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The antinomies of Ernesto Laclau: a reassessment

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ABSTRACT
This article provides an internal assessment of Ernesto Laclau's theory of populism. While critiques of Laclau have been made from a variety of traditions, few scholars have sought to work through the contradictions of his thought on internal terms. This article identifies some key antinomies in Laclau's oeuvre and hints at some redemptive strategies. It starts with a short summary of Laclau's conception of populism in contextual and conceptual fashion. Subsequently, four possible deficits of Laclau's theory are examined, ranging from a tension between verticality and horizontality, an ahistorical dimension, a descriptive and normative hyperformalism, and the lack of a reflexive approach to the term 'populism' itself. The article finishes with a fresh research agenda for 'post-Laclauian' theories of populism.

The fate of any 'grand theory' is always tinged with irony.[1] Excepting some earnest criticism and endorsement, most macro-theories usually become the powerless witness of two divergent processes: radical rejection or dogmatic mutation. Ernesto Laclau's theory of populism – formulated from 1977 to 2012, spanning books from *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory* (1977) to *On Populist Reason* (2005) – is no exception to this rule. Laclau's work on populism has fascinated a whole generation of scholars dissatisfied either by the narrow positivism of mainstream populism studies or the supposed economism of Marxists. They have found much to like in his oeuvre. Laclau has provided a fully-fledged theory of 'the political' that stands out by its conceptual strength, internal coherence and direct political appeal. Its impact has also been far from local. The tools honed by Laclau – 'discourse', 'hegemony', 'empty signifiers', 'chains of equivalence', 'sedimentation', 'activation' and so on – have travelled far beyond his home turf of the Essex School.[2] This was always coupled with something unparalleled in other approaches: two-way traffic between populism theory and its activist uptake by movements in Latin America (Chavism, Kirchnerism, etc.) and post-2008 Europe (Podemos, Syriza, La France insoumise, Die Linke, etcetera).[3]

This has also made Laclau vulnerable to specific criticisms, however. Given the explicitly political status of Laclauian theory, critics have not only targeted its theoretical commitments but also its practical results, in particular the recent setbacks endured by left populist movements in Europe and beyond.[4] Often enough, however, such critiques –

both practical or theoretical – are made from perspectives *external* to Laclauian theory itself.[5] Meanwhile, Essex theorists still tend to prioritize the defence of Laclau's legacy against external attacks and misrepresentations.[6] Increasingly, however, some express their dissatisfaction with Laclau's theory and the current state of the field, and thus call for an earnest *internal* assessment of its balance sheet.[7]

It is precisely such an internal assessment that is at the heart of this article. To paraphrase Chantal Mouffe's quip about Carl Schmitt, this article reflects upon left populist theory both 'with' and 'against' Laclau, submitting his theory to closer scrutiny while sticking to some of its basic assumptions. Using a phrase cherished by Laclau himself, such an approach is both *post*-Laclauian and post-*Laclauian*, standing somewhere between supersession and sophistication. More than scholasticism, re-assessing Laclau's approach to populism might provide an indirect response to the deep *malaise* that pervades populism studies writ large, i.e. to the 'widespread fatigue, impatience, and frustration with the sheer abundance of work on "populism"'.[8] To be sure, over-inflation must be resisted insofar as it eclipses other traditions of thought such as feminism or critical theory.[9] Nonetheless, this article considers 'populism' too powerful a heuristic to understand contemporary political change for it be abandoned altogether. Rather than 'going beyond' populism studies as such – as some have suggested – we would encourage the adoption of a *thicker* notion of populism that purges its hypergeneralist deficit. This turns 'populism' into a concrete object that would be more easily distinguishable from its ontological conditions of possibility (for which Laclau's perspective remains the most convincing) as well as from its structural factors of success today. This article cannot of course remit all of Laclau's crises. Rather, it seeks to raise awareness about some of the limits of the Laclauian approach, driving debate and shaking some of the quietism (and, perhaps, religious respect paid to the Master) in the Essex School and fellow travellers. It works on a step-by-step basis. We start by outlining the main characteristics of Laclauian populism theory, highlighting its virtues and standard criticisms (section 1). In the two subsequent sections, we elaborate on more specific lines of criticism. Section 2 explores the notions of 'horizontality' and 'historicity' in Laclau and tests their limits and contradictions, while section 3 discusses the formalism and lack of reflexivity in Laclau's theory. Finally, all elements are synthesized in a concluding section, which paves the way for a post-Laclauian theory of populism.

Virtues and vices of Laclauian populism

Lamentations about populism's conceptual fuzziness have become commonplace in the contemporary literature. Claims can even be made that they have become so recurrent that researchers can no longer open papers without referring to this lamentation itself as a 'cliché', thereby sliding into their own, paradoxical 'meta cliché'. Usually, however, inoffensive reminders justify the use of a specific definition of populism, tacitly accepted as canonical: the ideational understanding of populism as a 'thin ideology'.[10] We would like studiously to avoid such an introduction. In fact, we think that such a temptation represents a considerable degeneration, as if the only choice was between *hubris definitoria*, theoretical minimalism or a full-blown empirical reductionism.[11] Rather, we would like to discuss the vices and virtues of Laclau's approach on its own terms.

Laclau's work constitutes a breakthrough in its courageous and conscious attempt to provide a *full* theory of populism. This theory tries to explain the concept's core characteristics, apply it to various historical and geographical cases and provide activists with a manual to 'radicalize democracy'.[12] Laclau exposed his vision of populism in his seminal *On Populist Reason* (2005). The book was the result of a life-long intellectual engagement with the topic rooted in the historical experience of Argentinian Peronism and internal debates among Marxist theorists in the 1970s and 1980s.[13] Laclau moved progressively towards the rejection of the 'determination in the last instance by the economy' in the 1970s and the subsequent adoption of a 'post-Marxism without apologies.'[14] It was against this background that populism became Laclau's central object of study.

Perhaps the best way to get at the specificity of Laclau's theory is to contrast it with other approaches. Contrary to attempts at defining populism by using a set of 'positive' characteristics – be they ideological, organizational, stylistic, sociocultural or strategic, – Laclau conceives it as a 'political logic' coterminous with politics itself. He thereby turns it into a phenomenon which shares a residual presence in *every* political space. In Laclau's view, politics takes place on the intersection between two competing logics: the 'logic of equivalence', in which relations of equivalence are drawn between the units (social demands), and, the 'logic of difference', which separates units and satisfies them on a serial basis. Populism, in turn, expands this equivalential logic to the detriment of the differential one: it constructs a 'chain of equivalence' between unfulfilled social demands based on a shared opposition to a common enemy – elites, castes, classes, parasitical outsiders. Put briefly, it condenses social spaces by reducing all oppositions within them to an antagonistic relation between 'the people' and a power bloc, the latter being held responsible for frustrating the demands of the former. The unity of this populist people is not pre-given. Rather, it is always constructed discursively (the very act of naming a subject is constitutive of that subject) and negatively (the subject is available only through opposition to a political adversary). During this process, one of the demands usually takes on a representative role for the chain as a whole, thus turning into an 'empty signifier' whose meaning transcends its own particularity and secures unity for the popular camp.[15] Precisely because of the disparate nature of these demands, organizational cohesion is necessarily achieved through condensation in the figure of a leader – one of the most controversial aspects of Laclau's theory.

Nothing is pre-given in Laclau's populism. Since there is no intrinsic relation between the nature of social demands and their political expression, representation is always an *articulatory* practice operating on a terrain of radical contingency.[16] Contrary to Marxian approaches, for instance, a subject's topographical ranking within relations of production does *not* determine that subject's position in a political struggle. A key consequence of this claim is that populism can articulate *any* type of social and ideological content, ranging from the most progressive to the most reactionary vision. Finally, those articulatory practices themselves constitute the field of *hegemonic struggles* – a concept pervading the entirety of Laclau's corpus as a conscious attempt to build on Gramsci while radicalizing his insights, while also drawing on studies of performativity pioneered by Judith Butler.[17]

The terrain laid out by Laclau is extremely fecund. Leaving aside its inspiration to social movements, several theoretical strengths jump out for populism experts. Firstly, by

identifying populism with an ever-present logic inherent to the political (regardless of its ambiguous relation to democratic principles[18]), it removes the concept's pejorative connotation and neutralizes its polemical potential. Secondly, it upgrades the vagueness and ambiguity of populism as a *constitutive feature* of the phenomenon rather than an inherent flaw which renders it immune to generalization.[19] Finally, casting populism as an interactive, dynamic and performative phenomenon resolves the endless debate between the respective role played by structure and agency in its success (see *infra*). These are clear strengths. As should be visible, however, immediate limits (not completely unrelated to the dilemmas faced by left populist movements today) are visible already. Four dimensions of Laclau's theory have proven open to sustained criticism here, to which the article now turns.

Historicity, verticality and horizontality in Laclau

Critics of Laclauian populism theory have always displayed a rich variety of inclinations. Some have criticized his populism for a monistic focus on leadership, the weakness of its economic analysis, its hyper-voluntarism or its insufficient historical bent.[20] This section argues that most of these criticisms can best be approached as the result of Laclau's conceptualization of *horizontality, verticality* and *historicity*, concepts implicitly organizing his work.[21]

The deeper issue at stake in left populism's negotiation of the horizontal and the vertical is brought out more clearly when we contrast it with other approaches to subject formation. Contra theorists of the purely 'horizontal', Laclauians deny that some available political actor can be 'read off' from an existing set of social relations and abjures any essentialist claims.[22] Instead, Laclau's people needs to be constructed and moulded, something that will have to be done through a central agency – here taken up by the figure of the leader. Concurrently, this has led Laclau to a vision of political representation as *embodiment* in contrast to classical 'delegate' or 'trustee' models, in which transfer of power from represented to representor still allows for discretion in the first.[23] In the view of these 'horizontal' theorists, Laclau's theory of populism supresses the natural spontaneity of groups and disregards their organizational capacity.[24] Laclauians have here shifted the burden of proof to libertarian and liberal criticisms by pointing out the practical dividends of their own strategies, partly borne out in Laclau's own responses to Antonio Negri's writings on the 'multitude'.[25] Secondly, rebuttals of contemporary left populism as anti-pluralist and authoritarian often run into difficulties when trying to tie their accounts to on-the-ground empirical evidence. Nonetheless, Laclau's notion of verticalist populism remains deserving of criticism in its own right on a (i) *descriptive* and a (ii) *normative* plane.

The first, descriptive problem concerns the applicability of Laclau's theory to the historical experience of populist movements themselves. This holds, for instance, for the American People's Party of 1891, the first self-declared 'populist' movement in history and a protagonist in *On Populist Reason*. In the 1880s and 1890s, Populist Farmers' Alliances and Granger clubs were known for their heavily horizontal modes of decision-making, coupled with a complete refusal to submit to any leadership. It was only when the People's Party embarked on its long march through the institutions that a national leadership was able to gain independence from its base which, in turn, continued

jealously to guard its influence.[26] The difference with Laclau's account is important. Rather than a diffuse set of actors looking for top-down guidance, American Populism was able to achieve consistency long before the arrival of its strongman. Additionally, it was precisely through the *usage* of intermediary bodies such as cooperatives, churches, and brotherhoods that a coherent notion of a populist 'interest' was able to form itself. Similar comments have been made about Laclau's rendering of Peronism and Chavism, in which most of the regime's organizational bases were in place before the advent of leadership.[27] Against Laclau, then, stringing together these 'chains of equivalence' did not require the intervention of a leader. Such a descriptive deficit can also be traced to contemporary case studies. While movements such as the Yellow Vests display the classical characteristics of Laclau's populism – transversality, antagonism towards a ruling bloc, chains of equivalence – the movement itself has proven highly resistant to representative claims from above. Part of these problems can be adduced to classical 'biases' inherent in any populism theory, which tends to extrapolate on the basis of properties observed in one, mostly national, case study. Since Laclau's reading of populism is so heavily indebted to Latin American experiences, an overemphasis on the leadership factor in populist subject formation ensues and writes out characteristics of other populist instances.

This still leaves us with some analytical and normative issues. The first is a lack of reflexivity. Put differently, what are the exact *historical* factors that create opportunities for leaders to initiate populist claims? Except for generic and overdetermined notions of ´crisis', there is no clear-cut list of conditions for populist representation, nor an understanding of evolving models of leadership through time. It is one thing to claim that no social movement can exist without a degree of organizational unity mediated by vertical structures. It is quite another, however, to claim that the very notion of 'a collective will cannot be constructed without some form of crystallization of common affects' in which a paramount role is played by 'affective bonds with a charismatic leader.'[28] What is clear from recent experiences of left populist leadership is a persistent worry about such internal democracy. For these authors, populist leaders do not simply impose organizational unity on a populist coalition; they also function as agents that impart relative ideological coherence in a terrain marked by radical heterogeneity. This, in turn, implies a different relation between base and leadership than the one practiced by mass parties or movements. Critics of Laclau thus see his left populism living in the perpetual shadow of a Caesarist derailing.[29] As noted by Matt Bolton with reference Corbynism, populism seems in danger of remaining 'as much of a top-down mediated phenomenon as classical liberalism', easily susceptible to forms of 'clicktivism' and 'gesture politics'.[30] 'Since the figure of the leader is so vital', Bolton notes, 'the tenacity to hold onto leadership trumps questions of whether this leader is actually able to wield' his power in a given arena.[31] If left populism here really did represent the rebirth of mass militancy then the importance of the leader would be 'correspondingly reduced'.[32] But rather than mere expediency, populism's dependence on the leader might even testify 'precisely to the lack, the weakness, of the social movement of which the leader is the supposed avatar'.[33]

Bolton also provides an important counterpoint to standard narratives on left populism. These tend to attribute it to its capacity to reaffirm the socioeconomic cleavages, which have gained such acuity in recent years. Bolton's story is different. Instead, he points to left populism's compatibility with larger trends in European (and global) party

systems and evolving patterns of mobilization that comes with those. In an era of plummeting party membership and declining voter participation, classical political markers lose their saliency and give way to facile 'catchall' politics. This gives some structural colouring to the contemporary populist surge – and explains the efficiency of Laclau's logics. Precisely because many political parties have been hollowed out internally, their leaders have been *forced* to take on a more assertive role. This goes hand in hand with structural shifts in party politics, in which the existence of a 'void' between citizens and the state silts up classical representative channels.[34] The result is a species of political marketing in which spin doctors and experts urge party bosses to convince voters that what they are saying is, in fact, what the voters wanted all along, lacking any external vision of society. In the late 1990s, for example, supporters of the Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn claimed that the latter's slogan 'He says what we're thinking' was the reason they cast votes for him. When asked what they were in fact thinking, their response was: 'Well, what he's been saying, of course.'[35]

Here Laclau's model also makes for a marked contrast to 20th-century mass parties. As noted by Chris Bickerton, these parties consistently rooted their representative claim in a certain sociological segment. Left-wing parties advocated workers' interests, liberal parties spoke for sections of the employing class or the petite bourgeoisie, while Christian Democrats saw themselves as defending 'persons and families'.[36] In such a setting, Bickerton claims, 'a strong leader is of secondary importance, since it is the rank-and-file that remains at centre of the party'. Populist parties, in contrast, have a different hierarchy of interests, forced 'to fight themselves into the system' in a heavily mediatized public sphere.[37] Left populism's reliance on the leader seems more of a symptom of what Pierre Rosanvallon has described as global 'desociologization' rather than a solution, reproducing the very evil it objects to in mainstream parties.[38] In short, populism thrives on the erosion of social categories that structured party politics across the long 20th century.

Mair, Rosanvallon and Bickerton's stories allow for a 'thicker' take on the tensions between the horizontal and the vertical in Laclau. Since the 1980s, European societies have undergone a dramatic rupture between two activities classically conjoined in the post war era – 'politics' and 'policy'. We can think of the latter as the hard work of state negotiation and technical adjustment, while the former comprises the process of popular will formation. With the disentanglement of these two moments, technocracy and populism emerge as two complementary poles of the same spectrum: while the first represents a policy without politics, the second offers a form of politics without policy.[39]

This leaves us with a double vision of populism as both a symptom and a strategy. Although antagonistically opposed to the current order, populism also owes its own conditions of possibility to that order and accentuates some of its tendencies. Part of this can be traced back to Laclau's relative underestimation of the necessity of a political strategy that combines battles on a social, cultural and economic plane. In short, this implied a reductive take on the Gramscian concept of 'hegemony' into an exclusively 'electoralist' framework, in which executive power was equated with social dominance writ large. This is a bitter fruit for theory often marketed as radical and transformative, now culminating in narrow politicking with a focus on electoral media cycles without real base-building.

Similar critical comments can be made about the treatment of 'historicity' in Laclau's oeuvre. Any regular reader of Laclau's corpus knows it as peppered with historical information, ranging from Argentinian trade union politics to Jacobinism. In spite of this, however, Laclau consistently suffers from a chronic incapacity to relate his findings to a coherent theory of historical change. In the 1980s this was criticized as 'the randomization of history' widespread in poststructuralism itself,[40] displacing the base-superstructure model of classical Marxism.[41] Laclau's language of 'sedimentation' and 'activation' was a possible compensation for this loss. As Laclau claims, once a discursive model is set up and implemented by social actors, its precepts are translated into a whole repertoire of daily practices and common sense. From an anti-essentialist standpoint, there is also no a priori reason as to *why* certain discourses should resonate with particular publics. To this, critics have responded that Laclauians find themselves unable to explain why exactly large-scale historical changes (the introduction of market relations in the late 19th century, for instance) could occur in a synchronous manner, and why these evoked a similar set of responses across contexts.[42] A potent example of such a change is the rise of late 19th-century antisemitism.[43] Throughout the 1870s and 1880s, Jews were increasingly seen as a global and abstract threat. The most remarkable aspect of this development again was the *synchronous* birth of this new anti-capitalist antisemitism; as Mark Loeffler argues, clinging to a discursive vision obscures the almost semi-spontaneous nature of this ideological move.[44] At the same time, discourse theorists also find themselves at pains to explain the *qualitative novelty* of this antisemitism – its emphasis on the Jew not necessarily as a religious heretic, but rather, as a newly 'global' threat.

Laclau's notion of crisis suffers from a similar 'randomization'. If the pre-existence of crisis is taken as necessary for any populist moment, this obscures both (1) the role of the leader in the creation of this sense of crisis and its performative dimension, (2) how political, economic and cultural spaces can also be subject to different temporalities.[45] Following Gramsci, only those identities not too rigidly sedimented can be up for 'resignification' at specific moments. The way in which left populist forces have been taken aback by their recirculation of the terms 'homeland' and 'nation', for instance, pays testimony to the inertia of some games of signification in which populists take part. Conceiving this process in a global frame, in turn, also allows for a more 'partial' understanding of Laclau's notion of crises. Not all national settings are equally suscep-tible to populist capture. The left-right axis has proven resilient in some cases, as was visible with the resistance or recent rebirth of social-democratic parties in Spain, Portugal and Belgium. This would mean seeing these changes in both a macroscopic and a microscopic frame, and offer a thicker notion of crisis.

Reflexivity and normativity in Laclau's formal approach to populism

Laclau's radically anti-objectivist and anti-essentialist theory decrees that his 'populism' cannot be the mere reflection of underlying social cleavages or an unmediated appeal to a ready-made 'people'. Rather, it forms a formal process of articulation through which 'the people' is discursively constructed. Arguably, the focus on discourse and the 'dis-placement of the conceptualization, from contents to form'[46] remain his most funda-mental contributions to populism studies, however much underestimated by outsiders.[47]

Such claims yield several complications, however. On the one hand, the twofold nature of populism both as a term and a concept calls for a deeper understanding of the 'performative' nature of political struggles and academic debates in which the term circulates. On the other, the *reductio ad forma* of Laclau's populism raises several difficulties of a descriptive, explanatory and normative nature. This section explores these tensions and provides a synthesis of the possible ways to deal with them. This necessitates a closer look at the ontological status of discourse in Laclau. In its post-structuralist conceptualization in the Essex School, discourse does not merely refer to the semiotic dimension of social relations – as in Critical Discourse Analysis, for instance[48] – but rather refers to an 'ensemble of the phenomena in and through which social production of meaning takes place.'[49] In this view, 'there is no outside text' or unmediated objective reality, and interests and identities are 'always-already discursive constructions'.[50]

Populism is no exception to this rule. Far from a mere rhetoric ploy disconnected from its material elements, populism remains for Laclau a specific discourse (i.e., an 'articulatory practice') in that broad sense. This conception overcomes at least two twin pitfalls in the mainstream literature, either 'objectivist' or 'subjectivist'. In the first perspective, populism is the political expression of a new underlying and objective social cleavage between the winners and losers of globalization (defined either in economic or cultural terms)[51]; in the second, populism is a form of manipulation of an atomistic, dealigned electorate by a leader through emotional appeals.[52] Both have their counterparts in media coverage on the topic, where populism is depicted either as a natural disaster – an 'explosion' of 'ressentiment'[53] – or an act of manipulation on behalf of 'diabolical' individuals such as Steve Bannon.[54] In both accounts, the figure of 'the people' is considered as a given, a natural product of the social, whereas Laclau's approach takes populism itself as a performative act.[55]

This throws up as many new questions as it answers older ones. Placing itself in a tradition that emphasizes the performative nature of the social, Laclau's theory of populism remains surprisingly silent on *performative effects on its own object*. Or: if any object must be constituted as such within a specific discursive formation, what is the status of an analysis that takes a specific discourse (populism) as its object? Or: how to prevent it from being nothing more than another (meta-)discourse, leading to an endless regression of 'discourses on discourses'?[56] Scholars have noted that populism is both a 'concept' and a 'signifier' or, to put it differently, it is both 'a' discourse (a specific way of doing politics) and the contested object of competing discourses, both in the academic and the political realm.[57] This points to the necessity to adding the study of 'populism-in-discourse' (discourse *about* populism) to the study of 'populism-as-discourse' (the discourse on the antagonistic relation between the oppressed and an oligarchy) and investigate their interaction.

This can be done by starting with a conceptual history of the term 'populism' itself. In politics, the signifier 'populism' often carries a strongly pejorative meaning, in which the intellectual history of the concept played a significant part.[58] From its early assessment as a democratizing force in the late 19th century United States, 'populism' was retrospectively reinterpreted as an authoritarian, backward and protofascist mode of politics in post war American political science. In Europe, the concept's popularity first soared in the 1990s to describe the simultaneous rise of new radical right parties in several

European countries. The study of populism in a European context thus practically merged with the study of the radical right.[59] As such, it naturally incorporated the negative connotations of the latter (nativism, nationalism, authoritarianism etc.) to the already long list of flaws attributed to populism in general (here conceived as opportunistic demagoguery). Nowadays, this European 'regional bias' has overflown geographical borders and informs appraisals of populism on the other side of the Atlantic as well, both Northern and Southern American.[60]

Bearing this in mind would imply retaining a focus on 'populism-in-discourse' rather than on populism itself, shedding a genealogical light on its contemporary usages.[61] As a signifier within discourse, populism then 'defines those who use it rather than those who are branded with it'.[62] Some authors, for instance, have focused on the ways in which populism is used to disqualify political opponents and to enforce an equation between radical left and radical right. As such, the current inflation of the term 'populism' can be read as an index of our post-democratic age in which a 'new oligarchy' waives any antagonism as illegitimate, epitomizing a 'hatred of democracy' and 'stigmatization of the popular'.[63] Just like populism, anti-populism should then be understood as a 'political logic' in and of itself.[64] This calls for a deeper understanding of the interaction between populism and anti-populism which, although it remains largely under-researched, is now drawing increased attention.[65] Those studies show that this emerging cleavage is not simply orthogonal to the left-right axis: it is in counterflow to the setup of the latter and therefore 'tends to dissect, cut across, or reframe conventional alignments'.[66] Interestingly, this new axis of conflict is performatively accomplished by both populist *and* anti-populist actors. When technocrats and populists alike claim to be 'beyond left-right' and defines each other as the main adversary (as Macron and Le Pen did in the 2019 European elections), the consecration of the populism/anti-populism axis as society's most pertinent divide suppresses the left-right cleavage.[67] Paradoxically, therefore, the anti-populist invective has 'the performative effect of consolidating the position of populist actors as the main opposition to the status quo' while, ultimately, populism and anti-populism tend to ratify each other as the 'true' opponents.[68] Much like Le Pen and Macron's status as 'perfect enemies', populism and technocracy share an uncomfortable complementarity.

Academia is far from an impartial actor in these struggles. A 'populist hype' currently permeates public, mediatic and academic debates.[69] Notoriously so, populism studies also suffer from 'normative bias'.[70] One can detect a structural homology between the political struggle and the academic debate, insofar as the latter reflects and reinforces divides that prevail in the former. On the one hand, 'political scientists who study the phenomenon often fall into the category of being "anti-populist" themselves (...) given their concerns about populism's allegedly corrosive effects on liberal democracy'.[71] On the other, the Laclauian perspective, much like radical democratic theories in general, is much more favourable to populism insofar as it 'reclaims the values of popular sovereignty, political freedom and equality'.[72] In both cases, researchers are in danger of underestimating the performative side-effects of their actions. When academics identify, characterize and explain the coming of the populist/anti-populist divide as a central axis of conflict in Western societies, they equally consolidate this cleavage by endorsing a specific reading of contemporary politics and setting out a terrain of battle that superimposes itself on older ones, such as the left-right axis.

This need not be a problem per se. To non-positivist political scientists, research will always unpredictably affect its object of study. Yet taking stock of the 'double herme-neutic' at play might encourage supporters of the Laclauian approach to deploy *more* reflexivity, even more so because they often deplore its absence for anti-populist colleagues.[73] This is also important in light of a recent discourse-theoretical engagement with the mainstream literature, through the development of proper empirical and methodological research agenda.[74] In these circumstances, a more systematic look at how the Laclauian perspective participates in sustaining these political transformations that it purports to describe – as several discourse theorists already advocate[75] – could form an added value to mainstream approaches.

Finally, greater attention to performativity can also shed light on the shifting role of populism scholars on a fraught political scene. Today's political scientists are no longer (implicitly) attached to a party family anchored in a specific social pole.[76] Rather, stalked by a new market dependence, researchers both prophesy the decline of old cleavages and have a vested interest in the installation of new ones. There is room for comparison here. Much like we need to study the voters and members of populist movements in compar-ison to the 'traditional' allegiances of post war party politics, we should compare the position of today's populist scholars with their predecessors, allowing for a revealing 'anthropology' of the contemporary 'populism scholar'. A booming populism industry builds constituencies amongst politicians and citizens (thus enlarging their intellectual 'markets') and secures a seat at the table with liberals looking for remedies. Whether specialists then speak of populism as a threat or as a potential substitute for a dying Left, a 'therapeutic temptation' is always a latent possibility.[77]

Laclauian scholars have been ambiguous in this normative 'mission'. On the one hand, they have been univocal in their advocacy for a left populism, mainly as a vehicle for a radicalized democracy. On the other, their embrace of a formalist theory of populism delays (or externalizes) any strong positioning as to what 'modality' of populism is preferable. This is a symptom of a deeper issue in Laclau. As Yannis Stavrakakis rightly points out, throughout his career Laclau's thought underwent an increasing formaliza-tion, ending up with a notion of populism undone of any specific content (even giving up the centrality of 'the people' as the nodal point).[78] His definition of populism thus became 'a strictly formal one, for all its defining features are exclusively related to a specific mode of articulation – the prevalence of the equivalential over the differential logic – indepen-dently of the actual contents that are articulated'.[79] The *locus classicus* of this formalism is *On Populist Reason*, where Laclau developed an astonishingly 'thin' conceptualization of populism, now 'amount(ing) (…) to political reason tout court'.[80]

This gets us into muddy waters. Foremost, Laclau's statement seems to conflate an ontological theory of the political with his account of populism as an ontic object, ending up with an equation between hegemony, politics and populism rendering unclear the added-value of the latter.[81] Hyperformalism necessarily turns into hypergeneralism, since any challenge or amendment to the existing social order (in short, any political logic) can suddenly count as populist. It then becomes dangerously easy to overstretch the concept *ad absurdum* and even to depict contemporary anti-populism – such as Macron's – as a form of populism, simply because of the latter's antagonistic character.[82] As appealing as this overstretch might look – it rightly grasps that Macron and Mélenchon, for instance, have *something* in common – it adds to the confusion around

the notion of populism rather than providing a satisfying answer to it. It deviates the attention from what really unites these political actors: the fact that their irruption in the French party system represents a moment of political disruption (not necessarily *populist*) made possible by the decline of traditional party politics.

More concretely, the endorsement of a strictly formal conception of populism creates an inability to account both for the similarities *and* differences between the left- and right populisms. This problem shows up in several registers: descriptive (what are the concrete features of populism in its various forms?), explanatory (how to account for the rise of the various forms of populism?) or normative (how ought one to assess the potential of populism?). In each of these, a Laclauian perspective must resort to resources exogenous to the original theory, distinguishing for instance between an 'inclusionary' or 'exclusionary' variant of the people, a vertical or horizontal ordering of the antagonistic frontier, or discourses articulated around different nodal points ('the people' rather than 'the nation'). This position is difficult to articulate in public debates, barely distinct from the ideational framework. Both would indeed argue that populism can be associated with various 'thick' but mutually incompatible repertoires. In this context, a lack of endogenous arguments that allow differentiation between different populisms could also give the erroneous impression that Laclau here subscribes to a cheap 'convergence of the extremes' thesis.

Three broad strategies are on offer facing these questions. First, discourse theorists could decide to stick to their guns and keep their formalism *en bloc*, working out its nuances and showing differences with the ideational approaches through empirical analysis. The method would then consist in showing how the Laclau's 'logic of equivalence' is deployed by various actors, while critically reflecting upon the ideological and programmatic content espoused by these movements, their reactionary or emancipatory nature as well as their respective counterhegemonic potential.[83] This cannot be an exercise in purism, however. Sticking to formalism without appealing to external factors – such as a national political culture, the efficiency of a political *mot d'ordre* or the structure of the party system – would considerably reduce the scope of Laclauian analysis, restricting it to a metric of the 'extensiveness' of different equivalential chains. In this reading, the length of a movement's equivalential chain would be inversely proportional to its capacity to put forward a credible counterhegemonic claim: the more demands a movement integrates, the more indistinct its agenda must become. Still, any deeper examination of a concrete movement will always fall back on the need to appeal to a 'thicker' notion of populism to avoid 'distinctions without difference'.

A second strategy heads in an opposite direction. This consists of a radical separation between the concrete appraisal of populism and a purely 'formal' theory of the political, circumscribing Laclau's theory to the latter while infusing the former with normative and historical context. As it stands, populism as an *ontological* category can be extended far beyond our contemporary moment, with actors as diverse as Pericles, Berlusconi and Perón all taking their place in the populist pantheon. Taking seriously populism's status as both a 'concept' and a 'signifier', however, would imply a more rigidly nominalist approach and tease out the difficulty of applying 'populism' to movements and actors that arose prior to the lexical appearance of the term itself at the end of the 19th century. On this basis populism appears as a distinctly *modern* phenomenon, rather than a suprahistorical trend and/or ontological category.

A narrowing of populism's historical reach can help in several ways. Populism here entails the construction of a 'chain of equivalences' in a normative horizon genetically tied to the modern imaginary: it embodies a specifically modern instantiation of the political, subject to the double structural constraints of representative democracy and capitalism. This strengthens the concept's normative and analytical grip. Reconceived as attempts to empower 'peoples' against 'oligarchies', populist movements aim to 'deepen and enforce equal liberty and elevating the socio-economic and political status of the popular sectors vis-à-vis the ruling elites through the establishment of social rights and redistributive and participatory policies.[84] Populism here comes to stand for a modern update of older modes of 'plebeian politics', now adapted to the norms of electoral competition – i.e. an attempt to perpetuate the plebeian experiences[85] by granting them counterhegemonic strength beyond the pure moment of secession of the 'part-that-has-no-part'.[86]

Such an interpretation comes with two dividends. Firstly, it lays the ground for a conceptualization of populism that fully grasps its *modern* specificity, while resituating it within a broader tradition of political thought. It also allows for an understanding of the specificities and attractiveness of recent populist waves due to an ending armistice between democracy and capitalism.[87] Populism's current success would here be the result of a twofold transformation: the 'disintermediation' of 'late modern democracies'[88] and the resultant disjunction between 'politics' and 'policy' provoked by neoliberalism. Secondly, it infuses the concept of populism with an explicitly *normative* content ('the extension of social rights'), thus allowing for a stronger critique of the mainstream literature's collapsing of populism and the far right. This perspective would stipulate that a movement should not be labelled as 'populist' on the sole grounds that it deploys an 'us versus them' rhetoric, since this rhetoric could well serve an exclusionary project at odds with genuine popular empowerment.

A third and final strategy lowers the dose of formalism of Laclau's populism to render it more context-specific, distinguishing it from concept such as nationalism, people-centrism or plebeianism. There are at least two options here. First, researchers could take a step backwards and refuse Laclau's conflation of 'populism' and 'the political', stipulating that the former merely represents one political logic *among others*, rather than the political logic *par excellence*.[89] In this line of critique, movements are populist only insofar as they construct the chain of equivalences around the people defined as the 'underdog' or 'subaltern', thus emphasizing vertical antagonisms between the 'low' and the 'high'. Despite larger empirical payoffs, this perspective will not do away with all definitional doubts, especially for cases where populist and nationalist logics coexist within the same movement, blurring the choice of labels. A workable solution here would be to opt for a gradual, less 'purist' approach to populism as distinct but nonetheless in many cases interdependent with nationalist logics, making mutual contamination possible.[90] The other option implies abjuring the populist label for most of the right-wing political movements currently identified as 'populist' in the mainstream literature – a risk which few discourse theorists seem ready to take, given the distance at which this would put them vis-a-vis current debates.

A second, more substantively anti-formalist option would advise a return to Laclau's early writings, especially *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory* (1977). Even in this Althusserian period, Laclau had not yet completely abandoned a more classically Marxist

emphasis on class and economic factors. A productive conflict between Marxism and structuralism here enabled a distinction between a 'populism of the dominated classes' and a 'populism of the dominant'. The latter – under which Laclau grouped Nazism and other fascist movements – concerned an ideology deployed by a fraction of the dominant bloc seeking popular sanction, intensifying the masses' antagonism towards the state while simultaneously trying to neutralize their revolutionary potential (through racist logics, for instance).[91] This approach lay interestingly close to the concept of 'authoritarian populism' coined later on by Stuart Hall to describe Thatcherism and still offers a fitting description of the so-called 'populism of the elites' in vogue today (Berlusconi, Trump, Le Pen, etc.).[92] Empirical precision here came at the cost of theoretical coherence, however, and most discourse theorists see the residual 'class reductionism' of 1977 as incompatible with the later period.

As should be clear, the formalism of Laclau's populism theory can easily turn from an advantage into a blind spot. Divorced from its historical settings and material conditions, researchers run the risk of handling an empty populism theory that may capture its conditions of possibility but is at pains to explain its appearances beyond a narrowly circumscribed set of characteristics. As populist praxis has repeatedly shown, Laclauianism here requires continual (re)assessment of its descriptive, explanatory and normative power.

Conclusion: post-Laclauian populism theory

This article cannot do full justice to the complexity of Laclau's theory of populism, nor can it adequately capture all of its critiques. Nevertheless, the amendments proposed here point in a similar direction: a post-*Laclauian* approach that builds on Laclau's theoretical strengths while re-embedding them in a more robust framework that increases its descriptive precision and encourages an earnest assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of contemporary movements that take inspiration (whether tacitly or explicitly) from his oeuvre. To summarize, this article calls for (1) a revision of notions of horizontality and historicity in Laclau's oeuvre, (2) the adoption of a more reflexive attitude towards the academic performance of populism, and (3) a correction of formalism through recent discourse theory, plebeian politics and earlier sections of Laclau's oeuvre. All in all, these reassessments of Laclau's thought could lead to a better balance between a *general* theory of populism (based on, but not reducible to, a proper political ontology) and the *concrete* appraisal of its 'ontic' instantiations.

Among the advantages of this recontextualized populism, one stands out. Laclau has often been reproached for failing to provide an adequate explanation for the recent success of populism other than it being 'the purest form of manifestation of the political' in a time of 'organic crisis'. How could one compensate for such indeterminacy? Here, a reading of our 'populist moment' as taking place in a specifically new *political ecosystem* might prove helpful. Within this system, 'populism' would be one political species amongst many, although adept at adapting itself to a new environmental setting. This metaphor makes possible a relation between structure and agency that avoids a reduction of populism either to a mere expression of structural factors (as the party politics literature tends to do) or a stand-alone 'logic' unmoored from any context (as the discourse-theoretical approach tends to). After the (partial) 'extinction' of classical

party democracy in Western societies, populist logics represents one of the most success-ful survival tactics, together with 'technocracy' and other forms of adaptation to 'disintermediation'.

This metaphor is helpful in several ways. On the one hand, it retains the local validity of Laclau's lens: descriptively it still offers the best account of how different species hope to overcome declining party loyalties. On the other, contra many contemporary scholars, it does not succumb to the temptation to classify each and every new political movement as 'populist' under pretexts that it does not conform to older organizational forms. This approach goes a long way in explaining *why* exactly populism and technocracy possess the right genetic make-up for the hostile environment of the 'void' described by Mair and Bickerton.

The survey sketched here also offers a glimpse of a new 'grand synthesis' in con-temporary populism studies. Without giving in to ecumenism – some of the current approaches to populism are, and will probably always be, incompatible with Laclau's – this article pleads for a 'theoretical federalism', fusing the advantages of several schools without skipping over their mutual differences. Following this lead, a solution would be to bring together (1) historical political science *à la* Mair, Kriesi and Bickerton which captures the varying 'degrees' of decline and disorganization in classical party systems and their comparative 'emptiness', (2) gradualist and less 'purist' notions of populism and (3) a 'thicker' and less formal version of discourse theory that can inform research practice without sliding into abstractionism. Each approach would have to accept its status as a province in an empire and give up on some imperial ambitions. Given the limits of autarky, however, this seems like a good enough solution for Laclauians and mainstream researchers alike.

Notes

1. Q. Skinner (Ed.) *The Return of Grand Theory in the Human Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).
2. C. Mudde and C. Rovira Kaltwasser (Eds.), *Populism in Europe and the Americas: Threat or Corrective for Democracy?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); M. Rooduijn and T. Akkerman, 'Flank attacks: Populism and left-right radicalism in Western Europe', *Party Politics*, 23(3) (2017), pp. 193–204.
3. I. Errejón and C. Mouffe, *Podemos: In the Name of the People* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2016); F. Fernandez, 'Podemos: Politics as a task of "translation"', *Translation studies*, 11(1) (2018), pp. 1–16; P. Iglesias Turrión, *Politics in a Time of Crisis: Podemos and the Future of European Democracy* (London: Verso, 2015).
4. L. Chazel and G. Fernández Vázquez, 'Podemos, at the origins of the internal conflicts around the "populist hypothesis": a comparison of the theoretical production, public speeches and militant trajectories of Pablo Iglesias and Íñigo Errejón', *European Politics and Society* (2019), published online; J. Franzé, 'La trayectoria del discurso de Podemos: del antagonismo al agonismo', *Revista Española de Ciencia Política*, 44 (2017), pp. 219–246; R. Keucheyan and C. Durand, 'Le "populisme de gauche" est mort', *Le Nouvel Obs*, June 7 2019, available online at: https://www.nouvelobs.com/idees/20190607.OBS14100/tribune-le -populisme-de-gauche-est-mort.html); S. Kouvelakis, 'Syriza's rise and fall', *New Left Review*, 97 (2016), pp. 45–70; C. Lapavitsas, *The Left Case Against the EU* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019); Y. Varoufakis, *Adults in the Room: My Battle with Europe's Deep Establishment* (London: The Bodley Head, 2017).

5. E. Deront, 'Populisme: un concept inutile à la gauche', *Lava* (2017); B. L. Mckean, 'Toward an inclusive populism? On the role of race and difference in Laclau's politics', *Political Theory*, 44(6) (2016), pp. 797–820; J-W. Müller, '"The people must be extracted from within the people": Reflections on populism', *Constellations*, 21(4) (2014), pp. 483–493; P. Sotiris, 'Is a "left populism" possible?', *Historical Materialism* (2019), published online.

6. This article focuses mainly on the reception of Laclau in Europe through the so-called Essex school of discourse theory, since we are mainly interested in the praising and pitfalls of Laclau's theory when it comes to understand the current state of play of West European politics. The Latin-American(ist) strand of literature usually proposes more critical applications of the Laclauian theory, less burdened by its excessive formalism and generalism, and less focused on populism as an oppositional form of politics (given the numerous and long-lasting examples of populism-in-power). See for instance M.L. Cadahia and al., 'Hacia una nueva lógica del populismo: de la rupture de las instituciones a la institucionalidad populista', *Recerca*, 25(1) (2020); J Beasley-Murray, *Posthegemony: Political Theory and Latin America* (London and Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

7. For an early criticism of this sort, mainly focusing on the notion of hegemony, see B. Arditi, 'Review essay: populism is hegemony is politics? On Ernesto Laclau's *On Populist Reason*', *Constellations*, 17(3) (2010), pp.488–497; recent initiatives to go beyond this immobilism can be found, for instance, in the work of Benjamin De Cleen, Jason Glynos, Aurélien Mondon and Yannis Stavrakakis, as well as in a 15th year anniversary symposium for *On Populist Reason*, edited by Lasse Thomassen, *Theory & Event*, vol. 23 (July 2020).

8. B. De Cleen and J. Glynos 'Beyond populism studies. thinking with discourse theory against the reification of populism', *Journal of Language and Politics* (forthcoming 2020).

9. B. Maiguashca, 'Resisting the "populist hype": a feminist critique of a globalising concept', *Review of International Studies* (2019), pp. 1–18.

10. C. Mudde, 'The Populist Zeitgeist', *Government and Opposition* 39(4) (2004), pp. 541–563. For recent studies focusing on various aspects of populism from the ideational perspective, see: S. De Lange and L. M. Mügge, 'Gender and right-wing populism in the low countries: ideological variations across parties and time', *Patterns of Prejudice*, 49(1–2) (2015), pp. 61–80; L. de Jonge, 'The populist radical right and the media in the Benelux: friend or foe?', *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 24(2) (2019), pp. 189–209; C. Miller-Idriss, 'The global dimensions of populist nationalism', *The International Spectator*, 54(2) (2019), pp. 17–34. For critical reflections on the limits of the ideational approach, see P. Aslanidis, 'Is populism an ideology? A refutation and a new perspective', *Political Studies* 64(1) (2016), pp. 88–104; M. Freeden, 'After the Brexit referendum: revisiting populism as an ideology', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 22(1) (2017), pp. 1–11.

11. N. Urbinati, 'Political theory of populism', *Annual Review of Political Science* 22(1) (2019), pp. 111–127; P. Manow, *Die Politische Ökonomie des Populismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Surhkamp, 2018); C. Mudde and C. Rovira Kaltwasser, 'Studying populism in comparative perspective: reflections on the contemporary and future research agenda', *Comparative Political Studies*, 51(13) (2018), pp. 1667–1693.

12. E. Laclau and C. Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London: Verso, 1985).

13. R. Blackburn, 'Obituary: Ernesto Laclau, Philosopher and Key Influence on Latin America's New Left', *The Guardian*, May 28 2014, p. 41; E. Laclau, 'The Specificity of the Political: The Poulantzas-Miliband Debate', *Economy and Society*, 4(1) (1975), pp. 87–110; S. Hall, 'Authoritarian populism: a reply', *New Left Review* 151 (1985), pp. 115–124.

14. E. Laclau and C. Mouffe, 'Post-marxism without apologies', *New Left Review* 166 (1987), pp. 79–106.

15. See Jason Frank, 'Populism and Praxis', in Paul Taggart et al. (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Populism* (London: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp.652–655, for a discussion of this 'incarnational' logic.

16. Laclau's work is part of a larger post- trend in political theory typified as 'post-foundational' by Oliver Marchart. See O. Marchart, *Post-Foundational: Political Thought Political Difference in Nancy, Lefort, Badiou and Laclau* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007).

17. Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy, op.cit*, Ref. 12.
18. M. Canovan, 'Trust the people! Populism and the two faces of democracy', *Political Studies*, 47 (1999), pp.2–16; C. Colliot-Thélène and Florant Guénart (eds.), *Peuples et populisme* (Paris: PUF, 2014).
19. E. Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso, 2005); Y. Mény and Y. Surel (Eds.), *Democracies and the Populist Challenge* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2002).
20. E. M. Wood, *The Retreat from Class: A New 'True' Socialism* (London: Verso, 1986); P. Anderson, *The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci* (London: Verso, 2017).
21. This could equally be organized around notions of 'time' and 'space', as Samuele Mazzolini has done impressively in 'Populism Is not Hegemony: Towards a Re-Gramscianization of Ernesto Laclau', *Theory & Event, vol. 23 (July 2020)*, pp. 765–786.
22. See, inter alia, A. Negri and M. Hardt, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005); J. Clover, *Riot. Strike. Riot: The New Era of Uprisings* (London: Verso, 2016).
23. Given Laclau's Lacanian commitments, such 'incarnation' will be necessarily incomplete, although it still revolves around the same analytical axis. For a recent exploration of this theme, see L. Sabsay, 'Beyond populist borders: embodiment and the people in Laclau's political ontology', *Theory & Event*, vol. 23 (2020), pp. 810–833.
24. This theme has also been explored from within the Laclauian tradition, as in M. Prentoulis & L. Thomassen, 'Political theory in the square: Protest, representation and subjectification', *Contemporary Political Theory*, 12 (3) (2013), pp. 166–184.
25. Laclau, *On Populist Reason, op. cit*, Ref. 19, pp. 242–244.
26. L. Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976); M. Schwartz, *Radical Protest and Social Structure: The Southern Farmers' Alliance and Cotton Tenancy, 1880–1890* (New York: Academic Press, 1976). A stimulating re-reading of contemporary populism theory in light of the original American Populism can be found in J. Frank, 'Populism and Praxis', in Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, Paul A. Taggart, Paulina Ochoa Espejo, Pierre Ostiguy (Eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Populism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 629–643.
27. See D. V. Kingsbury, 'From populism to protagonism (and back?) in Bolivarian Venezuela: rethinking ernesto Laclau's on populist reason', *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*, 25(4) (2016), pp. 495–514; G. Ciccariello-Maher, *Building the Commune: Radical Democracy in Venezuela* (London: Verso, 2016).
28. C. Mouffe, *For a Left Populism* (London: Verso, 2018), p. 70. See also L. Grattan, *Populism's Power: Radical Grassroots Democracy in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016). Although Laclau and Mouffe have arguably explored different theoretical directions during their intellectual career (in particular, the latter has focused more on a critique of the liberal conception of democracy and the construction of an alternative theory of 'radical' democracy), we consider here that they broadly share the same political line when it comes to the populist question.
29. See N. Urbinati, *Democracy Disfigured: Opinion, Truth, and the People* (New York: Harvard University Press, 2014), pp. 153–155.
30. Cited in P. Avery, 'Is Corbynism a Social Movement', in *All That Is Solid . . .*, August, 2 2016, available at http://averypublicsociologist.blogspot.com/2016/08/is-corbynism-social-movement.html.
31. Avery, *ibid*., no page.
32. Avery, *ibid*., no page.
33. Avery, *ibid*., no page. See also M. Bolton and F. H. Pitts, *Corbynism: A Critical Approach* (London: Emerald, 2018).
34. P. Mair, *Ruling the Void. The Hollowing out of Western Democracy* (London: Verso, 2013).
35. D. Pels, *De geest van Pim: het gedachtegoed van een politieke dandy* (Amsterdam: Anthos, 2003), p. 68.
36. Cited in S. Becker, 'Sterke leider heeft wind mee', *Trouw*, May, 13 2004, available online at https://www.trouw.nl/home/sterke-leider-heeft-de-wind-mee~a82bb631/

37. Becker, *ibid.*, no page.
38. W. Selinger and G. Conti, 'The other side of representation: the history and theory of representative government in Pierre Rosanvallon', *Constellations*, 23(4) (2016), pp. 548–562.
39. V. Schmidt, *Democracy in Europe. The EU and National Polities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); C. Bickerton, *European Integration: From Nation-States to Member States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). 'Technocracy' is here meant as a mode of political legitimation centred around expertise and knowledge, rather than delegation through popular or group rule. See P. Tucker, *Unelected Power* (New York: Princeton University Press, 2019).
40. Cited in Gregory Elliott, *Perry Anderson: The Merciless Laboratory of History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), p. 172.
41. This includes emphasis on the impersonal nature of historical change, the dynamism of modern society, and its attention to institutional power. See W. Sewell, *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2005); D. Riley, 'The Historical Logic of Logics of History: Labor and Language in Sewell', *Social Science History* 32(4) (2008), pp. 555–565; D. Howarth, *Discourse* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000).
42. Wood, *The Retreat from Class, op. cit.*, Ref. 20, passim; P. Anderson, *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism* (London: Verso, 1983).
43. M. Loeffler, 'Populists and parasites: on producerist reason', in John Abromeit, York Normand and Gary Marotta (Eds.), *Transformations of Populism in Europe and the Americas: History and Recent Trends* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), pp.266–289; M. Postone, 'The dualisms of capitalist modernity: reflections on history, the holocaust and antisemitism', in Jack Jacobs (Ed.), *Jews and Leftist Politics: Judaism, Israel, Antisemitism, and Gender* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 43–66.
44. Loeffler, 'Populist and parasites', *op. cit.*, Ref. 43, pp. 266–272.
45. B. Moffitt, 'How to perform crisis: a model for understanding the key role of crisis in contemporary populism', *Government and Opposition*, 50(2) (2015), pp. 189 – 217.
46. E. Laclau, 'Populism: What's in a Name?', in Francisco Panizza (Ed.), *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy* (London and New York: Verso, 2005), p.44.
47. Aslanidis, 'Is Populism an Ideology?', *op. cit.*, Ref. 10, pp.97–98.
48. R. Wodak & M. Meyer (Eds.), *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis* (London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage, 2001).
49. E. Laclau, 'Populist rupture and discourse', *Screen Education*, 34 (1980), p. 36
50. J. Torfing, 'Discourse theory: achievements, arguments and challenges', in Jacob Torfing and David Howarth (Eds.), *Discourse Theory in European Politics. Identity, Policy and Governance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005), p. 15.
51. B.J. Eichengreen, *The Populist Temptation: Economic Grievance and Political Reaction in the Modern Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); H. Kriesi, 'The populist challenge', *West European Politics*, 37(2) (2014), pp. 361–378; P. Norris and R. F. Inglehart, 'Trump, Brexit, and the rise of populism: economic have-nots and cultural backlash', *Harvard Kennedy School Faculty Research Working Paper Series* (2016), pp. 1–31.
52. P-A. Taguieff, 'Populismes et antipopulismes: le choc des argumentations', *Mots. Les langages du politique*, 55 (1998), pp. 5–26.
53. J. B. Judis, *The Populist Explosion: How the Great Recession Transformed American and European Politics* (New York: Columbia Global Reports, 2016); E. Fassin, *Populisme: le grand ressentiment*, (Paris: Textuel, 2017).
54. J. Green, *Devil's Bargain: Steve Bannon, Donald Trump, and the Nationalist Uprising* (New York: Penguin Books, 2017).
55. B. De Cleen, 'The Populist Political Logic and the Analysis of the Discursive Construction of "The People" and "The Elite"', in Jan Zienkowski & Ruth Breeze (Eds.) *Imagining the peoples of Europe: political discourses across the political spectrum* (New York: John Benjamins, 2019), pp. 19–42.
56. R. K. Sawyer, 'A discourse on discourse: an archeological history of an intellectual concept', *Cultural Studies*, 16(3) (2002), pp. 433–456.

57. B. De Cleen, J. Glynos and A. Mondon, 'Critical research on populism: Nine rules of engagement', *Organization*, 25(5) (2018), p. 651.

58. M. D'Eramo, 'Populism and the new oligarchy', *New Left Review*, 82 (2013), pp.5–28; A. Jäger, 'The semantic drift: Images of populism in post-war American historiography and their relevance for (European) political science', *Constellations*, 24(3) (2017), pp. 310–323.

59. Y. Stavrakakis and al., 'Extreme right-wing populism in Europe: revisiting a reified association', *Critical Discourse Studies*, 14(4) (2017), pp. 420–439.

60. P. Aslanidis, 'Avoiding bias in the study of populism', *Chinese Political Science Review*, 2 (2017), pp. 266–287.

61. A. Elmgren, 'The double-edged sword: the political appropriation of the concept of populism', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 23(3) (2018), pp. 320–341.

62. D'Eramo, 'Populism and the new oligarchy', *op. cit.*, Ref. 58, p. 8.

63. A. Collovald, 'Le populisme: de la valorisation à la stigmatisation du populaire', *Hermès*, 42 (2005), pp. 154–160; C. Crouch, *Post-Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004); J. Rancière, *La haine de la démocratie* (Paris: La Fabrique).

64. De Cleen, Glynos and Mondon, 'Critical research on populism', *op. cit.*, Ref. 57.

65. Y. Stavrakakis and al., 'Populism, anti-populism and crisis', *Contemporary Political Theory*, 17(1) (2018), pp. 4–27; B. Moffitt, 'The Populism/Anti-Populism Divide in Western Europe', *Democratic Theory*, 5(2) (2018), pp. 1–16; P. Ostiguy, 'Populism: A Socio-Cultural Approach', *The* Oxford Handbook of Populism, (eds. C. Rovira Kaltwasser, P. Taggart, P. Ochoa Espejo and P. Ostiguy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 73–97.

66. P. Ostiguy and K. Roberts, 'Putting Trump in a Comparative Perspective: Populism and the Politicization of the Sociocultural Low', *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, 23(1) (2016), pp. 26–27.

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