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The study of populism is instructive about the consequences of condescension, arrogance, and ignorance on the part of elites and intellectuals.

Comer Vann Woodward, 1981

Indeed, our incapacity to foresee has been the main lesson of this cataclysm: how could we have been so wrong? All the polls, all the newspapers, all the commentators, the entire intelligentsia. It is as if we had completely lacked any means of encountering those whom we struggled even to name: the ‘uneducated white men’, the ones that ‘globalization left behind’; some even tried calling them ‘deplorables’. There’s no question that those people are out there, but we have utterly failed to hear their voices, let alone represent them [...] We, the ‘intellectuals’, live in a bubble — or, perhaps better, on an archipelago amid a sea of discontents.

Bruno Latour, 2016

Introduction

Nowadays everyone is talking about populism as well as about ‘the people’. Yet this paper is not concerned that much with populism and ‘the people’ *per se* – of course these two are connected in many ways. Instead, emphasis is placed on how exactly we (tend to) *talk* about populism and ‘the people’. Because in the public sphere – in politics and in journalism *as well as in the academic realm* – we basically talk about populism. In fact, we cannot stop talking about it. And this little word, ‘talking’, should not be left unnoticed. Why? Because language is never innocent. Language does not merely reflect an objective truth but dynamically constructs our (social) reality. And this construction never takes place in a vacuum. It is over-determined by various economic, class, symbolic and imaginary contexts; it expresses interests and inclinations; finally, it reflects the division/fragmentation of the social field and the antithetical socio-political representations produced by it. Hence, there is not one absolute reality, but many different and competing ones. As a consequence, attitudes

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towards populism and ‘the people’, towards (democratic) politics itself, vary both synchronically and diachronically.

Hence, if there is one thing that should differentiate the scientific – but not only the scientific, let us say a generally reflexive – stance towards socio-political phenomena is a suspicion towards the ‘obvious’ and the ‘taken for granted’; an effort to reveal the mechanisms through which it has been constructed and consolidated, to unravel its entanglement with power relations and with the hegemonic struggles present in every society. It is therefore urgent to critically address the question of the (usually *pejorative*) meaning and the (predominantly *dismissive*) ethico-political connotations attributed to specific socio-political practices which centrally refer to ‘the people’, aspiring to express popular demands, promoting popular participation and defending ‘popular sovereignty’. What seems to be needed is a reflexive, critical but not *a priori* dismissive appraisal of the aforementioned practices, which are – almost deterministically – labeled as ‘populist’ and at the same time stigmatized as irresponsible, irrational, dangerous and so on. Such a reflexive stance directly follows from the basic principles of discourse analysis – and of all rigorous scientific approaches to socio-political phenomena, for that matter.

Indeed the discursive sequence in question (reference to popular demands and ‘the people’ = populism = radical evil) has been sedimented in many public spheres to such an extent that one could argue that it has been *naturalized*. Both citizens and many academics apply it in describing a myriad of antithetical phenomena without ever doubting its relevance and applicability. That would be a concrete example of what Roland Barthes calls *myth*: a special type of *discourse* that becomes naturalized, represses its contingent and historical articulation and presents itself as an obvious and indisputable certainty, as *truth*. At this point Barthes’ critical stance is of great interest to us. As he emphasizes in his inaugural lecture at the *Collège de France*, ‘it was a question [...] of understanding (or of describing) how a society produces stereotypes, i.e., triumphs of artifice, which it then consumes as innate meanings, i.e., triumphs of nature. Semiology (my semiology, at least) is generated by an intolerance of this mixture of bad faith and good conscience, which characterizes the general morality [...] *Language worked on by power*: that was the object of this first semiology’ (Barthes 1979: 11-12). Truth and knowledge production – both mediated by language and discourse – are always over-determined by processes of articulation that very rarely operate in isolation from power relations. This is why Foucault, always alert to the intricacies of the power/knowledge nexus, coins the paradoxical term ‘Regimes of Truth’, meaning the frameworks that regulate public discourse and distinguish what can be said from what cannot, what is from what is not given credibility and assigned truth value (Foucault 1991: 73).

Obviously this is directly relevant to the debate around so-called ‘post-truth’, which dominated the public space following Donald Trump’s victory. *What if, to put it provocatively, every truth is a post-truth?* It is only from the point of view of a mythical, unreflexive attachment to (our) ‘regime of truth’ that *post-truth* can be so easily delineated and condemned. Yet, this is precisely what puts in doubt the *epistemic* validity of such distributions.¹ Instead, what seems to be unfolding before our eyes is

¹ If so, however, does that mean that we are condemned to inhabit a relativist – if not solipsistic – universe? Not necessarily. From a Lacanian psychoanalytic point of view, for example, it is possible to subscribe to a radical constructionist understanding of social *reality* without renouncing the primacy of our encounters with the *real*; only this *real* is not a representationalist *real*, it is not identical to our

the collapse of the politico-symbolic preconditions of sharing a common truth. Suddenly the (supposed) One is split into Two. And thus we encounter a division between two antithetical – equally fantasmatic – regimes of truth, between the camps of their adherents that increasingly realize that the minimum symbolic bond binding them together is not there anymore, something dissolving the chances to sustain – or reach again in the short-term – an *agonistic* compromise à la Chantal Mouffe. As Bruno Latour has cogently put it:

We thus find ourselves with our countries split in two, each half becoming ever less capable of grasping its own reality, let alone the other side's. The first half — let us call them the globalized — believe that the horizon of emancipation and modernity (often confused with the reign of finance) can still expand to embrace the whole planet. Meanwhile, the second half has decided to retreat to the Aventine Hill, dreaming of a return to a past world.

Thus, two utopias: a utopia of the future confronting a utopia of the past. The opposition between Clinton and Trump illustrated this rather well: both occupied their own bubbles of unrealism. For now, the utopia of the past has won out. But there's little reason to think that the situation would be much better and more sustainable had the utopia of the future triumphed instead (Latour 2016).

Judging from the (almost ubiquitous) power and (nearly universal) dispersion of the above obviously pejorative/negative *mythologization* of populism, a process of *de-mythologization* seems to be justified and could even be deemed necessary. The latter would require a more reflexive and sober investigation of the multitude of language games articulated around 'the people', politics and populism both synchronically and diachronically. Populism research stands to benefit from focusing on the various representations claiming the expression of popular interests, identities and demands and, in addition, on the complex and polarized language games which develop around the symbolic expression and the affective investment of these demands. Such language games may involve the *recognition* or the *idealization*, the *rejection* or the *demonization* of the phenomenon in question (leading to the development of 'populist'/'pro-populist' and 'anti-populist' camps). Here, of course, recognition may emanate from an emancipatory desire for equal rights, while idealization may arise from a reduction of the 'popular' to the ethnic core of the nation. Similarly, rejection may involve a suspicion towards the specific ways through which popular demands are formulated and the political actors (parties, leaders, etc.) that promote them. But it may also signal an elitist foreclosure of popular sovereignty as the foundation of a democratic polity. Thus, both (pro)populist and anti-populist discourses can acquire 'progressive' or 'reactionary', democratic or anti-democratic forms.

Especially in times of global crisis the confrontation between populism and anti-populism emerges as the predominant discursive cleavage within various political, geographical and cultural spheres (from SYRIZA and PODEMOS in Southern Europe to Latin America and the USA of Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders). Now, in most cases, research focuses on the different versions the above

symbolic and imaginary reality, it is what exceeds this reality, what stimulates our desire to represent it but also reveals the inadequacy of our (always partial) representations. See, for a more comprehensive elaboration, Stavrakakis 2007: 5-14.

antagonism takes in political discourse and journalism. Therefore the role of social and political scientists who have had a significant impact on the identification, naming and – most important – on the often unreflexive denunciation of populism is left under-researched if not completely foreclosed. What then if one follows a more Gramscian approach? What if we focus on the role of intellectuals in the hegemonic struggles around populism? Drawing upon the work of Anthony Giddens regarding what he calls a ‘double hermeneutic’, it quickly becomes abundantly clear that in the debates around populism, social and political theorists are not and cannot be neutral and detached observers. In the social sciences, scientific inquiry not only needs to take into account the meaning that social actors ascribe to their actions and the social world at large; in addition, ‘[t]he “findings” of the social sciences very often enter constitutively into the world they describe’ (Giddens 1987: 20). The question that arises from this point of view has to do with the involvement of academic discourse in the *negative/pejorative naturalization/mythologization of populism*: is socio-scientific discourse predominantly anti-populist? If yes, how has this anti-populism been established in the academic sphere? Finally, to what extent does this anti-populism affect the negative naturalization of populism in public discourse? How does it facilitate the reproduction of the anti-populist myth and at what cost? What unfolds in the following paragraphs is a brief and incomplete, but hopefully productive, attempt to deal with such questions.

Constructing a genealogy of academic anti-populism: The birth of the anti-populist matrix in the work of Richard Hofstadter

If one attempts to construct a genealogy of the academic trajectory of anti-populist arguments, she/he shall very soon recognize that its roots can be most likely traced back to the work of Richard Hofstadter in the 1950s as well as to the writings of his ‘liberal’ and ‘pluralist’ fellow-travellers. What has preoccupied this academic circle was, at least initially, the (re-)assessment of American populism during the 1890s. In particular, the year 1955 marks in the US the publication of a very influential book, Richard Hofstadter’s *The Age of Reform*, which includes his famous attack on American Populism in a chapter characteristically – and pejoratively – entitled ‘The Folklore of Populism’. This text is emblematic of the revisionist turn in American historiography of the populist movement. Before its publication most accounts of so-called ‘progressive’ historians had praised, following Hicks (1931), American Populism as a progressive democratic mass movement that expressed the interests and grievances of many strata of the population (mostly over-indebted farmers and over-exploited workers) suffering in an era of aggressive capitalist modernization. Although, on one level, he does acknowledge the ‘ambiguous character’ of populism (Hofstadter 1955: 18) and even accepts that ‘[t]here is indeed much that is good and usable in the Populist past’ (Hofstadter 1955: 60), Hofstadter is determined to focus on its negative side: on ‘its significant provincialism’; ‘its relations with nativism and nationalism’; last but not least, ‘its tincture of anti-semitism’ (Hofstadter 1955: 60).

In effect, his approach is dismissive of the movement; as he argues, in populist political priorities ‘I have found much that was retrograde and delusive, a little that was vicious, and a good deal that was comic’ (Hofstadter 1955: 12). The populists are indeed depicted as a movement looking backwards, at a lost egalitarian utopia of American agrarian republicanism nostalgic of the Jacksonian tradition of ‘Equal rights

for all, special privileges for none' (Hofstadter 1955: 62-3). Their antagonistic vision of social and political space as one divided between a flourishing minority and a suffering majority is derided and ridiculed (Hofstadter 1955: 64-69).² Last but not least, the populist imaginary is denounced as conspiratorial and anti-semitic (Hofstadter 1955: 61, 78).

What is most important, however, is that this negative depiction is not limited to American Populism, but extends to all radical movements. Why? Simply because, for Hofstadter, radical movements like populism offer the opportunity to 'agitators with paranoid tendencies, who are able to make a vocational asset out of their psychic disturbances' (Hofstadter 1955: 71). What is also significant in his work is that one can find there the basic idea that American populism is an inherent feature of at least one side of American political culture within a *dualist* context. Indeed, for Hofstadter, populism indicates a political outlook that constitutes a major current affecting American political culture as a whole: 'I consider the Populist Party to be merely a heightened expression, at a particular moment of time, of a kind of popular impulse that is endemic in American political culture' (Hofstadter 1955: 4). It has to do with a certain holism and urgency, a restlessness, with the fact that all political causes become 'fits of moral crusading that would be fatal if they were not sooner or later tempered with a measure of apathy and of common sense' (Hofstadter 1955: 12). What we seem to have here is the existence of two cultural and political camps, one associated with nativism, a nostalgic traditionalism and 'moral absolutism' and another one that is pragmatic, flexible and capable of synchronizing with the pace of modernization, familiarized with the need of accepting 'quietly the evils of life' (Hofstadter 1955: 13) associated with aggressive capitalist modernization. This is where a determinist and hierarchical distribution between 'normal' and 'abnormal', 'good' and 'bad' implicit in Hofstadter's argument becomes clear. To accept the advance of capitalist industrialism is thus considered *normal* to the extent that it obeys the laws of rational social and political evolution. By contrast, to resist this trend becomes irrational, backward looking, extremist, simply put *abnormal*. In this sense, for Hofstadter, American populism 'seems very strongly to foreshadow some aspects of the cranky pseudo-conservatism of our time' (Hofstadter 1955: 20), and it is thus connected to MacCarthyism.

All these stereotypes continue to plague most approaches to populism globally, demonstrating the *a priori* reprehensible character of the phenomenon in question. It is no exaggeration to argue that today's dominant anti-populist arguments emanate from Hofstadter's work, including the accusation of national-populism (ethnopolulism) and anti-semitism, the diagnosis of dualism and irrationalism, the so-called 'theory of extremes', that is to say the equation of right-wing and left-wing populism based on the connections he first draws between the People's Party and McCarthyism.

And yet this is not the end of the story. What must also be stressed is that the success of the aforementioned anti-populist schema was supported – and, in turn, has further strengthened – the appeal of a broader argument that has functioned diachronically, as we shall see, as the imaginary horizon of anti-populist argumentation. And this is none other than the theory of 'modernization' that

² One does not dare here think how Hofstadter would treat contemporary movements like Occupy.

dominated American liberalism and operated as the cornerstone of US foreign policy during the Cold War.

The wider context: Modernization versus populism

Both the unconditional anti-populism of Richard Hofstadter and the emergence of the disciplines of comparative politics and political culture during the same period – associated with the work of Gabriel Almond and his colleagues – have been premised on a drastic reduction (*normalization*) of the political phenomenon to ‘procedures of routine’ which coincided with the reproduction of the dominant system of capitalist democracy (Lyrintzis 2001: 29-31). Whomever diverged from the dominant rule identified with ‘modern society’ – which according to modernization theorists was cosmopolitan, secular, welcoming of rapid changes and characterized by a complex division of labor – was discredited and denounced as *abnormal*, as unable or unwilling to move beyond ‘traditional society’. The latter was depicted as inward looking, passive, superstitious, conservative and economically simplistic. United States and Europe functioned as examples/models of the first ideal type, while Latin America, Asia and Africa were unified under the single category of ‘traditional’ (Gilman 2003: 4-5). Within the framework of a supposedly linear movement from the traditional to the modern pole, this dualism also resulted in the internal division within societies themselves into two opposing social and cultural camps, the modernizing one and the backward one, as Almond would argue (Gilman 2003: 151), forming a dualism similar to that of Hofstadter.

This scientific paradigm, that is to say modernization theory in its various successive expressions, enjoyed unprecedented glory during the post-war period: The theory assumed, on the basis of a powerful evaluative/hierarchical division between tradition and modernization, that progress and growth follow a common linear evolution which paved the way for the western, industrial and capitalist democracies of the time, which, as a result, signal the only pathway to authentic modernity (Latham 2000: 4). And yet, contemporary critical literature has highlighted and, to a large extent, has managed to shed light on the main flaws of modernization theory, emphasizing especially the following:

(1) Its monolithic reductionism and determinism. Given its linear conception of development, it is not by coincidence that this theoretical framework has been criticized for ‘evolutionism’ and for adopting a ‘teleological’ vision of socio-political reality (Lyrintzis 2001: 49). Furthermore, the aforementioned linear development is perceived as a coherent and universal process of ‘rationalization’ without realizing that it (modernity) might be riven by internal tensions, contain unsavory aspects or that the various features of modernity might play themselves out very differently in different places, cultures and contexts (Gilman 2003: 5). In that sense, developmentalist discourse conceals the contradictions and conflicts inherent in modernization and development itself (Lyrintzis 2001: 52). All that has also been retroactively highlighted by former adherents like Eisenstadt, who now favour a more reflexive ‘multiple modernities’ schema (Eisenstadt 2002).

(2) Its subordination of the social sciences to ideological uses in the Cold War context. The unscientific and arrogant certainty that history is on their side and that, in a way, it seems to justify the American way of life, eventually reduced many distinguished academics to apologists of American foreign policy: ‘indeed,

modernization theory represents the most explicit and systematic blueprint ever created by Americans for reshaping foreign societies' (Gilman 2003: 5). By defining a singular route to progress, the concept of modernization simplified the complicated world-historical problems of decolonization and industrialization and allowed for the disguise of the American power and influence as a well-intended universal duty:

In the Cold War context, the scientism of modernization theory also allowed for a necessary and politically desirable reformulation of the older ideologies on which it was based. As they described America's world role in terms of an objectively determined, scientifically verified process of universal development, theorists and officials used the ideology of modernization to project an appealing image of expanding power during a period of decolonization (Latham 2000: 16).

Modernization as a project was thus able to reoccupy the role of the dislocated colonial logic, functioning this time in a *crypto-colonial* way, often encouraging and/or enforcing a peculiar *self-colonization*. In that sense 'modernization theory was hopelessly reductionist in its conception of change abroad, fundamentally conservative in its politics, and blindly reflective of the political and social prejudices of the midcentury American Establishment' (Gilman 2003: 3). As Christos Lyrintzis has pointed out, what emerges here is the imposition of a distinct political logic on the research interests of a particular research area (Lyrintzis 2001: 42-3).

(3) A dangerously hierarchical and one-dimensional dominating impulse. Cold War modernizers believed that there was only one true route to successful development, the one that they articulated from the heights of their own sense of national and cultural supremacy (Latham 2000: 66-67). While being trapped in this fantasy, these devoted and militant scientists, eventually disclaimed any opposition to the political implementations of the modernizing model, which escalated to the point of legalizing violence in order to enforce it. Consequently, the model's application to countries such as Korea and Vietnam 'showed the comfort of modernization ideas claiming liberal roots with autocratic regimes' (Ekbladh 2010: 212). Disdainful of anything that stood in the way of progress – as they defined it – which was guaranteed by the indisputable authority of their scientific reason, they had no hesitation to legitimize the need to subject individuals from unruly traditional societies to mechanisms of control (both epistemological and political) (Gilman 2003: 8).

Eventually the trend leaned towards authoritarianism, involving a blackmailing attitude towards 'traditional' subjects in order to 'liberate' them: 'In the context of an American cold war mentality that considered "developmental dictatorships" preferable to "vulnerable" democracies, the utopian impulses of American liberals all too easily degenerated into endorsing the wholesale destruction of communities and social and political groups as the necessary by-product of "forcing men to be free" in a non-Communist fashion' (Gilman 2003: 11) – here, of course, the analogies with more recent developments, like exporting democracy to the Middle East or enforcing ordoliberal principles within the Eurozone, should not be missed. In this context, one could point to Lucian Pye's advocacy of military dictatorship as a useful modernizing agent, or to Rostow and Pye's colleague at the Center of International Studies, Ithiel de Sola Pool's statement that 'In the Congo, in Vietnam, in the Dominican Republic it is somehow clear that order depends on somehow compelling newly mobilized strata to return to a measure of passivity and defeatism from which

they have recently been aroused by the process of modernization' (cited by Gilman 2003: 250). Paradoxically, many former liberal modernization theorists were slowly led to embrace neo-conservative positions, similar to those of Samuel Huntington, according to which 'order' is not considered just one of the prerequisites for achieving the highest political good but itself becomes the highest political good (Gilman 2003: 258).

(4) Its zealotist elitism. Once more, we have to admit that this authoritarian orientation was gradually developed in a field of tension between the desire of many modernizing theorists to imagine better lives for the global masses and their increasingly authoritarian approach to achieving this vision, which in their view was identified with the spread of the Euro-American model (Gilman 2003: 20). There were precisely two components of modernization theory that decisively influenced this unpleasant turn. First and foremost, the modernizing theorists' faith – which usually contains elements that resemble a religious faith (after all, it may be necessary to view capitalism itself as a form of religion – Benjamin 1996) – in their vision of modernization and in their duty to spread the word and achieve its implementation at all costs (at the expense of the 'guinea pigs' of the global periphery and semi-periphery) (Latham 2000: 58-59). This was truly a 'great American mission', designed on the basis of 'a gospel of liberalism': the 'Gospel of liberal modernization' (Ekbladh 2010: 76, 91, 152). Undoubtedly, the concept of development constituted a form of *modernist messianism* (Gilman 2003: 69). Therefore, the resistance of reality itself to this over-simplistic modernization vision easily turned the 'proselytizers' of that theory (Gilman 2003: 70) into vengeful and punitive crusaders, capable of justifying even military dictatorships in the name of benevolent modernization (Gilman 2003: 50-51).

Here, we also have to consider another crucial factor: 'the initial flimsiness of their democratic concept' (Gilman 2003: 50-51). Indeed, drawing upon Schumpeter, the modernization movement adopted an elitist or minimalist theory of democracy. The greatest principle of this narrow model seems to be that 'the people may exhibit proficiency at selecting worthy officials and maybe even at ratifying good laws, but they should be excluded from initiating or formulating policy, or from participating politically in any proactive manner' (McCormick 2011: 29). Indeed Schumpeter starts by subtracting elements from what he calls the Classic Model of Democracy, to differentiate it from the aforementioned model of 'competitive elitism' proposed by himself (Held 2006: 140). His theory of competitive leadership is based on the axiom that: 'democracy does not mean and cannot mean that the people actually rule in any obvious sense of the terms "people" and "rule". Democracy means only that the people have the opportunity of accepting or refusing the men who are to rule them' (Schumpeter 2003: 284-5). This is certainly a model that inspires political thought from Aristotle and Cicero to Guicciardini's republicanism and from representative governance as conceived by the American Revolution (Madison etc.) to Schumpeter's 'elected oligarchy' (McCormick 2011: 66); and of course it ends up in today's crisis of democracy (the so-called *democratic deficit*) and the gradual consolidation of *post-democratic* institutional arrangements (Crouch 2004; Habermas 2012). The indirectness of popular participation within electoral democracy creates an expansive space within which political elites can manoeuvre to directly control the decision-making process (McCormick 2011: 17).

In fact '[t]he elite theory of democracy was not so much a theory of democracy as a theory of aristocracy in the literal sense of that term' (Gilman 2003: 49). Indeed, modernizers' elitism reduced the significance of pluralism to the replacement of a single elite (military or partisan) – that characterized totalitarian regimes – with more elites that antagonize each other for dominance. At any rate, 'what pluralism decidedly did not mean was that "the masses" were to participate in political decision making' (Gilman 2003: 49). In that perspective, 'the people' are on the receiving end of an arrogant suspicion that ultimately leads to their exclusion. As Gabriel Almond has put it, because of their 'volatility and potential explosiveness [...] the proper way for "the masses" to "participate" in policy making was "in indirect and primarily passive ways" ' (Gilman 2003: 52). Other modernization theorists would excel in tranquilizing the masses into acquiescing to elite rule, which was perceived as the carrier of a 'dispassionate rationalism', even if this would entail the legitimization of a soporific mass culture (Gilman 2003- 53-54). In any case, the vitality of democracy corresponded to the apathy and abstention of citizens, while their participation was perceived as a danger or risk (Gilman 2003: 48).

All the aforementioned characteristics justified the adoption of a clearly anti-populist position: 'Complementing modernization theory's elitism of technical expertise was its resolute anti-populism' (Gilman 2003: 8). According to Gilman, this 'indelible anti-populism [...] was the most fundamental political sentiment subtending modernization theory' (Gilman 2003: 18). It is against this broader background that we need to situate Hofstadter's anti-populist argument already addressed in this text. Democracy was good but only to the extent that the demos would obey the commands of 'responsible' technocrats who always know better. However, insofar as popular groups rejected technocratic prescriptions, modernization theorists did not hesitate to 'consign these people to the dustbins of both history and politics' (Gilman 2003: 18).

Deconstructing Hofstadter

As is well known, modernization theories – at least in this form – have failed to survive the challenge of the Vietnam war and a series of similar challenges radically putting in doubt both their epistemic foundations and their political implications. But what about Hofstadter's work? Likewise, almost none of his arguments has managed to withstand critical scrutiny. In fact, already from its publication onwards, Hofstadter's book became the object of sustained criticism (see, for example, Glad 1964, Nugent 1963, Ridge 1962). Very quickly critics started to deconstruct bit by bit Hofstadter's impressionistic account. It is not an exaggeration to say that his argument has thus triggered a regeneration of progressive historiography on American populism starting with the work of Pollack, especially his book *The Populist Response to Industrial America* (Pollack 1962), and moving into a new generation of historians such as Goodwyn and Kazin (Goodwyn 1976, Kazin 1998). This new wave has produced compelling evidence and has substantiated the argument that far from being anachronistic, American populism was a thoroughly progressive movement of democratic renewal.

In this respect, Postel's argument is of particular relevance: it was a 'firm belief in progress [that] gave them confidence to act' (Postel 2007: 4). In opposition to the revisionist reading, 'the Populists understood that the transformation they

sought required the uprooting of rural ignorance, inertia, and force of habit. Across much of American rural territory, Populism formed a unique social movement that represented a distinctly modernizing impulse' (Postel 2007: 9). The first four chapters of Postel's book substantiate this claim through a history of the educational and financial initiatives of farmers (especially the *Farmer's Alliance* – also see for a detailed history, McMath 1975). In fact, they viewed politics as a mode of technocratic governance (rational businesslike administration) that should serve, however, the interests of the people (Postel 2007: 139-142). It was existing party politics that did not obey this rule and that acted ideologically. The Populists, thus, accused the 'banking and monetary systems as antiquated, premodern obstacles to progress' (Postel 2007: 150).

How then did they come to be identified with irrationalism and an antimodernist spirit? In the 1880s and 1890s, 'Corporations grew exponentially amid traumatic spasms of global capitalist development. Mark Twain called it the "Gilded Age". The rich amassed great fortunes, a prosperous section of the middle classes grew more comfortable, and hard times pressed on most everyone else' (Postel 2007: vii). And how did those affected respond? Well, the industrial and agricultural crisis of the 1880s and 1890s brought a lot of trauma and suffering, but it also triggered innovative political responses including the Populist revolt. No wonder then that 'the political, business and intellectual elites greeted the Populists with equal shares of fear and derision. [...] The power of the Populist movement lay in the efforts of common citizens to shape the national economy and governance' (Postel 2007: 4). The ruling capitalist elite, however, 'pursued a corporate power that left little room for the organized power of the men and women of the fields, mines or factories. Their corporate vision clashed with the Populist vision of an alternative capitalism in which private enterprise coalesced with both cooperative and state-based economies. At stake was who should be included and who should wield what shares of power – a conflict that all concerned understood as vital to the future of modern America' (Postel 2007: 5). Indeed, the Populists 'organized protest movements the likes of which this country had never seen before. Populism – made up mostly of farmers but also of wage workers and middle class activists – provided one of the most intense challenges to corporate power in American history' (Postel 2007: vii). The movement was bound, thus, to face the ideological warfare of the hegemonic bloc of the day:

During the Gilded Age, the corporate elite made exclusive claims on modernity. Captains of finance and industry, *supported by economists and political scientists from the universities*, held that the particular corporate model that they pursued conformed to unalterable laws of progress and development. They derided those who questioned corporate prerogatives as helplessly opposed to progress, bound by tradition and intractably antimodern (Postel 2007: viii, emphasis added).

This is then how the articulation between rationality, progress, modernization and capitalist industrialization was constituted and sedimented. Hofstadter has just put the final touches in this picture adding the damaging ingredients of anti-semitism and of populism as a precursor of MacCarthyism.

And yet, on both these two fronts Hofstadter has also been proved wrong. When his book was published, to the eyes of many Hofstadter was seen as reducing a crucial part of America's progressive heritage to 'a horde of xenophobic, anti-

Semitic, delusional cranks' (Collins 1989: 152). Even those scholars that continued to respect him, had to remark that his conclusions were based on rather inadequate research and that it relied on benchmarks modeled on the psychopathological and the irrational, while simpler and more persuasive explanations were available; in the words of David Nugent, for instance, the Populists were 'bound together not by common neuroses but by common indebtedness, common price squeezes, common democratic and humanitarian ideals, and common wrath at the infringement of them' (Nugent in Collins 1989: 154). Apart from scholars dismissing Hofstadter's accusations, milder critics of his work have produced, with hindsight, an even more compelling argument. The case of C. Vann Woodward is characteristic. Even if the Populists entertained some unconventional ideas, Woodward argued,

they were hardly unique in their delusions, prejudices, and crankiness. Woodward cautioned against repudiating the Populist heritage of democratic radicalism simply because of failings that the Populists shared with most Americans of their day. Their anti-Semitism had been fully shared by elite eastern intellectuals and the nation's urban poor. Conspiracy theories had been embraced as enthusiastically on Wall Street as in the wheat fields of Kansas. In short, the Populists were neither protofascists nor the progenitors of McCarthyism (Collins 1989: 153-4).

So overwhelming and irrefutable was this avalanche that in the crucial issue of populist anti-semitism, 'which stood at the center of his portrait of Populism's unattractive underside, Hofstadter found himself forced to make an important concession' (Collins 1989: 155). As he later admitted to a former student, 'certain kinds of nativism and anti-Semitism were in fact fairly common in American society in the 1890s, in urban as well as in rural areas, and it was a serious deficiency of my book that I did not give any attention to this, and thus inferentially suggested that the Populists were the sole or primary carriers of this kind of feeling' (cited by Collins 1989: 155-6). To another of his interlocutors, Hofstadter has made an equally revealing confession: 'I think I said more than I meant, but it is of course impossible to recover just now what I had in mind' (cited by Collins 1989: 157). Having observed in 1958, just three years after the publication of his book that, in his view, the Populists were 'largely a good influence in our history', Hofstadter's confessions and oscillations raise a crucial question, cogently formulated by Collins: 'Why then did Hofstadter [...] so miscarry as to leave many readers, both friendly and antagonistic, convinced that they had read an account of a fundamentally irrational mass movement?' (Collins 1989: 158). The answer Collins provides turns around Hofstadter's urge to establish a distinct intellectual identity; simply put, Hofstadter was a victim of 'the originality trap'. However, his political trajectory was also crucially involved here revealing the other vector operative in Giddens's 'double hermeneutics', the one moving from politics to scientific inquiry: 'To an important degree, his ambivalence derived from his personal politics; it was fed by both his political radicalism and his personal conservatism as he made the transition from Marxism in the 1930s to what he characterized as radical liberalism. Significantly, as he moved across the political spectrum, at each step he found justification for an animus against populist democracy' (Collins 1989: 163) both on political and cultural grounds (Collins 1989: 165).

From metropolis to semi-periphery

Exactly as the *crypto-colonial* aspirations of the theory of modernization had anticipated, its simplistic formulation articulated by American sociology and political science and the accompanying condemnation of populism as the fundamental obstacle in the course of achieving modernity, was adopted from the ruling elites in many peripheral and semi-peripheral countries, constituting a globalized horizon that attempted to set the limits of the conceivable and the sayable when discussing the people and democracy. Surely these elites included the academic elites of a series of different countries and geographical entities. Paradoxically then, Hofstadter's miserable failure at home did not affect the impact of his work beyond the American context.

With regard to Latin America, for example, Gino Germani interpreted the phenomenon of populism in terms of an *asynchrony* in the passage from a traditional form of society to a modernized one. In countries such as Argentina, this interpretation argued, the masses developed rapidly the unforeseen expectation of inclusion in political institutions and so the institutional system was not capable of incorporating them organically, leading to a 'short circuit' which caused the populist rupture (Germani 1962). However, once more, this perspective seems to arbitrarily divide collective action to *normal* and *pathological/abnormal* variants, such that whatever deviates from the 'norm' of the western prescribed path of development towards the 'ideal' of a 'developed' and 'rational' modern society is stigmatized: 'populist followers are considered irrational masses deceived by demagogic, overpowerful, charismatic leaders' (De la Torre 2000: 22; also see Karush & Chamosa 2010: 4, and Plotkin 2003, especially the introduction). As we have seen, these features are already evident in Hofstadter's work as well as in the work of other modernization theorists of the Cold War period. To accept the advance of industrialism in whatever form it takes is considered *a priori* normal, to accept the domination of industrial and financial capitalism is equally normal because they both follow from a determinist understanding of modernization. To resist this trend is then obviously irrational, backward looking, extremist, simply put *abnormal*: 'both the imperialist elite and the Populists had been bypassed and humiliated by the advance of industrialism, and both were rebelling against the domination of the country by industrial and financial capitalists' (Hofstadter 1955:93). Needless to say, we know very well, and it has been the subject of some fascinating pages by Foucault, that the creation of the 'abnormal individual' – and that applies to individual persons as well as to individual countries – legitimizes the process of normalization itself and the technologies of domination it energizes (Foucault 2003). Commenting on Canguilhem's categorization of the 'norm' as a polemical concept in *On the Normal and the Pathological*, Foucault confirms its thoroughly political character: 'The norm consequently lays claim to power. The norm is not simply and not even a principle of intelligibility; it is an element on the basis of which a certain exercise of power is founded and legitimized' (Foucault 2003: 50).

Thus, in his book *Authoritarianism, Fascism and National Populism*, Germani will adopt what he calls a position of 'partial determinism' (Germani 1978: ix) insisting on the ideal type of the modern 'integrated society' against which the sociologist and political scientist must measure and locate whatever fails to synchronize (Germani 1978: 15), escapes predictable 'normality' (Germani 1978: 19) and is thus characterized as 'deffective' and 'anomic' (Germani 1978: 21). In di Tella's case, this

insistence on an ideal of normal progress relegates populist mass politics to no less than the sphere of 'social primitivism' (Di Tella 1997: 199). Nevertheless, while Germani considers 'national populism' as a form of authoritarianism which may not lack totalitarian elements (Germani 1978: 10), in (late) Di Tella's view the far-right and fascism are not related to populism, since they do not challenge the *status quo* (Di Tella 1997: 190).

Once more, the connection put forward by Germani between populism and fascism is explained in the context of the dominant theories of transition and modernization generated, as mentioned above, by 'mainstream' American political science and revisionist historiography. In his influential work *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics*, Seymour Martin Lipset defines populism in its Peronist version as a type of extremism, which could include different varieties of *fascism* (Lipset 1960: 130). At this point Lipset introduces a very broad and eccentric definition of fascism which involves right, centre and left variations; Peronism along with Communism are a part of the last category (that of left fascism; while national-socialism, for instance, is perceived as centrist, middle-class fascism – see Lipset 1960: 133). This form, Peronism, largely found in poorer underdeveloped countries, appeals to the lower strata and it differs from communism due to its nationalistic character (Lipset 1960: 133-134).

Apart from the paradoxical connection to fascism – since Lipset himself recognizes that 'Peron and his party remained in power in reasonably honest elections, winning overwhelming majorities' (Lipset 1960: 171) – and the transitional context adopted by Germani and Di Tella, the work of Lipset highlights the fact that the extremism of working class demands, whether Communist or Peronist, 'is most commonly found in societies undergoing rapid industrialization, or in those where the process of industrialization did not result in a predominantly industrial society, like the Latin countries of Southern Europe' (Lipset 1960: 138). In this context, the social base of populism appears to be located in 'the growing, still unorganized working class who are suffering from the tensions inherent in rapid industrialization' (Lipset 1960: 139). However, what is also present here is the pejorative characterization of the behavior, but also the general profile of these strata of 'displaced masses' of newly industrializing countries (Lipset 1960: 139): this paradoxical (electorally validated) extremist/fascist populism appeals 'to the disgruntled and the psychologically homeless, to the personal failures, the socially isolated, the economically insecure, the uneducated, unsophisticated, and authoritarian persons at every level of the society' (Lipset 1960: 175).

The biased character of this analysis is rather obvious. The by definition 'immature' masses appear to be demonized because they did not have the patience for the 'predestined' course of modernization itself to offer them recognition, rights and dignified living conditions but, on the contrary, they fought for them in response to a political call by leaders that diverged from the supposed norm of (crypto-colonial) Western political rationalism. However, how can one assure us of the trustworthiness of the theories of modernization given their almost eschatological linearity? What about their simplistic reliance on the inherent rationality and generosity of the ruling classes? Why do populisms also arise in countries that have overcome this transitional stage? (Laclau 1983: 175). Last but not least, to what extent do transition and modernization theories idealize the progress that leads to a developed 'normal' society by attributing to a Euro-American master-model the

characteristics of an inextricable necessity and an *a priori* privileged rationalism? And what happens when this progress starts producing more losers than winners? These queries remain unanswered in the axiomatic – close to religious – elitism of anti-populist academic discourse in the semi-periphery as it unconditionally accepts the work of Hofstadter and his modernizing counterparts as a point of departure.

The Greek case

The situation is more or less similar when one starts exploring the relationship between modernization and populism in the Greek context – with Greece being one of the countries in the European semi-periphery (Mouzelis 1986). The most emblematic work here is of course the so-called ‘cultural dualism’ thesis advanced by Nikiforos Diamandouros, which has influenced more than any other the relevant literature as well as public discourse in general. Diamandouros seems to understand contemporary Greek history as a continuous struggle between a ‘modernizing’ and an ‘underdog’ cultural camp. Very briefly, the theory of cultural dualism understands political/cultural space as divided between two sides: modernizers and traditionalists. In essence, this schema implies that the construction of a modern state in Greece, entailing the introduction of a variety of Western institutions with their accompanying logics and ‘their grafting onto traditional and precapitalist, indigenous structures’, led to ‘intense social, political, and cultural struggles in which potential beneficiaries and potential losers in the redefinition of power relations within Greece played the central role’ (Diamandouros 1994: 8). Two distinct cultural camps, two cultures, clearly emerged out of these struggles.

The first, the so-called ‘underdog culture’, became particularly entrenched ‘among the very extensive, traditional, more introverted, and least competitive strata and sectors of Greek society and was more fully elaborated by intellectuals adhering to this tradition’ (Diamandouros 1994: 15). The younger of the twin cultures described by Diamandouros exhibits the opposite characteristics: it ‘draws its intellectual origins from the Enlightenment [...] [it is] secular and extrovert in orientation’ (Diamandouros 1994: 17) and puts forward a modernizing project aiming at making Greece a truly Western polity and society. While the ‘underdog culture’ stresses tradition and is largely influenced by the Ottoman and Byzantine past, the modernizing cultural camp pursues social, political and economic reform in order to promote Greece’s integration into the international system and the European family.

Overall then, Diamandouros sees Greece’s historical trajectory as well as contemporary socio-political struggles in terms of a clash between an essentially *benign* modernizing orientation, illustrated with the use of positive metaphors, as moving forward towards a truly modern future, and an essentially *malignant* populist one, which creates obstacles and obstructs a decisive move ahead – the current crisis is also directly linked to it (Diamandouros 2013: 331). A dualistic logic is thus generated. A dualistic logic very similar to Gabriel Almond’s modernizing project – to which, indeed, Diamantouros, directly refers – and to Hofstadter’s anti-populism we have previously examined.

It is also noteworthy that Diamandouros has recently shifted his Greek translation of the ‘underdog’ culture from *παρωχημένη κουλτούρα* to *κουλτούρα των μη προνομιούχων*, a signifier with very strong associations with PASOK’s populism

during the 1970s and 1980s (Diamandouros 2013: 313). A few pages later it is expressly stated that a populist logic constitutes one of the main constituents of the ‘underdog culture’ (Diamandouros 2013: 315). Hence, populism is the basic component of the first culture and it is presented as a reaction and resistance to the attempted modernization, placing, once again, this domestic argument of ‘cultural dualism’ within the broader genealogical context of a modernizing anti-populist logic going back to the Cold War era.

Deconstructing ‘cultural dualism’

It is impossible, I think, despite the pretensions of a dispassionate scientific discourse, to miss the hierarchical normalizing implications implicit in the ‘cultural dualism’ distribution. It comes as no surprise then that Diamandouros’s schema has influenced the development of a discursive *repertoire* that has been extensively used by politicians and journalists. Initially, ex prime minister Costas Simitis has associated his ‘modernizing’ project [*εκσυγχρονισμός*] with the defeat of populism and an all-out embrace of European institutions and values – from religious tolerance to the Euro and privatizations (this is indicative of the radically shifting contents of the syntagma ‘European values’, which is often used in an essentialist and a-historical manner). But this *repertoire* has – perhaps astonishingly – returned with a vengeance to support the central narratives articulated to legitimize the austerity avalanche and the ‘creative destruction’ Greece has been experiencing under the *benevolent* guidance of IMF and European institutions since 2010. Here, once more, populism is demonized as the prime cause of the crisis and what is put forward is the need for a cultural change – not merely an economic one – able to restore Greece’s chance to be recognized as a ‘normal’ European country (see Stavrakakis & Sevastakis 2012).

Yet, throughout this period, the ‘cultural dualism’ thesis has also become the object of much criticism. Konstantinos Tsoukalas, for example, has criticized the essentialism usually entailed in similar schemata in so far as the two camps are understood as being unified along the lines of two self-enclosed and given poles or essences (tradition, on the hand, and modernization, on the other) (Tsoukalas 1983: 37). There is little doubt that the ‘cultural dualism’ thesis seems to presuppose a particular conception of political subjectivity, which indeed tends to simplify a rather more complicated psycho-social picture (Stavrakakis 2003). For his part, Dimitris Tziouvas has pointed to the fact that it is susceptible to the danger of all dualist representations: the sliding into a good/bad dualism which, based on a quasi-eurocentric logic, tends to downplay the complexity of the issues in question (Tziouvas 1995: 34 7). Taking into account complexity would force us here to deal with some delicate questions related to the character of European modernity, questions that are rarely posed in mainstream fora and are largely absent in Diamandouros’s schema as well. Questions related not only to the absence of a uniform European modernity, not only to its shifting nature, but also to its inherently ambivalent profile (Triantafyllidou, Gropa & Kouki 2013). Needless to say, such questions have never bothered the political/cultural forces undertaking the enforced modernization of the country under the guidance of the *troika*

Ambivalence here appears at least on two levels. First of all, at the level of the supposedly unilinear and irreversible trajectory of modernization. Here, Nikos Demertzis has cogently questioned the dualist schema insofar as it simplifies the

relationship between tradition and modernity and, in some of its versions, reproduces and uncritically justifies an unqualified pattern of transition from one to the other (Demertzis 1997: 118). Such a deterministic schema surely reoccupies the worst moments of Marxist reductionism and determinism. There is also, however, an even more serious type of ambivalence that needs to be taken into account: this modernity, which is now idealized, is also associated with colonialism, totalitarianism and the Holocaust, with all the side-effects of what the Frankfurt School has denounced as the 'instrumentalization of reason' and, last but not least, with the development, over the last few decades, of a brutal post-democratic order in the service of galloping inequality. Surely then, it becomes crucial to reflexively interrogate modernity and modernization and to scrutinize and re-evaluate its friends as well as its enemies, its adherents as well as its detractors, their motives and their aspirations. We might, then, end up realizing that some – *not all* – of the 'populists' relegated to the backward-looking underdog camp sabotaging modernity are, in fact, merely defending another important value of European modernity, something called 'popular sovereignty' and 'equality', while those currently credited with an a priori 'modernizing' profile could be devoted to returning power and labour relations to pre-modern times.

At any rate, the structure of Diamandouros's argument, his selection of references (theories of modernization and political culture) as well as the choice of political actors that animate his schema incarnating the good and the bad guys (modernizing sectors accepting progress and backward-looking populist sectors resisting it) is bound to invite strong associations with the similar schema advanced by American 'pluralist' intellectuals in the 1950s and 1960s. At the same time, the fact that both schemata (at least in their less sophisticated political translations) have involved an argument highlighting the 'exceptional' predicament of American and Greek political culture respectively and their 'unique' trajectories in the modernizing process, a uniqueness that is however shared and thus not as unique as initially conceptualized, may be able to shake our unreflexive belief in an idealized deterministic version of modernization and modernity, which may be nowhere to be found. A conclusion consistent with our everyday political experience in crisis-ridden Europe. Indeed those that today celebrate the fact that, amid the ruins, Greece is allegedly becoming a 'normal' country winning its battle against populism, would better explain why 'normality' is faltering in the European core itself, in countries like France, the UK, Austria etc. where populist right parties have recently made significant advances. What if this idealized normality is in itself the primary source of the 'abnormal' signs noticed, for example, in the last European Parliament elections as well as in the recent European referenda (in the UK and Italy)?

If one wanted to summarize the instructive results of this parallel reading she/he would probably conclude that both Diamandouros (and the political translations of his position) and Hofstadter share a similar, standardized understanding of modernization that, being in reality a rather bumpy process, forces them to formulate a division between its adherents and its detractors, its heroes and its black sheep, a division that inevitably involves a hierarchical valuation with a variety of theoretical, analytical and political implications. Having invested so heavily on its supreme rationality, its one-dimensional nature, its inherently progressive outlook and its virtues of moderation, the pluralist camp fails to realize its own sliding into an essentialist fundamentalism that legitimizes all sorts of violent and brutal exclusions – a sliding that is today often discussed under the rubric of the

‘extreme centre’. Yet, exactly like Diamandouros’s subjects, ‘[p]olitical tendencies in America cannot choose to be either consummatory or instrumental; they differ from each other in the way they combine the two orientations’ (Rogin 1967: 35). Indeed, long ago Rogin has demonstrated how pluralist and hegemonic rhetoric in general can be equally if not more moralistic and extremist than the discourse of reformers and populists it attacks, incorporating both an often apocalyptic outlook and relying on a conspiratorial background (Rogin 1967: 53). Most important, ‘conservative moralistic and extremist rhetoric reveals itself best in attacks on reformers and reform legislation’ (Rogin 1967: 53). As a result, destabilizing the dualist schema, ‘American conservatives combine moralism and pragmatism, moderation and extremism, “populism” and pluralism’ (Rogin 1967: 58).

If, on the one hand, rationalist pluralism cannot avoid the passage through moral principles and even ‘populist’ logics, on the other hand, populism proper – the one espoused by democratic egalitarian mass movements like the American Populists of the 1890s and inclusionary populists in today’s Southern Europe (Podemos and SYRIZA) – can also be seen as unavoidably engaged in a continuous dialectic with moderation and pluralism. This is an encounter to be encouraged and reflexively promoted. Thus, Rogin speaks in favour of a ‘populistic pluralism’ essential for the survival of democracy to the extent that, in most cases, when populism is eliminated, pluralism is soon to follow (Rogin 1967: 275). This is something conservative pluralists fail to take into account.

Conclusion

Not only has Hofstadter introduced the strong pejorative meaning of populism in academic discourse; he has also managed – notwithstanding the miserable failure of his project in intellectual terms – to export it to many peripheral and semi-peripheral countries, leading to a naturalization feeding the anti-populist myth. Not only has this academic argument been closely intertwined with political projects like modernization and austerity, but it still manages, even when its political articulations end up in social destruction, to forestall rigorous research and to short-circuit the search for progressive, popular, democratic alternatives.

In the current European conjuncture, this is, of course, creating a vicious circle. As long as the autocratic imposition of austerity remains dominant – despite its technocratic *façade* and the token objections of French and German social democracy – inequality will keep growing and the demands of the oppressed and impoverished middle and lower classes will intensify; and as these demands are usually expressed using a popular-democratic grammar, through a reference to the signifier ‘the people’, it should be expected that they, in turn, will be discredited and denounced as ‘populist’. Furthermore, if the ‘revolt of the elites’ – to refer to the seminal book by Christopher Lasch – continues unabated, if inclusionary, egalitarian populist calls are ignored or even crushed, then authoritarian exclusion (whether populist or non-populist) will surely figure as the only force able to challenge an increasingly unequal, unjust and disconnected status-quo (economic, political and intellectual), reducing ‘the people’ to a xenophobic and chauvinistic ‘nation’, translating economic grievances to essentialist identity claims and transposing an anti-elitism targeting the ‘minority’ of the 1% to other types of persecuted minorities. Can we really let our arrogance and ignorance let this happen?

From such a point of view, the real scandal we are facing today is not populism *per se*. It is the naturalization of ‘voluntary servitude’, our submission – as supposedly enlightened citizens and *modernizing* intellectuals – to the order instituted through a ‘revolt of the elites’, naturalized and imposed since then – the TINA dogma, if you want, in its most recent mutation –, our inability not only to predict, but also to make sense of the reactions this creates. Our inability, for example, to realize that Europe is currently dying in a crypto-colonial suicidal inferno orchestrated by European elites.

And yet, what does that mean? Does it mean that we need to take sides in favour of inclusionary populism and against both a decaying, openly elitist establishment and its exclusionary populist pseudo-alternative? Is inclusionary populism the third alternative beyond the two bubbles that Bruno Latour castigates? It certainly means that we need to register something that Machiavelli points out: there are two moods within all human cities, that of the figures of the mighty – the elite, the establishment – ‘who want to dominate, and that of the people who wish not to be dominated. [...] It is from the clash of these two contradictory desires, from the turmoil they occasion, that liberty comes to be’, as Miguel Abensour observes (Abensour 2011a: 337). Needless to say, this emancipatory, inclusionary popular/populist desire remains impure, it can be translated to its opposite. Here, having registered the constitutive character of popular participation, we may be able, to *educate* and *reflexively* interact with this popular/populist desire in a bid to reinvigorate the democratic paradox about which Chantal Mouffe talks about, a new progressive blend of the democratic and the liberal tradition able to reconstitute a common regime of truth, a shared agonistic basis.

To conclude, populism is neither necessarily ‘bad’ nor necessarily ‘good’. It involves a series of contradictory articulations. Hence the immense plurality of populist hybrids in the global environment: anti-institutional (personalized, dependent on a leading figure, autocratic) and institutional (producing new institutions of democratic participation and representation, operating as vehicles for the demands of excluded parts of society), violently antagonistic and agonistic, reactionary and progressive, refined and vulgar, democratic and anti-democratic, etc. In this sense, what is at stake in democratic politics, especially in times of crisis, is rarely the presence or absence of populism as such. What is at stake is the specific (democratic or anti-democratic) profile of the populist articulation(s) emerging within such a context. Depending on the socio-political context, populism can operate as either a *corrective* or a *threat* for democracy, acquiring both *inclusionary* and *exclusionary* articulations, to borrow Mudde and Kaltwasser’s formulations (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2013). Furthermore, to the extent that the role of ‘the people’ remains central within any democratic regime, to the extent – that is to say – that some kind of populism will remain unavoidable, what we may need then is to cautiously engage with and sublimate the first and fight the second.

Thus, the crucial question here, taking into account the inevitability of populism, would rather be the following: how would it be possible to foster a responsible popular-democratic pole – a responsible, democratic populism? Indeed, ‘how could we imagine a progressive populism?’ A reflexive, pluralist populism that would ‘recognize the vital necessity of divisions within the people, divisions, however, that do not fracture its political, only its supposedly essential, unity’ (Pantazopoulos 2011: 19, 24, 30). In this perspective, ‘the people’ that is never one

with itself, from which the best (the heroic fight for freedom) and the worst (voluntary servitude) may come about (Abensour 2011b: 77, 119), should not be considered as 'a substantial organism, turning inward, but as a divided, split, body, embarked on the never ending quest for a problematic identity' (Abensour 2011b: xl), opening itself onto a perpetual and precarious search for its (partial) emancipation.

This is an open wager, since the bond between popular-democratic demands and their vehicle, the political agent that will manage to represent them is a two-way link, one characterized by plasticity. The political vehicle actively constructs what it simultaneously represents; it offers 'the people' form and orientation. It is on this inventiveness its success relies, today more than ever, when it is called upon to represent a plurality of demands that emerge from the collapse of a whole system and lead them towards a much-needed renewal of democracy, towards its deepening and radicalization, that is to say everything that (consciously or unconsciously, intentionally or unintentionally) contemporary anti-populism ultimately denounces. It is within this ambivalent framework that populism research and its researchers must operate.

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POPULIST DISCOURSE AND DEMOCRACY
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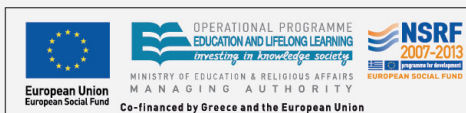
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POPULISMUS: POPULIST DISCOURSE AND DEMOCRACY

Populism is dynamically and unexpectedly back on the agenda. Latin American governments dismissing the so-called "Washington consensus" and extreme right-wing parties and movements in Europe advancing xenophobic and racist stereotypes have exemplified this trend. Emerging social movements and parties in Southern Europe that resisted the current administration of the global financial crisis as well as the Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders presidential candidacies in the US have also been branded "populist". The POPULISMUS research project involved a comparative mapping of the populist discourse articulated by such sources in order to facilitate a reassessment of the category of "populism" and to develop a theoretical approach capable of reorienting the empirical analysis of populist ideologies in the global environment of the 21st century. Building on the theoretical basis offered by the discourse theory developed by the so-called "Essex School", POPULISMUS endorses a discursive methodological framework in order to explore the multiple expressions of populist politics, to highlight the need to study the emerging cleavage between populism and anti-populism and to assess the effects this has on the quality of democracy. Through the dissemination of its research findings we anticipate that the synthetic analysis of populist discourse it puts forward and the emerging evaluation of populism's complex and often ambivalent relationship with democracy will advance the relevant scientific knowledge, also enabling the deepening of democratic culture in times of crisis.



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