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SPECIAL ISSUE INTRODUCTION

People Have the Power? Reframing the debate on Contemporary Populism(s)

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The term 'populism' has been used, at least in the last fifteen years, with great frequency both in scientific political literature and in the language of the mainstream media. The fortune of the category, far from its initial use – which was somewhat specialised and linked to political phenomena determined in time and space – has amplified beyond all reason the semantic scope of the conceptual category linked to it. Many scholars have adapted the category of populism to any phenomenon with certain basic characteristics, i.e. political leader's attitude, direct link with a 'people', reference context characterised by oligarchic drift and others.

Starting from this fact, the exertion of this issue of the journal has not been to proceed to a unidirectional clarification of the content of the term, but, on the contrary, to account for its polysemy, which is its structural characteristic.

The four contributions that *IdPS* presents on the theme of populism and its variety therefore examine different aspects of the populist phenomenon, investigating its historical-political roots, highlighting its contradictions, and questioning

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the aporias and contradictions of the main theoretical approaches to the phenomenon.

Alfredo Ferrara's contribution proposes a threefold typification of the populisms that emerged within Western liberal democracies in the aftermath of the 2008 crisis: (a) productive populism, which combines a pro-market competition approach with an anti-authoritarian sensibility, and contrasts the productive people with party elites, indicated as incapable of seizing the opportunities of globalisation; (b) nationalist populism, which adopts an authoritarian approach in the governance of society, aggressive in the governance of international relations without questioning the axiological priority of the market; it counterposes a native population with globalist elites; (c) citizenship populism, the only one that questions the centrality of the market and proposes a demanding idea of democracy; it counterposes subordinate and marginal citizens against post-democratic and neo-liberal elites. Finally, the author points out that, unlike what has happened outside the enclosure of Western liberal democracies, no forms of populism combining an authoritarian approach with a critique of capitalism have emerged in the context examined.

Damiano Palano's contribution examines some of the theoretical nodes of the discussion on populism developed in the last two decades, initially reviewing the multiple approaches to the debate and then focusing on the perspective outlined by Ernesto Laclau, analysing a specific problematic feature: the dual nature of Laclauian populism, which is both a universal logic of political discourse and a particular political proposal. First, the author highlights how this aspect makes the use of the Argentine philosopher's populist theory as a tool for interpreting contemporary populism problematic. Later, he identifies in the distinction between the logic of equivalence and the logic of difference – which is central to *The Populist Reason* but already present in the first works on populism by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal

Mouffe in the 1980s – a key to overcoming the impasse in which the dual nature of Laclausian theory risks to lead those scholars intending to operationalise its concepts and use them in order to interpret the present.

Alessandro Simoncini's contribution analyses the political context that emerged in the aftermath of the 2007-08 economic crisis, linking the ordoliberal government of the crisis – in continuity with the neoliberal governmentality imposed in the 1970s and 1980s – with sovereignist populism. The author highlights how these two perspectives, which compete on the post-2008 political scene, although in conflict and in alternative to each other, are in fact two faces of the same capitalist realism, sharing the intent to create a new system of neoliberal accumulation, in which competitive elements are exacerbated and mixed with racist, securitarian and coercive devices. According to Simoncini, both ordoliberalism and sovereign populism promote – albeit in different forms – an alliance between the local middle and lower classes, thus revealing a colonial subconscious that is reinforced against a racialised external enemy and consolidates neoliberal domination of society.

Gianpasquale Preite analyses the emergence of populist movements as an attempt to provide answers to the problems that have emerged from the global spread of financial capitalism and neo-liberal practices, which have produced a communicative overlap between the economic system and the political system, generating new forms of exclusion and placing economic value at the top of social values. According to Preite, the explosion of populist movements is describable as the result of the stabilisation of the processes of corruption of functional codes: these organisations act as networks of inclusion that promise the obtaining of what is no longer obtainable through politics by virtue of the processes of marginalisation and exclusion that politics itself has produced. In the hypothesis outlined by Preite, fol-

lowing the track of these expectations disappointed by politics and embodied by populism allows an understanding of how the peripheries are generated and stabilised, urgently re-proposing the need to think of the relationship between the state and the market in new forms.