Re-visiting polymorphous ideology: Populism of the Left and Right

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Abstract
In this article I aim to re-visit the contested concept of populism. I urge scholars to approach the study of this polymorphous ideology known as 'Populism' with an open mind. Today, it is no longer necessary to strictly separate the ideological characteristics of populism from its particularistic discursive and strategic elements. I propose that the populism of the left and the right share similarities that could possibly outweigh their differences. I first outline a set of misconceptions that have prevented us from realising that populism does in fact hold a redemptive side to it which can ultimately be positive to contemporary democracy. Second, I discuss the three main modern approaches to populism (ideational, socio-cultural, political-strategic) and provide a brief but useful critique of all of them. Third, I present my very own 'fresh' approach to the topic and provide an in-depth definition of populism in order to give "right-wing" and "left-wing" populism a better and fairer hearing, especially in an era where the discontents of world populations towards political elites are increasing. Finally, I share some thoughts on what the future direction of the study of such an intricate marvel like populism should entail, also addressing the question of whether in times likes these the left-right divide is still relevant.

Some misconceptions
A great number of scholars are still baffled by the term 'populism' (Tarchi 19-32) . The term recurs so often that hardly a day goes by without reading about populism in the press, where mainstream journalists use mostly as a derogatory word, or in the media, where a familiar politician launches a verbal tirade against a rival, accusing them of being 'populist'.

Before we attempt to define what populism is (or might be), it would be a good idea to focus our attention on what it is not. First, populism is not simply demagogy. While it certainly can take demagogic forms, especially in its more primitive versions, it is much more than rabble-rousing exhortations made by questionable characters to stir up frustrated crowds, the kind of entity an aristocratic and elitist thinker Plato would refer to as the "many-headed monster" (Canovan 96).

Second, populism is not necessarily some sort of radical political statement. It is not exactly fascism, in the same way as it is most certainly not communism (Weyland 55-65). Most prefer to incidentally or purposely confuse it with the former. In reality, populism lacks the sophistication of full-fledged political ideologies such as palingenetic ultra-nationalism (also known as 'fascism') or Marxist post-Hegelianism (also known as 'communism'), where both maintain an allegiance to their own specific myths and symbols as well as a coherent ideological repertoire (Eatwell et al.). Although populism does often advocate a far-fetched general reform of society, it certainly is not as revolutionary as fascism and communism (Dhanagare 22). More importantly, throughout history, the concept of populism has also been borrowed by the "radical centre" of Tony Blair, who later inspired the neoliberal Matteo Renzi in Italy, or even a liberal tycoon like Silvio Berlusconi (Moffitt).

Third, it is intellectually dubious to state that the populist electorate comprises only of un-educated angry and poor white men. In fact, recent studies have shown that more than half of white women have voted for Donald J. Trump in the last American presidential run (Jaffe 18-26). In their late work, Roger Eatwell (2016) and Matthew Goodwin (2016) destroy the myths and inaccurate narratives surrounding populists and their voters (Eatwell and Goodwin). With particular attention to 'national-populists' (or right-wing populists), the two British scholars explain that a significant amount of Trump's support came from people who also had degrees and had stable and decent full-time job incomes (Ibid). Whilst it is true that large portions of populist voters globally are part of disengaged and economically lower strands of the population, the body also includes free-market libertarians and more conservative preservationists who are not necessarily economically deprived and do not overwhelmingly belong to a specific ethnic group (Ibid).

Fourth, populism is not entirely incompatible with democracy (Canovan 2-16). Intellectuals of substantial relevance, such as Margaret Canovan (2005), Benjamin Moffitt (2020) and Chantal Mouffe (2018), have in distinct ways demonstrated to academia that whilst there have been degenerative authoritarian and sometimes even totalitarian populisms like the ones of Fidel Castro, Hugo Chavez and Juan Peron in Latin America, with their appeal to 'the people', populism as a more horizontal and direct democracy has also proved it can be somewhat of "fixer of democracy" (Moffit). This means that populism can remind elites that there also exist majoritarian and republican principles in the democratic process, often overlooked in the name of constitutionalism and liberalism (Ibid). Mudde sheds some light on this issue specifically, explaining how calls for popular sovereignty and participation can lead full-blown authoritarian systems to move into an increasingly democratic direction (Mudde and Kaltwasser). In this manner, populism can help create the circumstances for the development of an at least electoral-democratic -if not liberal-democratic- system from a dictatorial regime. For instance, insurgent populistic nationalisms like those we have seen during the late 18th century in France and slightly earlier with the revolution across the Atlantic, or even in the recent 20th century struggles where Slavic independentist forces faced either their Soviet or Yugoslavian oppressors, have generally contributed to tearing down outdated tyrannical apparatuses.

Finally, populism is definitely not a passing phase (Goodwin). It has been around since the beginning of time. Some political theorist have even suggested that it could have been practiced during the 'glory days' of Athens, and that Athenian democracy is an example of what could be defined as 'populist democracy' (Mair 81-98). Early modern conceptualisations of the phenomenon, at least in its strictly civic, participatory and anti-elitist derivatives, can also be traced back to the Rousseau and the city-state era (Canovan 48). That being said, the most coherent populist appeals have manifested themselves with the *narodniks* in Russia and the People's Party in the United States (Taggart).

Nowadays, populism re-appears as acutely welfarist, protectionist and anti-immigrationist. Populists, are globally either influencing policy-making directly, by being in power or sharing power with other non-populist actors. In Austria, the coalition involving both populists and liberal conservatives is a perfect example of the latter case. Moreover, in worst case scenarios populists indirectly pressure the establishment by relying on blackmail techniques and when this

occurs mainstream actors have difficulty ignoring them due to their growing popularity. Hence, they often find themselves having to give in to their demands (Forthomme). Additionally, non-populists (or 'anti-populists' as we will see later) have to make use of populist *people-centric politics* too in order to maintain their parliamentary majorities. Sometimes, they even imitate populists by adopting what Jan Werner Muller rightly defines as *populism-light* (Müller). More specifically, Populist-oriented charismatic leadership is present in the U.S.A (e.g. Donald J. Trump), India (e.g. Narendra Modi), Hungary (e.g. Victor Orban) and maybe even in Britain and France, where both Boris Johnson and Emmanuel Macron have showcased some populist characteristics.

Contemporary theoretical approaches to populism: Ideology, performative act or strategy?

Despite the wide use of the term 'populism' there is no consensus on a definition of the phenomenon. This has been the case since the London School of Economic conference of 1967. Those who have dedicated years of scrutiny to populism, namely Donald MacRae, Peter Worsley, Edward Shils, Kenneth Minogue, Angus Stewart , each gave their own view on the matter but were interlocked in disagreement with others (Tarchi 19-85). The major disagreement concerns the core of phenomenon. Some consider it to be an ideology, others a discursive style or perhaps even a political technique, if not a , *mentalité* as Marco Tarchi and Pierre Andre Taguiff call it (Ibid 32-52). However, it was Isaiah Berlin who during the conference made the point that academics involuntarily created a "Cinderella complex" around populism, attempting at all costs to find the right foot that could not easily fit the shoe (Tarchi 491-518). It could be that Berlin was using a metaphor to merely tell us that the essence of populism does in fact exist somewhere, and that it had to be found sooner or later (Tarchi 25).

Today, the three main approaches (ideational, socio-cultural, political-strategic) to populism have also, to some degree, failed us. Cas Mudde who developed the very interesting theory that populism is a thin-centred ideology (unlike the other 'thick' ideologies we have seen from the 18th century onwards) that considers society to be separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, "the pure people" versus "the corrupt elite", and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people (Mudde). Mudde, who is the pioneer of the *ideational* approach, however falls short because he over-relies on abstract ideological models which can involuntarily lead to generalisations and incoherent assumptions. This critique is especially pertinent when it comes to labelling as 'populist' those leaders, parties and movements that are not populist but have perhaps merely used populist rhetoric and antagonistic discursive styles (of which I will go into detail in the next paragraphs). For example, it would be difficult to apply the definition to classic liberals like Berlusconi who have openly praised the European Union and disavowed any form of right-wing populistic sovereignism (Moffit). This is especially true when considering the 'later years' Berlusconi. Likewise, asserting that neofascists like Jean Marie Le Pen - who has been flirting with outright holocaust denial throughout her whole political career - can be populist, is an error (Weyland 62-63). Sometimes fascists, conservatives, liberals and even socialists can appear to be populist when they use populist techniques (Paxton 52-118). Another politician, who is often erroneously labelled as populist is the mainstream conservative and republican George W. Bush, who lost the popular vote in the American elections and appears too close to elitist neoliberal positions to be a real populist (Weyland 53). As Kurt Weyland argues, *ideational* theory alone is insufficient to understand populism, because it attributes disproportionate importance to the "us vs them" Manichean narrative that is present in the discursive traits of all political actors, regardless of

where they belong on the spectrum and whether they are mainstream or not (Ibid). However, it is true that populists appeal directly to "the people" in a less mediated fashion than other actors (Canovan 81-98).

Another notable and relevant modern approach to populism has been developed by French scholar Pierre Ostiguy (Ostiguy 73-93). The *socio-cultural* approach focuses on discourse and style, essentially treating populism as a performative act. According to this approach, populists are put under scrutiny by two correlated criterions: a directly *socio-cultural* one and a *political-cultural* one (Ibid 79). In the first one, Ostiguy argues that populists "flaunt the low" (Ibid 73). By this he means that we should envision an orthogonal axis to the left and right one on the political spectrum which in turn holds two opposites: 'high' and 'low'. On the 'high', we find all the non-populists or ('anti-populist') like Francois Hollande, Mario Monti, David Cameron and many others who are extremely procedural, bureaucratic and formal when applying themselves in the political arena (Ibid 79). These politicians can appear bookish, elitist, and detached from the ordinary man in the street (Ibid 78-84).

The language of these establishment reflects that: the well-presented 'suit-and-tie politicians' who is sophisticated and very different to the populists on the "low" end (Ibid). Famous populists like Umberto Bossi, Beppe Grillo and the recent Donald J. Trump -although distinct from each other politico-ideologically- do have something in common: they use direct and unmediated language. All three of them 'flaunt the low'. Politicians belonging to the centre would never dream of using language like for example, Bossi who taunts his opponents directly with personal insults, or Trump does, or even call for unconstitutional measures, something that Grillo still does. This last one, once notably claimed he would make sure to "open up Parliament like a can of tuna" (Movarelli 213-221). Populists on the 'low' are often unfiltered, and direct to the point of being vulgar. They can sometimes appear clumsy and unkempt compared to their anti-populist rivals. They rarely wear suits and do not contrive to appear as polite and procedural. On the contrary, they 'flaunt the low' using folksy expressions and vernacular to directly appeal to fixed geographical areas and peoples with even more fixed interests (as in Bossi's case with his secessionist Northern League) (Ostiguy et al. 80).

Although Ostiguy's approach has merit, we should be careful of its limitations as it is an ideational one. 'High and low' are too easily confused with 'rich' and 'poor' (Ostiguy). For example, the Dutch Pim Fortuyn and Austrian Jorg Haider are often labelled as populist while they were both significantly educated, well-mannered and extremely careful in their use of language even when making controversial statements against minorities. Haider, always appeared neat and tidy, wore tailored suits and drove expensive fast cars (Zehndorfer). He was well-educated and did not consistently 'flaunt the low'. For this reason, the good aesthetics and upper middle class eccentrism belonging to some populist characters are hard to legitimise as having a place in the 'low'.

Kurt Weyland, the advocate of the *political-strategic* approach suggests that academics have spent too much time focusing on what populists say, failing to study what they do when in power and opposition (Weyland 50). Weyland was right when he proposed that unlike fascists and communists, populists are not very ideological, and are generally less concerned about ideology (Ibid 63). This strategic approach argues that populism is something of a "shortcut to power"

adopted as a strategy just to appeal to as many people as possible, in other words, a political strategy to obtain full powers in the shortest time possible (Ibid). However, this argument can raise some eyebrows. Weyland almost entirely refutes ideology, when in fact most populists do have ideological tropes in common (to be listed below). Primarily, they all share an *anti-elitist ethos*. It is true that some populists are more ideological than others, for example, Italian populist Matteo Salvini is more loyal to his commitments to regionalism, productivism and free-market conservatism, while Grillo flexibly oscillates between left libertarianism and environmentalist socialism (Tronconi 76). Another limitation would be thatthe political-strategic approach comes close to the *ideational* one, which attributes far too much relevance to the element of *charisma,* when in fact not all populist parties consistently rely on charismatic leadership (e.g. Alternative fur Deutschland, Sweden Democrats and Flemish Bloc). Further, the political-strategic approach overestimates the top-down personalism in populism. Not all populist parties or protest-movements exercise personalism or have a definite top-down hierarchical structure (Meade). Some populist mobilisations, like the substantially left-leaning Occupy Wall Street, have shown to be rather horizontal and bottom-up (Ibid). The same can be said of the much older *narodniks* in Russia. Finally, Weyland's claim that all parties/movements that are truly populist will dismantle or stay in opposition forever unless they have a rapid ascent to power soon after their genesis can also be easily dismissed. This is due to the fact that there are countless examples of populist parties that have come in and out of power, without ever disintegrating and falling into political oblivion (Ostiguy 90-91). The Italian Northern League (now only called 'League'), the French Front National (now called 'National Rally), the Austrian Freedom Party and the Sweden Democrats have all been around for quite some time and continue to influence policy decisions regardless of whether they are represented in government alone, in a coalition, or in opposition (d'Albergo 48). They also do not seem to be going anywhere (Goodwin).

All things considered, the three modern approaches to populism have been extremely helpful in developing theoretical frameworks and stimulating empirical analysis (e.g. Kirk Hawkins's populist 'fuzzy-sets') and ought not to be ignored, but just re-evaluated objectively and evolved, especially as populism has soared since the 2014 European Elections, and for the first time in history a coalition of left-wing and right-wing populists was experimented upon in the Italian sphere *('Contratto di governo'* between Five Star Movement and League) (Moschella 1-14). A new approach is needed now more than ever.

A fresh start: an all-encompassing approach

While previous attempts to define populism seem to have failed to pin-point its precise nature, they allow us to say to produce a composite defintion which reads as follows: *"populism is a polymorphous and versatile ideology that heavily relies on antagonistic discourse as well as a set of particularistic political strategies to send its message across to its perennial opponents and potential supporters".*

I did not choose this wording at random. Populism is *polymorphous* because it does not have a well defined ideological structure but can rather mutate and change colour like a chameleon according to what politically suits it best (Lee 355-378). Populism has taken different shapes and forms throughout history, and this had depended on both temporal and national contexts. When the Keynesian state was showing its weaknesses towards the end of the 20th century, populist-driven charismatic leaders like Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan advocated for large scale deregulation of the economy and a global free market for both corporations and individuals to exploit. Berlusconi did the same in Italy a few years later pursuing his "liberal revolution"

(Tarchi). What Thatcher, Reagan and Berlusconi had in common was their appeal to popular sovereignty. Thatcher even coined the word "popular capitalism" (Constitutional Right Foundation 12). Many years down the line, but also inconsistently during that time, the *versatile* nature of populism has been seen not only on the economic level but also on the cultural one. After the recession of 2008, worldwide parties and movements began branding themselves as *anti-globalist* and opposing not only the free market but the free movement of people (De Diego and Caulkin). Populist parties in particular, made very specific appeals to 'the people', 'freedom' and the nation-state. Hardly anyone will find overtly free-market populists after the economic crisis. Right-wing populist like Salvini, Le Pen and Trump are largely protectionist (at least in theory) and left-wing ones, like Di Maio, Tsipiras and others, are also economically *anti-globalist*, and nearly always oppose open borders and freedom of movement.

Another example of polymorphism to be found in populism is that it can be urban, but in the past has also been rural-agrarian, and it can be liberal, but it can also be illiberal (in both socio-cultural and economic terms). Lest we forget, it can be left- or right- wing, depending on its 'host ideology', as Mudde notes. Again, it can be open to compromise with mainstream actors like in the case of the Five Star Movement and the Austrian Freedom Party, but it can also be uncompromising and stubborn like *'Peronismo'* and *'Chavismo'* (Mudde). Experts distinguish between the 'national populism' of the right, the 'neoliberal populism' and 'tele-populism' that can be found on centre-left and centre-right, and the 'revolutionary populism' of the hard-left (Germani 56-57). The Five Star Movement is moderately left-leaning, but it has also been sometimes referred to as 'techno-populist', and therefore almost impossible to locate anywhere on the political spectrum as we know it (Trottier 76).

What is clear,, however is that all populists use, or have at some point used, *antagonistic discourse* that can be extremely helpful in identifying *perennial opponents* when there is a mood of politician distrust and de-alignment as well as economic deprivation and the electorate's perceived destruction caused by swift ethnic change[1]. For example, a right populist like Salvini openly called the European Union's single currency a "a crime against mankind", but went on to partially win the Italian 2018 elections. A few years ago Grillo suggested that it would be great if Islamist

[1] Eatwell, R. and Goodwin, M., 2018. *National Populism: The Revolt Against Liberal Democracy*. Pelican.
(Please note: In their work Roger Eatwell and Matthew Goodwin indicate that the fear of seemingly rapid but actually gradual ethnic change that exists among mainly white European middle and working class electorates is a major factor that has contributed to the rise of political national-populism. Statistics made available by official European Union documents online at ec.europa.eu might suggest that some of these fears are legitimate given that illegal immigration flows into the continent have been steadily increasing in the 2015-2016 period. In regard to legal immigration, 2.4 million documented migrants have made their way into the EU-27 area in 2018. Statistics related to illegal immigration for more recent times are not easily available and harder to access. However, it is a fact that 21.8 million non-EU citizens have made Europe their home by January 2019. The respected Pew Research Center has demonstrated that the levels of unauthorised immigration have risen to dramatic levels only in 2016 where it peaked at 5.3 million and then "levelled-off". That being said, ethnic change is a matter of how it is perceived by electorates rather than the actual numerical data. It appears that a good portion of a minority of voters in any given European member state believe that immigration alters the cultural, ethnic and social identity of a nation and that their only way of showing that this is something not desirable to them is casting their vote in favour of a populist party. See: https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/11/14/5-facts-about-unauthorized-immigration-in-europe/)

terrorists had "the right coordinates to drop a bomb on Parliament (Di Giuseppe)." Ironically, his "hybrid-party" currently holds the largest number of MP's in the two Italian parliamentary chambers. These are just two examples of the *antagonistic discourse* strategy and many more can be found by carrying out a discursive analysis of Le Pen's, Trump's and Salvini's speeches or tweets. We could therefore suggest that while the ideological structure of populism is not exactly well defined but six tropes can be identified that recur quite often, regardless of whether the populist party is considered to belong to the right or left. Those six tropes are in scattered order: *anti-elitism* (always present), *anti-globalism* (predominantly present in the form of 'Euroscepticism') ,*"un-politics"* (what Paul Taggart implies is a rejection of professional politics slightly distinct from outright 'anti-politics'), *sovereignism* (defence of popular, territorial and parliamentary sovereignty), *producerism* (similar to 'productivism' a positive emphasis on those in society who produce and belong to the "pure people"), and *reformism* (supporting radical change but not systemic revolutions).

Moving forward, the *perennial opponents* of populists of left and right remain essentially the same, even if they might articulate their offensives against these opponents slightly differently, depending on where they reside within the spectrum. It is widely accepted that populists who are more left-leaning are motivated by *anti-elitism* when attacking 'corporate elites' because of their wealth and authoritative character (Taggart). Instead, their right-leaning 'cousins' prefer to focus their attacks on the elites belonging to transnational institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, European Central Bank, European Commission and lately even World Health Organisation, not merely due to their great wealth but due to their opaque influence on political decisions. The latter are less concerned about the fact that independent institutions often carry out their own private monetary interests in a potentially corrupt manner, but they are more worried that those institutions are overrepresented and led by culturally 'liberal elites' (Ibid). Liberal elites are apologists of immigration and the degradation of traditional societal norms and therefore anathema to right-wing populists. In times of profound perceived economic and moral crisis, by using rewarding strategies such as the call for *people-centric politics (rallies and referendums), personalisation through media, victimisation,* and of course, *antagonistic discourse* any one can become a *potential supporter* of a populist force. In terms, of social class, we have already established,- in line with the great recommendation of Matthew Goodwin and Roger Eatwell (REF),that electorates with significantly different backgrounds and identities can be drawn at once to the populist web (Eatwell and Goodwin). The only way to understand populism and perhaps one day discover its true essence (supposing that there is one) is to properly is to encompass the ideological, performative, discursive and political-strategic elements in one larger approach that integrates the several distinctive and divisive elements of its *forma mentis.*

The future direction

My research explores the conditions that have allowed a left-right populist coalition to form in Italy in during June 2018 out. My aim will be to show that the Five Star Movement and League share a common ideological patrimony loosely based upon the six tropes I have discussed above. and have also opportunistically relied on the same opportunistic political strategies that were mentioned in sections above. Moreover, I wish to examine the nature of the relationship that has held populist of left and right together. Of course, this involves a commentary on how both populist formations have responded to external and internal current demand-side issues, such as the EU's encroachments and the refugee crisis in the first case, and the dissatisfaction with

mainstream politics in the other, in conjunction with their overall view of democracy. 'Populist democracy' is the conceptualisation of a system where there is an overwhelmingly vertical access of ordinary people to institutions, a system that is disproportionately unmediated and majoritarian (Mair 81-98). This idea has also been been linked to 'direct democracy', theoretically incompatible with representative democracy (Del Savio). Whether populists really believe in direct democracy itself or believe that they can achieve it is still unknown, but what is certain so far, is that the *anti-elitist* or "anti-establishment ethos" that Lorenzo Cini has aptly described does play a central role in the constitution of a "lethal political cocktail" between populist left and right (Cini).

A few examples of what I have found out so far when familiarising myself with Matteo Salvini's and Luigi Di Maio's parties in Italy is that these two populist parties hold a series of similarities and differences (Moschella 1-14). Setting aside for a moment that the coalition government between Five Star Movement and League failed due to Salvini-led party's voluntary and strategic withdrawal, it appears that the ideological similarities outweigh the differences between the two. If the League's "captain" Salvini had not suddenly suffered from some form of 'Napoleon's complex' (attributing his withdrawal to his coalition-partners' obstructionism on set policy) and instead chosen to remain in the coalition (rather than incorrectly assuming that he could rule alone, it would have been likely that the coalition would have kept going until the natural end of the legislation. In summary, during the short-lived Italian populist coalition we saw how two parties on apparently opposite sides of the spectrum can build a partnership and a coherent agenda based on six tropes, especially *anti-elitist ethos*. *Anti-elitism* has permitted the two parties to govern together for more than a year and agree on policies such as the drastic reduction of the costs of politics, the 'cutting down' of parliamentarians, a number of pro-welfare policies, the re-negotiation of EU treaties, and the securitizing of the immigration question (Politi).

In the aftermath of Brexit, Trump and the populist 'contract' in Italy, we could be looking at more prospective populist governments. Hence, it would be reasonable to argue that academics should dedicate even more time to the understanding of the populist and (neo)populist (the populist parties and movements born in the last ten to twenty years) phenomenon. A sensible direction to move in would be that of addressing the gradual erosion of the left and right sharp divide in a time of large scale political de-alignment. The new cleavage seems to be less that between rightists and leftists, free-marketeers and Keynesians, but rather between populists and anti-populists. Benjamin Moffitt (2019) recognises that while populism has been put under scrutiny not enough time has been dedicated to understanding the anti-populism of those located on Ostiguy's 'high' (Moffit). The re-focusing on the ideological character, discursive style and policies of personalities like Hillary Clinton, Matteo Renzi and Angela Merkel that have warned us against the dangers of populism, can be used to not merely understand anti-populism better but populism itself (Ibid). Moffitt also enlightens his readers by underlining that the politicians mentioned above have little in common with regards to fiscal and social policy, but nonetheless are all essentially centrist actors who agree that deliberation, representative and liberal are put under threat by the populist surge (Ibid). This surge evokes the return to an imaginary but still somehow vivid *heartland* (Taggart). In the populist mindset, it is likely that the sovereign and independent nation-state (the *heartland*) keeps politics at a minimum. Curiously though, the anti-populist Macronian politics (relating to Emmanuel Macron) of "not left, nor right", and, before that, Blaire's "third-way" motivated by Anthony Giddens, sounds somewhat familiar and

comparable to the new populist third way attempted by the Five Star and League in Italy. After all, it was Salvini who refused to appropriate any "right-wing label", and, like Le Pen in France, prefers to remind the public how he is "neither left nor right" but instead stands for a "revolution of common sense" ('*rivoluzione del buonsenso*') which corresponds to an electorate of "decent people" (*la gente per bene*)" (Passarelli and Tuorto 89-107).

In other words, the divisions between right and left, and perhaps between populists of right and left, seem to be continuously blurred. While it is true that the host ideology of a populist formation does have an impact on its positions, it is also true that populists of right and left have been forming alliances not only at a national level but at a transnational one. For example, we have seen that in the European Parliament left-leaning pro-welfarist formations like the Five Star Movement have joined groups with anti-welfarist right-leaning formations like the UK Independence Party (Del Savio). The same point can be made about Salvini's League and the Le Pen's Front National, they essentially operate under the same banner in the European Parliament, but the first is still now sympathetic to regionalism and federalism while the second is ardently centralist and nationalist. Once again, it is their *anti-elitist ethos* that accompanies their *anti-globalist* and *anti-immigrationist*, majoritarian populist creed that holds them together in both cases. As years pass, and the populist *zeitgeist* continues, the real demarcation line is now between sovereignists and globalists (nationalist and internationalists), Europhiles and Eurosceptics, and/or ultimately anti-populists neoliberals and populists. This needs to be looked at it in more detail and is useful in any project that has the ambition of uncovering the nature of any relationship that involves populists of left and right.

Rather ambitiously, I plan to incorporate all these aspects in a segment in my future work. I can only hope that academics worldwide will not dismiss the *all-encompassing* approach and focus their attention on incorporating the necessary empirical elements to carry out such investigations successfully, such as interviews with populist policy-makers as well as the in-depth analysis of electoral manifestos. Additionally, methodologies that include more participatory and interactive field work with subjects belonging to the electorate of populist parties can be useful. I can only hope that the academic world adopts what Lana Mosley calls "rigorous subjectivity" when dealing with these matters, given that any keen intellectual interest in the populist phenomenon also holds a moral responsibility, that of not giving way to the promotion of false narratives (Mosley). Alas! there cannot continue to be this separation or tension between *liberalism* (rule of law and individual liberty) from *democracy* (popular sovereignty and majoritarianism). So far, facilitated by mainstream media outlets, both populists and anti-populists have unfortunately propagated this incorrect and menacing binary. Perhaps, before attempting to stop populism, we should dedicate more time to its full comprehension.

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