, pp. 11–27. The authors provide an insightful mapping of populism literature and make a proposal of how to get out of the "conceptual impasse" in the field.

3. Relevance beyond Southern Africa

Whilst this specific project focuses on Southern Africa, the debates from the region are also highly relevant for post-trauma societies elsewhere, as we can currently observe in Ethiopia. Following a violent two-year conflict in and around the Tigray region, a debate led by the Ethiopian federal government is currently in full swing on how to create "social cohesion" in the highly culturally and ethnically diverse country. This highlights the significance of the term for present-day socio-political projects on the continent *beyond* the Southern African region. As these developments in Ethiopia are currently unfolding in real time and it is still unclear how this specific social cohesion project will be moved forward, we are very greatful to have had the opportunity to include in this volume an insightful interview on the current state of the debate with Fana Gebresenbet, the director of the Institute for Peace and Security Studies (IPSS) at Addis Ababa University. Arguably, social cohesion has become a hinge that connects regional debates from different parts of the continent with each other where social cohesion discourses are embedded in post-conflict reconciliation efforts and the quest for healing.

4. Contents of this Special Issue

This *Comparativ* special issue aims to further populism research by zooming into Southern Africa, nuancing universalist approaches to these terminologies, and emphasizing the importance of taking different local, national, and regional experiences seriously in the study of populism. The different contributions highlight the diversity of how populism and social cohesion are being engaged with across the region while illuminating new perspectives and current debates. The authors reflect on three key elements in particular:

4.1. "Regionness" and the Transnational in Populism

One central observation from the Cape Town workshop was that participants primarily spoke about their own respective national contexts. A lot of potential for in-depth cross-border research and analysis that focuses on transnational connections and entanglements between various actors exists, which has not yet been harnessed. While the debates during the workshop reflected a certain regional dimension of what was experienced, especially with regard to the similar socioeconomic challenges associated with the common legacy of settler colonialism and former liberation movements in power, the actual transfer of ideas, practices, concepts, and even policies (i.e. the land question) across the region still remain to be empirically investigated.

4.2. The Variety of Different Social Cohesion Vocabulary

Another key insight from the Cape Town exchange was that the language and terminologies used to speak of notions related to social cohesion as well as populism differed

significantly between various local and national contexts.[39] Both the terms "social cohesion" and "populism" can have positive and negative connotations. As highlighted in the article by Christi van der Westhuizen of this special issue, addressing xenophobia in South Africa, there can be a lot of cohesion in violence. Social movements such as #FeesMustFall on South African university campuses or on urban land rights in Namibia's capital Windhoek can represent "positive" populism in the sense that voices that had been ignored or unheard are being noticed (see the article by Rui Tyitende, this volume). A variety of different vocabularies have emerged in this field, in particular around the notion of social cohesion (for the case of Namibia, see the article by Rui Tyitende; for Ethiopia, see the interview with Fana Gebresenbet, both this volume). Similarities, ambivalences, and contradictions in discourses on social cohesion and populism being visible across the continent, differentiating between and disentangling the various meanings of this wide array of terminologies employed remains a key challenge to scholars and practitioners alike.

4.3. The Changing Relationship between "the Leader" and "the Led"

And third, many reflections over the course of the workshop revolved around the appeal of charismatic leaders and their rhetoric employed. The need to conceptualize the evolving relationship between "the led" and "the leader" (see the contributions by Christi van der Westhuizen and Ringisai Chikohomero, both this volume) was identified, not only for the specific regional context where the way "the people" is shaped by high inequalities along racial lines, but also in the context of mass media, (mass) youth unemployment, and growing urbanization rates. As a consequence, performative elements that populists can draw from are abundant (i.e. historical injustice, inequalities, youth unemployment, race and ethnicity, gender roles, social conservativism, etc.). Looking at political leaders as well as "the people", this special issue engages with populism as a "dynamic social relationship".[40]

Each of the articles addresses one or several of these three core elements. Together, the contributions speak to both the horizontal (the citizen-citizen relationship) and the vertical (the citizen-state relationship) dimensions of the social cohesion. This special issue aims to further the debate on populism and social cohesion from a regional perspective, highlight the interconnectedness of discourses and practices, and to link these insights to newly emerging debates elsewhere on the continent. Of the opinion that discourses and practices are interlinked and actors learn from each other, the objectives of the special issue are (1) to cover perspectives, voices, and emerging practices on populism and social cohesion, (2) to foster intra- and interregional perspectives in the study of populism and social cohesion, and (3) to overcome the nation-state as the primary lens of anaylsis. By

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39   See also U. Engel, Social cohesion and resilience: On the challenge of comparing and measuring, in: M. Bøås et al. (eds.), Resisting Radicalization: Exploring the Non-Occurrence of Violent Extremism, Boulder, CO 2024 (forthcoming).

40   Dean and Maiguashca, Towards a renewal and reorientation of populism studies, p. 20.

bringing together perspectives from practitioners and scholars on and from the region in this volume, we also aim to enhance the dialogue between academia and praxis and to bridge the continuing, oftentimes artificial, divide between these two groups.[41] Furthermore, this special issue contributes to linking the debates on populism and social cohesion in the Global South and the Global North more systematically with each other, which often still take place in parallel.

5. Individual Contributions

In the first article, Christi van der Westhuizen, from Nelson Mandela University (South Africa), engages with xenophobic discourse of various political actors in South Africa. She investigates the information flow between "the leader" and "the led" in the context of "democratic populism". In opposition to Ernesto Laclau's suggestion that left populism is created due to an impetus "from below", van der Westhuizen describes the version of populism currently observed in South Africa as being radically exclusionary of marginalized groups, despite the use of anti-apartheid struggle rhetoric and symbolisms. The conceptual link and ambiguous causal directionality between populism and social cohesion comes clearly to the fore in the context of xenophobia.

In the second article, Mduduzi Ntuli, from the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre (JHGC), explores how genocide is being taught in the South African context and how the term functions as a gateway to introducing apartheid in school curricula. He describes the methodologies of the JHGC, a central institution involved in public education, which centre around public memory and foster inter-generational connections. He also addresses how the specificity of the South African experience can be understood against the backdrop of the global construction of *race*. By exploring the approaches and practices of the JHGC, Ntuli provides glimpses into how young South African "born frees"[42] can navigate life in a multi-racial, diverse, and highly unequal society while defying attempts of divisions that are easily sown since *race* still remains a central trigger point that populists across the region make use of.

In the third contribution, Ringisai Chikohomero, from the Pretoria-based Institute for Security Studies (ISS), addresses the relationship between "the leader" and "the led" in Zimbabwe and describes how a growing distance between the population and the ruling party Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front (ZANU–PF) has become entrenched in the country's post-independence. The author highlights the historical path dependencies linked to colonial perceptions of the "African subject" as well as current political dynamics that continue to curtail active citizenship. Chikohomero describes the symbol of the "father figure", successfully employed by both the ruling party and the op-

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41   This has to a large extent been an artificial division, as the burgeoning reflections on concepts such as "scholar-activists", "scholar-practitioners", or "activist scholar-practitioners" reveal.

42   People born after the end of apartheid or around 1994 who did not grow up under apartheid.

position to re-emphasize hierarchies, as well as the land reform in the early 2000s as powerful tools of control that keep citizens in a subservient relationship with the ruling party. In the fourth article, Rui Tyitende, from the University of Namibia (UNAM) in Windhoek, discusses recent political populisms in Namibia. He critically examines the term "populism" and its application when it comes to the African context, proposing that the current discussion should gravitate towards "progressive populism" vs "destructive populism". Using the case of the Affirmative Repositioning in Namibia, Tyitende argues that not all populist politics is automatically negative but can also give a voice to the downtrodden. The author describes the rise of the hitherto understudied AR as social protest movement around urban land rights. He also takes a look at the populism of current Namibian president Hage Geingob, which is discernible against the backdrop of plummeting approval ratings for the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) Party of Namibia, thus addressing populisms of both the ruling party and the (non-parliamentary) opposition in the country.

In the fifth contribution, Constanze Blum, from the Leipzig section of the Research Institute Social Cohesion (RISC), investigates the transnational linkages between populist actors and the transfer of their practices in the Southern African region. She specifically focuses on emerging populist parties in Namibia and South Africa, including the EFF, the AR, and the LPM, and shares empirical observations of how they interact with each other and "learn" from each other. Her article argues for the importance to integrate regional dynamics and transnational exchanges between both the former liberation movements in power and emerging opposition parties more systematically into the study of populism in order to overcome the container of the nation-state as primary unit of analysis in this research field.

In the final contribution, Fana Gebresenbet from the Institute for Peace and Security Studies (IPSS) in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) shares insights into current developments in the Ethiopian peace process that was launched after the brutal two-year-long war in the Tigray region (formally) came to an end. In conversation with Ulf Engel (RISC, Leipzig), Gebresenbet unveils the role "social cohesion" plays in the efforts by the Ethiopian federal government to start a process of reconciliation and healing. This timely contribution creates a bridge between Ethiopia and other post-conflict contexts on the continent, where these terms have been prominently debated in conjunction with each other, not only in South Africa, Namibia, and Zimbabwe but also in Rwanda and Sierra Leone – to name but a few.

6. The Way Forward

This special issue constitutes a first step in filling some of the identified research gaps relating to populism and social cohesion, especially when it comes to the Global South in general and the African continent in particular. However, further research and conceptual reflections including on how we speak *about* these terms are vital in order to counter

dominant universalist and Western-centric approaches and to foster the empirical and theoretical advancements of transnational populism research.[43] An edited volume on populism in Africa is currently in the pipeline that aims to compile the variegated experiences and diverse cases across the continent. In a similar vein, a handbook on social cohesion in Africa is planned, extending beyond the Southern African region to cover the entire continent.[44] Furthermore, in autumn 2023, the IPSS in Addis Ababa will launch a working paper series on social cohesion in the Horn of Africa. Too often, research remains confined to *the national* as the unit of analysis, only touching upon transnational connections, linkages, and learning processes. While this special issue already highlights the transnational dimension of populism, there still is much more be explored in this area. It thus intends to stimulate this growing debate, to enrich the empirical discussion, and to make the reader curious about the research in this field that is yet to come.

43   See Engel, Social cohesion and resilience.
44   Both edited by Constanze Blum, Christi van der Westhuizen, and Ulf Engel.