Etica & Politica
Ethics & Politics

XXV, 2023, 2

Etica & Politica / Ethics & Politics, XXV, 2023, 2

M o n o g r a p h i c a

CITIZEN SCIENCE WITH AND WITHIN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES AND THE HUMANITIES

S y m p o s i u m

Paula Biglieri, Luciana Cadahia, *Seven Essays on Populism: For a Renewed Theoretical Perspective*, Polity Press, Cambridge UK 2021

V a r i a

Symposium

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ESSAYS ON THE SEVEN ESSAYS: POPULISM, ONTOLOGY, FEMINISM AND MORE
INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

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ABSTRACT
The paper provides a succinct introduction to the special issue of *Ethics and Politics* dedicated to the book *Seven Essays on Populism. For a Renewed Theoretical perspective* written by the Argentine duo Paula Biglieri and Luciana Cadahia. To this purpose, it firstly outlines the growing scholarly tendency to conceptualise populism as an ontological phenomenon. Secondly, it provides some basic information about the scope of the text under analysis. Finally, it introduces two of the most discussed issues of the book, ie. the choice to consider populism as being inherently emancipatory based on a different way to conceive ontology and the connection between populism and feminism, with a brief overview of the contributors' positions involved in this critical exchange.

KEYWORDS
Populism, ontology, feminism, Ernesto Laclau

Populism studies is a thriving field of in-depth analyses on a contemporary phenomenon that, despite some recent ups and downs, seems to be here to stay. The vitality of such studies would thus appear to be secured by the persistent character of their object of inquiry as well as by the polemical talk and fuss it engenders on a number of levels within our societies. However, populism studies harbour much more than strictly empirical examinations of the antagonistic rhetoric of some political leaders and the unsettling electoral successes of once unlikely contenders of the status quo. In fact, some of the existing approaches are ever more inclined to relate populism to the working of the political as such, that is to regard it as an ontological category. The Essex-school tradition inaugurated by Ernesto Laclau has been at the forefront of such efforts. As he famously stated, if populism is about providing a radical societal alternative, it cannot but become synonymous with politics. While such an equivalence may sound strained to some, it nevertheless throws light on the far-reaching implications that populism carries in thinking about a number of vital political questions, such as democracy, antagonism and hegemony, just

to name a few. Not a fringe phenomenon whose heightened relevance today will eventually give way to a return to politics as usual tomorrow, but something that permeates politics through and through.

Convinced that the notion at stake has something very important to say about politics both conjuncturally and ontologically, and operating in the wake of Ernesto Laclau's thought although, as we shall see, with some important departures, Paula Biglieri and Luciana Cadahia have written a book that adds much to the comprehension, interpretation and potential applications of populism. Throughout seven essay – enshrined in the very title of the book in honour of the most notable work of the Marxist Peruvian thinker and politician José Carlos Mariategui – the authors perform a number of bold and innovative moves that are likely to generate much discussion for the years to come and which this special issue of *Ethics and Politics* intends to initiate and trigger. The very premise on which the book is founded, ie. the situatedness of the authors' intervention along with their attempt to seize what is universalisable from their own experience by shaping it into theory rather than passively receiving and applying Anglo-Saxon theoretical canons, is either implicitly or explicitly praised by all the texts gathered here. As Biglieri and Cadahia reiterate in their concluding remarks of this symposium, the politics behind the book is indeed predicated upon the militant engagement of the two as well as upon the regional (ie. Latin American) situation that they witness and experience on a daily basis. But if the politics that the authors defend and promote is by and large upheld by all the contributors of this exchange, the same cannot be said insofar as their philosophical insights are concerned. This makes the present collection of reviews all the more promising for furthering the investigation on the theoretical entanglements of populism.

But, to begin with, what are the theoretical operations that Biglieri and Cadahia perform in *Seven Essays on Populism*? Even though this is not the place for an exhaustive recap, it will be useful, in the guise of an introduction to the critical exchange, to mention in passing the two main contentious points that have been raised, either in form of praise or problematisation, by the various contributors and which arguably point at the nitty gritty of the book under analysis. The first issue regards the ontological character of populism, as constitutive of the political. It is only thanks to the stimuli of Marchart, Barros & Martínez Prado, and Bosteels that their position on ontology is fully spelled out in their final text of this critical exchange. The twist that the authors of *Seven Essays* operate to the position of Laclau is notable. Following in Jorge Alemán's footsteps, they hold dear ontology, but rather than having it as a meta-historical and meta-political tool, they prefer, not unlike Hegel and Foucault, to tie it to actual history and politics, and in this sense they deem Bosteels' criticism as directed towards a Heideggerian version of ontology that they themselves fully repudiate. In so doing, that of the Argentine duo becomes a theory of populism that offers an ontology of the people founded upon an

articulation of differences, attentive to the fundamental heterogeneity of the social, that cannot be confused with their suppression, as in the case of fascism. The consequences are momentous: it follows that populism can no longer be distinguished between its left and right variants, but can only be emancipatory in character. The question of how to conceive antagonism surfaces here as of utmost importance: while according to Marchart it can present itself in different guises, Biglieri and Cadahia hold that right-wing politics cannot be populist because it distorts the basic antagonism, which they identify in the people/dominant bloc opposition. According to Barros & Martínez Prado however, the risk here is that, by taking up a normative character, populism slips into the ontic register and comes to occupy the semantic terrain of notions such as equality and inclusion. Surely, this point is likely to generate further heated discussions and analyses within the Essex-school camp and beyond.

The second issue is the audacious connection that the authors draw between populism and feminism. Albeit it is fair to suppose that this move will attract much critical attention from those sectors of feminism, such as the autonomist one, that Biglieri and Cadahia take issue with in the book, the contributors of this exchange find themselves on the whole in agreement with the predicaments of the two Argentine authors, although with different nuances. Marchart, for example, while finding their proposal particularly valuable, highlights that such an association has so far found little echo in concrete political subjects. Barros & Martínez Prado centre almost their entire piece on the issue. They question that Biglieri and Cadahia retain the centrality of the notion of care in that, despite unquestionably being a rallying notion of many contemporary feminisms, it reinforces a certain position of women in the labour force – an objection to which the authors of *Seven Essays* respond by stating that their choice was dictated by practical and strategic reasons. More in general, the take of Barros & Martínez Prado is that, by foregrounding heterogeneity and indeterminacy, feminism provides an important de-totalising antidote against all essentialisms and binarisms. Yet, they nurture reservations on the actual compatibility between feminism, characterised by horizontality and open-endedness, and populism, insofar as the latter tends to involve a moment of closure and fullness. The possibility that they work in tandem seems to be feasible only if one accepts – but they do not seem well disposed in this sense – that populism, divested of its possible authoritarian and fascist drifts and invested with an emancipatory elan, is supportive of the constitutive heterogeneity of differences within the people. A similar line of friendly criticism is elaborated by Gunnarsson Payne who, after recounting the mutually reinforcing effects between right-wing populism and anti-gender movements, and the de-politicising repercussions of neoliberal feminism, warns against the risks of subsumption of feminism by some 'more important struggle' in the context of articulation with other differences. Her disagreement is stronger on the question of the leader. She prefers to locate the status of the leader at an ontic-

empirical level, and not at an ontological one. Accordingly, the presence of a leader is not considered to be essential in order to constitute a people as in the account of Biglieri and Cadahia. Even more fundamentally, for Gunnarsson Payne the figure of the leader is strictly tied to patriarchy and, as such, considered to be an obstacle for a happy marriage between intersectional and transversal feminism and populism.

But there are many more issues that Biglieri and Cadahia's book raises and that in all likelihood will spark much debate in a variety of scholarly (and possibly also not-scholarly) literatures. These include, among the others, the proposition of a republican populism that forges novel institutions out of the conflict-ridden character of society, the reflections on how to build an ethic of populist militancy, the compatibility of populism with a transnational project and the critical analysis of the reluctance of other strands of the left to fully embrace populism. The task of this special issue is then only that of providing a preliminary approximation to the richness of arguments contained in *Seven Essays* that we anticipate will orientate the theoretical conversation on populism in the foreseeable future.

IMAGINING POPULISM DIFFERENTLY. NOTES ON THE PROPOSAL OF A FEMINIST, INTERNATIONALIST, REPUBLICAN POPULISM[1]

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ABSTRACT

In the article I briefly discuss four important interventions from Biglieri and Cadahia's *Seven Essays on Populism*: (a) against anti-institutionalist readings of populism, they make a plea for a 'populist institutionality'; (b) they defend a plebeian version of republicanism; (c) they seek to rehabilitate the nation-form while, at the same time, arguing for a transnational populism, and (d) they argue in favour of the feminization of populism and an 'antagonism of care'. However, while it is argued in the article that their main intervention, i.e., their ontological claim about the intrinsically emancipatory nature of all populism, remains ultimately unconvincing, it could be interpreted as a productive political incantation to make use of the human faculty of imagination and start imagining populism differently.

KEYWORDS

Populism, post-foundationalism, antagonism, imagination

In their *Seven Essays on Populism,* Paula Biglieri and Luciana Cadahia present a staunch defense of populism. Of populism *as such,* to be sure, not merely of left-wing or progressive variants of it. Starting from a critique of the widespread mediatic and scientific vilification of populism within the liberal consensual matrix, they make the convincing case that what is behind the pejorative denouncement of populism is a post-political understanding of democracy as a largely procedural affair within a minimalist institutional framework. From such a perspective, populism can

only be seen as a deviation from the salutary path of liberalism. In contrast to the liberal critique of populism, Biglieri and Cadahia's book provides a perspective much needed in a discussion dominated by scholars from the Anglosphere and Western Europe. They make very clear that other parts of the world have undergone quite different historical experiences of populism. The Latin American experience in particular proves key if one wants to dissociate oneself from the Eurocentric equation between populism and fascism. In many Latin American countries – similar to the forgotten, or repressed, history of the populist party in the US –, populism has been experienced as a largely emancipatory phenomenon: as an anti-oligarchic, egalitarian project geared at integrating the impoverished masses into the political system. Biglieri and Cadahia thus engage in an effort of epistemic decolonization without falling into the trap of an extreme standpoint epistemology that would leave no room for articulation between different epistemic experiences. Rather, they 'attempt to grasp what is universalizable – in the sense of a situated universalism – in the problems, challenges, and responses offered by a locus of enunciation like Latin America within the emancipatory production of knowledge in the Global South and Global North' (Biglieri and Cadahia 2021: xxiii). And what they seek to contribute from their perspective is an unapologetic view of populism as an intrinsically emancipatory endeavor.

This view is rather controversial as it conflicts not only with the typical denunciations of populism by the liberal mainstream. It also conflicts with the views of some of their fellow travelers from the Essex school of discourse analysis tradition – Mouffe, Stavrakakis, and myself are mentioned – who would insist on the ideologically undefined character of populism. From the latter perspective, which relies as much on Ernesto Laclau's seminal theory of populism as Biglieri and Cadahia do (Laclau 2005), populism only acquires ideological meaning through the articulation of its elements into a 'chain of equivalence' so that all kinds of right, left or even liberal – one may only think of Macron's first election campaign – variants of populism are possible. While remaining hesitant, for reasons developed at the end of this article, concerning this main volte-face proposed in the book, I do think that many highly important points are contributed to the populism debate by Biglieri and Cadahia. In fact, the authors' project seems to consist of a point-by-point refutation of the fatuous charges typically leveled against populism in all its variants. By bringing in the perspective of the Global South, they disturb the Euro- or Anglocentric tunnel vision that can only see in populism a 'pathology' or dangerous excess of democratic claims destined to endanger the smooth workings of the institutional machine of liberalism. In contrast, Biglieri and Cadahia's alternative vision allows for an idea of populism that would be emancipatory, plural, internationalist, plebeian-republican, and feminist. I fully subscribe to this political program, even as it is not entirely clear to me whether, or to which degree, their account is meant to be mainly descriptive or mainly normative. Is it a wishing list, in the sense that we all

would want an internationalist or feminist populism, knowing at the same time that it barely exists yet? Is it a normative claim in the sense that populism can only be called emancipatory if it is plural, plebeian, internationalist, and feminist? And would the latter claim not conflict with Biglieri and Cadahia's main wager that populism *eo ipso* is emancipatory? Before tackling these questions, I will first outline where I think the main achievement of the book lies: Biglieri and Cadahia, from a Latin American perspective of feminist militants and scholars, manage to bring into view the progressive aspects of populism and, on top of it, open space for imagining a populism that integrates hitherto unconnected political positions into a new chain of equivalence.

What allows them to build such a new chain of equivalence is their politico-theoretical perspective that clearly falls into the post-foundational camp (Marchart 2007; Marchart 2018). Against liberal or autonomist approaches, which would best be described as *anti*-foundational, the authors assume that, despite the absence of an ultimate ground, *some* ground needs to be politically instituted. Populism is a political attempt to construct a provisional ground of the social by way of an antagonistic division of society between the people, in the plebeian sense of the term, and an order dominated by an oligarchic elite. The people is therefore not understood to be a pre-existent assemblage of individual wills, as in liberalism or autonomism. Rather, in Gramscian terms, a 'collective will' needs to be constructed through a strategy of antagonization. Biglieri and Cadahia do not go as far as explicitly making the following claim, but, in my view, 'the people' are established by populism precisely as the contingent ground of society. The fact that this ground is contingent (as every ground), that, in other words, it is a groundless ground, must not detract from the fact that it still *is* a ground. It is not merely a legal fiction, as in liberal constitutionalism, nor is it an unarticulated multitude, as in autonomist approaches. The people is the political subject which, from a populist perspective, is supposed to ground, shape, and order the social in the 'popular' interest, thus serving as society's political foundation. As soon as such a perspective, which I think is integral to Biglieri and Cadahia's project, is adopted with all its consequences, we arrive at an entirely different view of populism as a truly political project that dares to fundamentally reshape society. And it is at this point where some of their most significant contributions to the debate can be found. I will briefly discuss four of these interventions.

First, if populism is an attempt at grounding the social, we must abandon the anti-institutional penchant of many descriptions of populism. Biglieri and Cadahia do a great job at refuting the useless dichotomy between populist mobilization on one side and institutions, including state institutions, on the other. Against anti-institutionalist readings of populism, they make a plea for a 'populist institutionality' (Biglieri and Cadahia 2021: 51) which, of course, cannot be congruent with the proceduralist liberal take on institutions. The state theoretical thrust of the argument is

clear and has been spelled out before by Marxist state theorists from Nicos Poulantzas to Bob Jessop: the state is not a monolithic bloc detached from struggles in civil society; the state is itself a relational terrain of struggles that cut across the state/civil society division. It follows that popular struggles, even when suppressed by coercive state apparatuses, can and must penetrate state institutions. A merely 'abolitionist' perspective, based on the sweeping anarchist injunction to get rid of the state altogether, is not only intellectually unsatisfying, given its simplistic nature, but it is also politically unpromising. The point is, in again Gramscian parlance, 'to become state'. It is from their Latin American position that Biglieri and Cadahia contribute a particularly salient dimension to the debate. While the state in the Latin American countries belongs to the legacy of colonialism and until today can be described as 'oligarchic state', this does not preclude the possibility of wresting state institutions from the hands of the wealthy few: 'It was the oligarchy that made the state the property of the few, so why not think that it might be the act of popular desecration that transforms institutions into a space for the nobodies to express their antagonisms' (51). The greatest innovation of populism, they continue, is 'to risk building a state-form that can account for the irruption of the people into politics' (51), since 'populism takes the risk of "working with" the antagonism that this irruption implies' (51). State institutions, from a populist perspective, need to be envisaged as a terrain that 'incorporates the contentious dimension of equivalential logic to compete with those on top for these same (oligarchic or popular) state forms. In other words, the state (and institutions) become another antagonistic space in the dispute between those on the bottom and those on top' (67). In this sense, state institutions, as soon as they are partially conquered by a populist project, may become an instrument that helps interrupt oligarchic domination.

The Latin American experience, to which the authors refer, is a case in point. The Kirchner governments in Argentina, the populist governments of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, of Lula da Silva in Brazil, Evo Morales in Bolivia, of Rafael Correa in Ecuador, or Andrés Manuel López Obrador in Mexico, have managed – in different ways, and with varying success – to establish for some time a ruptural institutionality by linking popular demands with state institutions, thus strengthening the egalitarian dimension of the state (67). These projects proved that 'it is possible to process political demands constructed at the popular level through the state', whereby, the state is 'not reduced to a mere manager of market health, but, instead, by embracing the inherently political dimension of the state's role, populism tries to keep alive democratic imaginaries of social justice, equality, and political freedom' (60-1). What is hardly conceivable from a liberal, Eurocentric perspective makes perfect sense within the Latin American realm of experience. What populism does, in short, is bring antagonism to the state, by using its conquered institutions to address popular demands and repress oligarchic domination. The fact that other state institutions may strike back, as the authors illustrate with the many

attempts at getting rid of populist leaders through judicial means and the newly discovered instrument of the 'legal coup', does not disprove their point. As long as state institutions exist, they remain a key terrain of popular struggle.

Second, the authors locate their institutionalist theory within a rich discussion that is developing in the Spanish-speaking world around a plebeian version of republicanism. While most republicanism in history was oligarchic or, as I would prefer calling it, senatorial, the popular or democratic variants of republicanism seem to belong to a submerged and half-forgotten past with very few authors defending them, most notably Machiavelli and arguably Spinoza (McCormick 2011; Negri 2004). Given the relatively scarce number of texts or passages to which one usually refers, I must confess that, from an intellectual history point of view, I remain sceptical about the actual historical importance of this tradition – if it is a tradition. The overwhelming majority of republics was far from democratic. Rather, republicanism – very much like liberal democracy – was the name for a political order meant to co-opt the populace into as marginal institutional places as possible in order to avoid social uprisings – *tumulti,* as the Italian authors would say – and protect the property of the wealthy casts. Biglieri and Cadahia are of course well aware of this. But again, the Latin American perspective brings an important and politically up-to-date aspect to the debate. As the authors claim, following Eduardo Rinesi, 'Latin American populism is the form through which republicanism has developed in Latin America' (Biglieri and Cadahia 2021: 72). Populism and republicanism, they claim, need to be thought of jointly.[2] One reason for thinking populism and republicanism together is structural and lies in the fact that republicanism, in its democratic variant, allows for the productive integration of conflict in the institutional setting (a point repeatedly made by Claude Lefort regarding Machiavelli's two conflicting *umori* of the people and the nobles) – which neatly matches the idea of a 'ruptural institutionality'. But another reason is historical: viewed against the larger background of the democratic revolutions in Latin America and the Caribbean, beginning with the Haitian revolution, a history of 'plebeian republicanism' unfolds 'that runs parallel to the official story of the oligarchic and exclusionary nation-states inherited from colonial rule. As if Latin American and Caribbean independence secretly inaugurated two forms of institutionality and citizenship, two ways of thinking about the role of the state and the law, two competing historical forces split between the construction of an unequal and elitist society and an egalitarian popular society'. The black Haitian slaves assumed 'that it was their responsibility to universalize the secret of plebeian republics: that there can be no truly republican freedom if it is not possible to build equality' (74). It is this tradition of plebeian Jacobinism that lives

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[2] This is why we need to 'begin speaking in terms of a republican populism as the antithesis of neoliberalism, as a way of naming one of the ways that plebeian republicanism has been taking shape in Latin America' (Biglieri and Cadahia 2021: 73).

on in today's democratic understanding of republicanism. However, as I will argue in my concluding remarks, I do think that this 'universalist' understanding is a particularly modern feature of republicanism and can hardly be found in the antique or medieval republics. It only comes to life with the democratic revolution.

Third, and presumably to the distress of many, Biglieri and Cadahia seek to rehabilitate the nation-form while, at the very same time, arguing for a transnational populism. Here again, the historical experience from the Global South of an emancipatory nationalism – just think of the many national liberation projects that accompanied the process of decolonization – is key to understanding the argument. And again, they direct our attention to the ambivalent, if not split tradition of nation-building from below and nation-building from above. There is not one idea of the nation, there are two ideas:

> The first of these is built 'from above' by Latin American oligarchies. While coinciding with the emergence of independent republics, this idea of the nation internalizes all of the culturalist remnants of colonialism, promoting - despite its avowed cosmopolitan liberalism - the separation and isolation of peoples. This is, therefore, an idea of the nation that tends to invisibilize and impede the cultural and political production by oppressed subjects, reproducing the framework of colonial contempt for and the exclusion of the people from the construction of the national ethos. The second, on the other hand, is the idea of a nation constructed 'from below,' by those subjects historically excluded from the other national narrative. This idea inherits the entire imaginary of popular struggles and transformations that have unfolded from the conquest to the present day. (Biglieri and Cadahia 2021: 89-90)

The oligarchic idea of the nation is associated by the authors with the name nationalism. The other idea has been called in the work of Gramsci and in the Latin American discussion that leads back to the eminent Peruvian Marxist José Carlos Mariátegui 'the national-popular'. Now, the important point to understand, according to Biglieri and Cadahia, is that the national-popular has nothing to do with a self-enclosed, identitarian, and jingoistic nationalism but, rather, is intrinsically open and internationalist. The popular idea of a nation stems from an experience of injustice and exclusion, thus carrying 'within itself the secret of an openness toward the other, an openness that tends toward the inclusion of the excluded' (93). And as they point out with reference to Mariátegui: 'National-popular projects did not exclude the possibility of constituting internationalist solidarity among oppressed subjects' (91), for local struggles have a vested interest in building networks of solidarity across the borders of a given nation-state. This consideration leads the authors to expand the argument to the case of populism. Confronted with a severe lack of research on the trans- and international dimension of populism, they boldly claim that a populist project can only be successful when combining a national-popular dimension with an internationalist one. On the one hand, the mobilizing success of a populist project depends to a significant degree on the national-popular heritage which cannot simply be ignored or dismissed by an enlightened elite as the nationalistic ideology

of the ignorant masses. The failed attempt at constructing a pan-European populist (or quasi-populist) movement with DiEM25 by Yannis Varoufakis attests to the fact that 'a people', in this case, a European people, while of course always resulting from a political construction, cannot be forged at will. Preceding moments of national-popular forms of identification need to be taken into account. On the other hand, a populist project that would deliberately restrict its political scope to a single country would clearly damage its chances. What Biglieri and Cadahia propose, in Laclauian terminology, is a chain of equivalence among different national populist projects. On a regional or sub-continental level, such articulatory effort came to light with the rejection of George W. Bush's plans for establishing the FTAA, the Free Trade Area of the Americas, and the subsequent alliance of nations, led at the time by populist governments, that constructed a progressive alternative with the Mercosur Parliament in 2005 and the Union of South American Nations in 2008 (97-98). Transnational populism is not a fancy dream, one can conclude; it does exist in the form of networks, mutual support, and collaboration, and even in the form of transnational counter-institutions.

Fourth, and perhaps most importantly, Biglieri and Cadahia investigate the missed encounter between feminism and populism to explore what link could be forged between the feminine and the plebeian. In fact, the encounter is blocked on both sides of the equation. From the feminist side, populism is, as a rule, identified with a masculinist form of politics. Several approaches – autonomist, communitarian and Spinozist feminisms are mentioned in the case of Latin America, 'difference feminism' (a habitual misnomer for a feminist current whose adequate name should be identitarian feminism) is mentioned in the case of Europe – reject the idea of antagonism or negativity as constitutive for the political (117). This produces a problem, because a feminist populism, to the extent that it *is* populist, will have to be consistent with the main tenets of populism, most fundamentally with a politics of antagonization. Thus, the authors point out, correctly in my view, the danger inherent in the 'feminization of politics into an ethics of care that, by politicizing what has historically been called "domestic," runs the risk of turning the "domestic" – the sphere of reproduction of social life – into the only possible horizon of the political'. For such a move would not only ignore the importance of more traditional terrains and organizations of struggle (such as political parties, labor unions, etc.), it would also result in over-emphasizing 'a non-conflictual form of politics, as if conflict and rupture fall on the masculine side, and reconciliation and closure of antagonisms fall broadly on the feminine side' (120) – an assumption that would perpetuate an existing binarism, only that the latter is now inversely evaluated.

On the populist side, the encounter between feminism and populism is blocked due to an unwillingness to theorize 'the feminization of the popular and the role of the political category of care in the construction of the people' (117). The only way out of this dilemma – between the expulsion of antagonism on the feminist side and

the expulsion of the feminine and the category of care on the populist side – lies in the articulation of a link between populism and care, resulting in what the authors provocatively call the 'antagonism of care'. Obviously, they are far from having a blueprint solution to the quandary of articulating populism and feminism, but they do provide a few hints by illustrating the antagonistic politicization of feminist issues, as a necessary step, with the case of the 'Not One Less' (*Ni una menos*) movement against femicide that started in Argentina and spread over Latin America. Also, the ensuing 8M International Women's strike of 2020 managed to politicize the 'International Women's Day' of March 8. These examples, however, are not entirely convincing. While feminist issues were publicly articulated in a forceful antagonistic way, these examples fall under the category of social movement mobilization without reaching the point of populist articulation. For instance, the figure of a popular leader – a necessary prerequisite for populist movements according to Laclau and according to Biglieri and Cadahia themselves – is oftentimes not present, or is even discarded in the case of social movement mobilization. The step into the field of representational politics, a step taken by Podemos for instance, is not always dared or wanted.[3]

So, what could the 'antagonism of care' contribute to a feminist radicalization of populism? Far from rejecting the category of care, they propose 'to reflect on the political role of care through a different matrix that takes antagonism as its starting point' (122). Recognizing that the strict dichotomy between the feminine and the masculine is itself a masculine construct, they try to subvert this construct by resorting to a left-Lacanian 'ethics of the not-all' (122) encapsulated in a revamped notion of love. The latter, as a stand-in for care, is not portrayed in the romantic mode of a supposed fusion between the sexes, but, rather, as a vector of de-totalization: 'the ethics of the not-all is the possibility of thinking about feminism as a disruption of the logic of the totality, short-circuiting the biologization of the feminine and masculine as man and woman' (125). If it is the dominant masculine logic that produces the totalizing fantasy of two mutually complementing biological sexes – a totalizing logic that would remain intact if one wanted only to invert it or eliminate one of its two sides –, then a post-foundational feminism would perceive of the feminine and the masculine as two mutually contaminated positions neither of which coincides with itself. They are two 'modes of naming the antagonism that constitutes us as subjects' (126). To engage in an antagonistic ethics of care, or 'love', is then to accept the incomplete and failed nature of one's own identity and to engage in the effort 'of building a collective we (self) through the other of the self' (130): 'The emancipatory structure of populism's logic of articulation (...) proposes a different self-

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[3] On the other hand, political parties or labor unions are often dominated by men, but Biglieri and Cadahia insist that these organizations are not exclusively masculinist but have been used in the past as platforms for the promotion of feminist demands as well.

relation, a different labor of the self, a different way of working through opposition. We would even dare to say that it is affirmed through a care for the self as the other of the self' (130). And yet, the moment of antagonism remains present. More than that, the process of care necessitates a constant effort at 'working through' negativity and antagonism, at embracing 'the other of the self as that *polemos* that must be cared for in order for things to flourish' (131).

As they present it, antagonism seems to appear in a double role in this account. There is the Lacanian 'antagonism' of psychoanalysis that cuts through both the feminine and the masculine, thus making impossible any neat fit between the sexes. But there is also the populist antagonism, i.e. the line drawn vis-à-vis the political enemy, an oppressive oligarchy for instance, and, by extension, vis-à-vis any homogenizing discourse. If the first antagonism requires an ethics of care, in order to work through negativity rather than disavowing it, the latter requires a clearly oppositional, if not destructive stance:

> Opposition is therefore not against the other, but against that form of identity that seeks to destroy the irreducible (or heterogeneous) through the configuration of inequality and exclusion. It is not about destroying the other but about destroying a position that prevents the existence of the other (the heterogeneous), what is to come. It antagonizes that power that seeks to assert itself as domination of the self. Emancipatory populism opposes and seeks to destroy the position that tries to eliminate what – from the totalizing point of view – is considered other, i.e. peasants, indigenous people, women, LGBTI+ people, etc. (131)

Now, this passage is of interest for many reasons, but one reason is the quite revealing conjunction 'emancipatory populism'. Were we not told that all populism is emancipatory? Why the need at the very end of the book to once more specifying it? Before tackling the question as to whether the main thesis of a constitutively emancipatory populism is sustainable or not, I would like to register some minor points of skepticism. But I want to insist up front that I'm in full agreement with the general aim of rehabilitating populism and with all the features of an emancipatory populism as described by Biglieri and Cadahia.

As regards the authors' discussion of plebeian republicanism, I suspect that much more historical work needs to be done, or presented, to prove that it actually existed as a remotely relevant political ideology in the past. A line of heritage that enlists, in a quote approvingly cited by the authors, Ephialtes, Pericles, or Protagoras, would hardly do the trick as we know next to nothing about Ephialtes, and Protagoras' pro-democratic position is mainly passed on via the potentially distorting account of a Platonic dialogue. More importantly, one needs to specify, in my view, that an understanding of (republican) freedom as a principle in need to be *universalized* is entirely modern, despite its perhaps Christian roots, and cannot be

found in the ancient or traditional republics.[4] As in the case of the particularly despicable Venetian republic, run by an aristocracy, these regimes were built – admittedly or secretly – on a caste system, regardless of the apparently equal distribution of citizenship among their members. I thus disagree with Biglieri and Cadahia when they assume that 'if we are all equal, there is no way to justify inequality within a republic, and, similarly, the law and institutions cannot be understood as the property and privilege of the few, but as mechanisms for expanding the rights of the majority' (71). The passage insinuates that there is something like an institutional automatism for the egalitarian expansion of freedom in republics. There are of course cases of revolts, the Florentine Ciompi revolt being the most prominent one, but what these revolts lack is an idea of the potentially limitless universalization of liberty and equality. Only the modern democratic revolution, which of course includes the Caribbean revolution, installs a horizon of freedom, equality, and solidarity that can be expanded well over the boundaries of the republic (hence the boundary problem in today's political science) and may potentially encompass noncitizens as well. Only within the 'symbolic dispositive' of modern democracy – against what I would call the *democratic horizon* – are we all equal; not so in traditional republics. For this reason, the republicanism of the modern revolutions is, in fact, a democratism.

This is far from having historical relevance only. The question reappears on a systematic level when the emancipatory nature of populism is to be evaluated. For Biglieri and Cadahia, populism is intrinsically emancipatory, implying that it is inclusive and respects plurality and heterogeneity. To start with, I am wondering whether fighting *against one's own exclusion* necessarily implies fighting *for the inclusion of others*. I'm not convinced that the latter fight is a direct consequence of the former. (We can easily imagine a populist mobilization aimed against the exclusion of the plebeian masses that does not really care about the inclusion of other excluded groups). It can indeed be discursively constructed as a direct consequence, but this involves a political effort that can hardly be read into the logic of populist mobilization per se. For this reason, I would take care to distinguish between populism and democracy, even though an intrinsic relation exists. Populism is an intrinsic feature of democracy for at least two reasons: (a) 'the people' as the sovereign ground of a democratic order will always be invoked by political actors in one or the other way, and an antagonistic – i.e., populist – construction of the people remains an ever-present possibility. And (b), democracy is the only truly political regime, because only in democracy a hegemonic struggle over the incarnation of the universal by particular actors takes place; and therefore antagonism, as a name for the political, will be an intrinsic feature of a democratic polity. But this does not

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[4] I am using the attribute 'modern' for lack of a better word and to point out the seismic historical shift instigated by the democratic revolutions.

imply that every antagonism will be constructed democratically or that every populist project will have democratic goals. So, while populism is an intrinsic feature of democracy, not every populism is democratic.

This is the reason why I remain unconvinced by Biglieri and Cadahia's attempt at identifying populism and democracy. While I do not wish to deny that there is an intrinsic relation, it does not work both ways. Populism follows democracy like a shadow, to use Canovan's metaphor, but this shadow could be frighteningly undemocratic. For this very reason we are forced – and Biglieri and Cadahia are forced as well – to add further criteria to determine the democratic credentials of a given political project. Merely invoking the people does not make a project democratic, as Biglieri and Cadahia would agree, who add criteria such as respect for plurality and the heterogeneous and an idea of tendentially universal inclusion. This is what they describe, in a left-Lacanian vein, as an ethics of the non-all. Yet, it is hard to see how such an ethics can be an intrinsic part of any antagonistic politics, as it sits uneasily with the political aim of expanding a given hegemony (or chain of equivalence) by means of antagonization. There is nothing in the logic of antagonism, or equivalence, that could be read as a predisposition to an ethics of democracy.[5]

In fact, the position I would be prepared to defend differs from Biglieri and Cadahia's as much as from Mouffe's position. 'In the case of Mouffe, Marchart, and Stavrakakis,' they observe, 'it seems that two types of people can be built through populism: one authoritarian and exclusionary, the other emancipatory and egalitarian' (35-6). Well, I would think that many more types of people can be built through populism. The range of political options is not exhausted with a choice between either authoritarianism or emancipation, either exclusion or egalitarianism. An equivalential chain can be built in many more than only two ways. Likewise, the range of political positions is not exhausted with a binary choice between left and right. Other than Mouffe (2018) I think 'left populism' remains too unspecific for a recommendable project because one can easily imagine a left populism that is authoritarian and exclusionary. As if the tradition of the left had never seen authoritarian currents. Of course, what can be done is, through a definitional operation, to define these currents out of an idealized picture of the left or populism. While sympathizing with the political aim of rehabilitating populism, such a nominalistic declaration of populism as emancipatory strikes me as symmetrically inverse to Jan

[5] There is a tendency in Biglieri and Cadahia's argumentation to shift, with a sleight of hand, between the logics of equivalence and the politics of egalitarianism, but the latter does not follow from the former because the expansion of an anti-egalitarian hegemonic formation would also have to proceed by building chains of equivalence. I'm wondering, by the way, whether Biglieri and Cadahia's ethical description of populism would equally fit with what in Laclau and Mouffe's earlier work *Hegemony and Social Strategy* was described as 'radical and plural democracy' (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). Doesn't Biglieri and Cadahia's description of an intrinsically democratic populism remind very much of 'radical and plural democracy'? And if yes, why not call it so? Why not speak, for instance, about a radical democratic populism? Wouldn't such a move solve, in one strike, all the problems?

Werner Müller's nominalistic fallacy in his book on populism. Where Müller decrees that inclusive cases (such as Podemos or Syriza) do not fall under the category of populism, because they don't fit his description of populism as intrinsically evil, Biglieri and Cadahia decree that authoritarian cases have nothing to do with populism because they don't fit their description of populism as intrinsically good.[6]

The problem reappears with the authors' reading of their main inspirational source: Laclau's theory of populism. Very interestingly they make out a difference between Laclau and Mouffe. Laclau, they observe, 'never claimed that this orientation (of a given populism) should be based on the left/right distinction, nor did he establish the fundamental features for establishing a binary distinction in these terms. Mouffe, by contrast, when determining the content of her distinction, favors an ontic classification of populism' (Biglieri and Cadahia 2021: 22). But, if this is correct, Laclau's agnosticism about the particular ideological orientation of populism can be read in two ways. Biglieri and Cadahia suggest that, given his Latin American experience, Laclau does not take the left/right distinction as the main axis of analysis (22) – which may very well be the case. But to conclude from this that populism was for Laclau an emancipatory phenomenon would only be partially true. Perhaps one could say that it was *and it wasn't*. The particular experience of a militant of the left wing of Peronism opened his eyes to the emancipatory side of populism, but at the same time Laclau, the theorist, ascribed to populism an ontological character that goes far beyond the Latin American experience. No doubt, compared to European or Anglophone scholars, he was much more aware of the emancipatory potentials of populism, and yet he would abstain from attributing any intrinsic content to populism. On many occasions he even claimed that, given the 'open' nature of a populist logic of articulation, fascism was a form of populism. So, when Biglieri and Cadahia accuse Mouffe of filling left-wing populism with an ontic content such as equality and social justice, couldn't the same charge be held against Biglieri and Cadahia? Are they not themselves smuggling an ontic content (emancipation) into an ontological category (populism)?

Hence, the status of their argument remains somewhat unclear. There are several options. It could be a normative injunction: 'this is how populism should be!' But there is little indication that would warrant such a reading. Secondly, it could be a merely descriptive account (all populist phenomena can be described as emancipatory), but then one would need to first nominalistically purge undesirable variants from the concept of populism. A third option is to retreat to a standpoint epistemology: 'If the left/right distinction seems unavoidable in the case of Europe, we need to ask why this is not the case for Latin America. Or perhaps to ask ourselves whether we can offer reflections on populism from the Latin American locus of

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[6] They thus propose to re-baptize them, i.e. to speak of neoliberal fascism rather than authoritarian populism.

enunciation that might disrupt some of those arguments constructed from Europe' (24). This is certainly the more convincing option because a certain standpoint allows you to see things – in this case: emancipatory variants of populism – which would be ignored from a different, Euro-parochial standpoint. Yet their claim as to the intrinsically emancipatory nature of populism *eo ipso* is much broader than that and can only lead to further problems: If it is an ontological claim, does it hold for Latin America only? If yes, it cannot be a truly ontological claim because such a claim must hold for populism in all possible worlds. If no, i.e., if it does hold for all possible worlds, how to account for the European experience of right-wing populisms – described by the authors themselves as 'unavoidable in the case of Europe' –, which flies in the face of any emancipatory ontology of populism.

So the argument in the book continuously shifts between a rather bold ontological claim and the much more modest aim to bring to the debate a Latin American perspective. While I think the ontological claim, which amounts to an emancipatory apriorism, is difficult to sustain, the latter goal to 'disrupt' the Eurocentric view on populism, should be welcomed as a much-needed intervention. But maybe I'm wrong and, perhaps, it is precisely the irritating aspect of the ontological claim that is meant to increase the disruptive quality of the intervention. Perhaps the ontological claim has the status of a provocation; perhaps it should be read as an injunction to turn the negative image of populism on its head and provocatively present liberal Eurocentric scholars of populism with a mirror-image of their own one-sidedness. For in place of an entirely negative assessment of populism we are confronted with an entirely positive one.

Now, there is a fourth option to which I now turn by way of ending these notes on Biglieri and Cadahia's *Seven Essays on Populism*. It is not fully elaborated, though, or only elaborated in Chapter 7 with respect to a feminist populism. Let me call it the 'imaginative option'. Biglieri and Cadahia take their start from the widespread feeling that the very idea of a (better) future has been canceled or rendered unimaginable. The neoliberal matrix leaves us 'trapped in a total immobility that forecloses on any idea of the future. Isn't the most spontaneous and paradoxically durable image of our present precisely the absence of a future?' (115). We are desperately confronted with a 'lack of imagination' (115). Worse than that, in the co-optative process that Gramsci would have called transformism or 'passive revolution', 'the reactionary powers of the present have managed to recycle those same emancipatory images, turning them into affective pastiches and mobilizing popular sectors toward their own reactionary ends' (115-6). Hence, we are in dire need 'to connect differently to our canceled futures' (116); and the two figures of the popular and the feminine 'can give us clues for imagining that which does not yet exist' (116). It appears that in these lines, which open the Chapter on feminist populism, a fourth option takes shape. Their argument, one can be sure, is neither normative nor descriptive; and their standpoint epistemology cannot fully account for the ontological

valence of their claims. So what if their book should be read as a political incantation to make use of the human faculty of imagination and start *imagining the popular differently*? But how to do this? How to engage in the labor of political imagination?

Biglieri and Cadahia approach this problem by revisiting Carlo Ginzburg's micro-historical method and what they describe as his 'evidential paradigm'. For Ginzburg, historical cases of knowledge production associated, for instance, with the plebeian and the feminine, proceed through the conjectural combination of clues, very much like Sherlock Holmes or Sigmund Freud proceeded. When, in an eastern fable, three brothers (re-)assemble the image of a camel, an animal they have never seen, through a number of clues, they exercise 'sensibility and intelligence to put imagination to work' (118). Such a method resembles the symptomatic reading strategy proposed by Lacan and Althusser:

> Unlike the positivist paradigm, which assumes that things are what they are and each object coincides with itself in a game of truth by correspondence, the evidential paradigm seems to suggest that things are not what they are since the thing cannot coincide with itself. (...) We can only refer to the thing through its effects: its symptoms, evidence, and footprints. Recall that this paradigm functions as a way of knowing from the place of not-knowing, from conjectural knowledge. In other words, it is experienced through clues that allow for the articulation of affects and intelligence in the very production of knowledge. (118-9)

While the evidential paradigm is meant to help the authors imagine the *coincidentia oppositorum* of an 'antagonism of care', it is also of relevance for their very object of research. Populism, it could be said, is not what it seems to be. It definitely is not what is described in the positivist paradigm by mainstream liberal scholars of 'populism research'. Precisely because it does not coincide with itself, because it is nothing that could be grasped in its positive presence, it is an object whose footprints need to be followed. This might explain why, even in mainstream populism research, this object has typically been described as fuzzy and hard to grasp. It is as if even the most hard-boiled empiricists felt a peculiar absence at the heart of their object of research. Following Biglieri and Cadahia, populism, precisely because there is no such thing as *the* typical case of populism, needs to be reassembled in a symptomatological way – which leaves space for re-imagining populism differently. This may explain the very nature of the authors' political wager: they present us with an image of how populism *could* be: i.e., with an alternative, not yet fully articulated image of an intrinsically emancipatory populism. Yet, their labor of re-claiming populism should not be mistaken for a purely 'mental' or theoretical activity, for a form of abstract speculation, disconnected from the world of actual politics. It is political through and through. For to re-imagine populism differently, as Biglieri and Cadahia do in their *Seven Essays on Populism,* is nothing short of a highly needed political intervention in the post-political matrix of liberalism.

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FEMINISM AND POPULISM WITH NO GUARANTEE

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ABSTRACT

From different latitudes across the globe, the study of the link between feminism and populism has been entangled in approaches that not only mistrust the possibility of the relationship itself, but also constantly reveal incompatibilities in their findings that shadow the reflection on their productive coexistence. Against this background, Paula Biglieri and Luciana Cadahia's book, *Seven essays on populism,* represents a breath of fresh air. The joint work of these Latin American political theorists opens up a line of research which proposes a new form of theorizing populism alongside feminism. In the following sections we focus on this dismantling process that underpins Biglieri and Cadahia's effort to open up and imagine a possible articulation between these phenomena, but alongside this analysis, we will also polemicize with their ideas, by bringing out the temptation of closure that eventually lurks in their analytical endeavours.

KEYWORDS

Populism, feminism, care, militancy

INTRODUCTION

Until recently, the relationship between populism and feminism has rarely been the subject of academic reflection. However, this situation has been changing rapidly, not only because of the unexpected relevance of feminisms today, but also as

a result of the rise of the 'populist moment' which, according to different readings, we are currently experiencing in various parts of the world (Mouffe, 2018; Brubaker, 2017; Villacañas, 2015).

The truth is that, while acknowledging the possibility of this crossover, several of these approaches' initial assumptions, as well as the conclusions they reach, tend to underestimate or even dismiss the implications and importance of the reflection on this linkage. To begin with, there seems to be an almost inevitable need to reflect on both contemporary and growing phenomena, but at the same time, there is also a sense that this reflection is somewhat odd, or at best, improper (Kroes, 2018). In fact, several of these readings suggest that the populist understanding of 'the people' leads to an eventual indistinguishability of gender. As Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser point out, populism falls short of having 'a specific relationship to gender; indeed, [they argue] gender differences, like all other differences within the 'people', are considered secondary, if not irrelevant, to populist politics' (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2015: 16). From other points of view, the thinking of the populism and feminism's link is directly considered to be inadequate because the two constitute opposite poles on the political spectrum (Roth, 2020; Kroes, 2018). As it is often pointed out, the most recent versions of right-wing populism are notoriously misogynist and sexist, opposing same-sex marriage, abortion and even gender studies (Gwiazda, 2021; Korolczuk, Graff, 2018; Askola, 2017). But in addition, even in left-wing populisms there would prevail aspects that place them in opposition to the feminist tradition: mainly their homogenising and anti-pluralist tendency and their confrontational and antagonistic rhetoric between two blocs – the elites and the underprivileged. As argued, while feminisms also tend to refer to male domination in antagonistic terms, the populist way of politics would obstruct last wave feminisms' intersectional political practices (Roth, 2020; Emejulu, 2011). Likewise, the centrality of the charismatic and paternalistic male leader in populisms is another aspect that would definitively separate it from feminism. As it is well known, feminist political practices insist on horizontality and question hierarchical and representative politics, since these aspects characterise precisely the male hegemony of politics (Kantola and Lombardo, 2020).

From different latitudes across the globe then, the study of the link between feminism and populism has been entangled in approaches that not only mistrust the possibility of the relationship itself, but also constantly reveal incompatibilities in their findings – to a greater extent regarding right-wing populisms – that shadow the reflection on their productive coexistence. Against this background, Paula Biglieri and Luciana Cadahia's book represents a breath of fresh air. The joint work of these Latin American political theorists, *Seven essays on populism*, opens up a line of research which, while seeking to overcome the advance of the right and the paralysing perplexity of the left, proposes a new form of theorising populism alongside

feminism[1]. By mapping a new emancipatory horizon for our time, Biglieri and Cadahia's intervention brings to the fore a necessary interpretative challenge that enables discussions that had not been truly opened before and which raises a thought-provoking question: how can we be feminist and populist without having to apologise for it?

Biglieri and Cadahia's argumentative path begins by clearly stating a political position: they recognise themselves, first and foremost, as women/theorists/*militants* of the global South. This positioning implies situating themselves in the Latin American context, and from there, theorising about another global social order's possibilities as well as new strategic alliances to achieve it. In this sense, they aim to recover political experiences *from* and *about* the global South, but not from a privileged epistemic perspective, nor from subalternity, but rather as an intervention which situates itself in the proximity of what is widely known to them. In effect, their intervention attempts to disrupt the usual preconception that undervalues theory from the South, or that directly uses the South only as a case study for a theory from the North. Their commitment is to capture what is universalisable in the region's experiences, convinced that understanding local problems requires a global perspective as well as a questioning of the usual hierarchy of nation-state borders. Indeed, with this intrepid book they claim that transformative ideas can only emerge within the construction of egalitarian academic spaces of debate framed in our condition as political subjects of knowledge.

Now, from this specific position, they propose a risky and provocative approach that rejects the apparent inadequacy of populism and feminism's link. As post-Marxist theorists and activists who are aware of the articulations and antagonisms of our time, and above all, of exceptional dislocating events, they believe that it is crucial to theorise, imagine and promote the articulation of these two political traditions. That is why their book ends with a clear wager: if it is the feminist struggles of the South that today shake everything up, revealing the limits of the social and restructuring the symbolic register of the popular camp, why should we doubt that an emancipatory populist politics can go in that direction? That said, their approach neither simply assumes feminist nor populist affiliations, but rather it attempts to dismantle and displace the positions generally taken as given within each of these traditions. Because, as argued, 'the basis of the missed encounter [between populism and feminism] can be found in feminist claims that block antagonism (and negativity), and populist proposals that deny the role of care and the feminisation of politics' (Biglieri and Cadahia, 2021: 119).

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[1]   Much of this proposal can be found in the last essay of the book, entitled: 'We Populists are Feminists', which is why throughout this text we will particularly focus on this chapter, although we will not neglect the general proposal of the book in the rest of the chapters.

In the following sections we will focus mainly on this dismantling process that underpins Biglieri and Cadahia's effort to open up and imagine a possible articulation between these phenomena. But alongside this analysis, we will also polemicise with their ideas, by bringing out the temptation of closure that eventually lurks in their analytical endeavours. In their persistent attempt to forge communication channels between feminism and populism, the authors run the risk of *making* a narrative that ends up preventing the oddness of populist politics and, above all, undermining the frontiers' contingency, arbitrariness and power which politics itself brings into being and that populism *par excellence* foregrounds. But let us first look at the operation of openness which is at the heart of Biglieri and Cadahia work and which makes it extremely interesting and conducive.

1.   FEMINISATION OF POLITICS? CAREFUL WITH CARE POLITICS

One of the authors' first and boldest steps to imagine the link between feminism and populism is to take up a discussion on the possibility of distinguishing and defining feminist praxis on the basis of a notion of 'care' linked to the 'feminisation of politics'[2]. They embark on this path not with the intention of recovering *women*'s politics – in a cis-heterosexist sense – but as an interpretative wager that seeks to conjugate the popular configuration that populism brings, as an always 'failed image of the people', to the social problems that feminisms address today (127). By these means, the authors privilege the notion of *care* as a signifier that ties together historical feminist approaches – socialist, Marxist and post-Marxist feminisms – as well as a political practice of *sorority* that would make this 'feminisation of politics' possible under the broad principle of *caring for each other*.

Now, in taking up this debate and these categories, Biglieri and Cadahia also seek to dissociate themselves from the 'autonomist current' that, according to them, has prevailed in certain traditions of thought and militancy, particularly in the Latin American context. These have been related to communitarian feminisms and to left feminist perspectives, close to the immanentist thought. Questioning this autonomous current throughout the book, but particularly with regard to feminist politics, the authors insist that these approaches risk transforming the horizon of the feminisation of politics into a non-conflicting and reconciling 'ethic of care' that eventually obscures the inherent antagonistic dimension in all politics. The risk is due to the way in which, from these approaches, the political dynamic becomes entangled in 'an unconfessed gender dichotomy' (121). Such division ends up constituting two separate and totalised camps: on the one hand, the masculine position, as the

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[2]   Cadahia and Biglieri focus on the idea of 'the crisis of care' proposed by Nancy Fraser, Cinzia Arruzza and Tithi Bhattacharya in their Manifesto: *Feminism for the 99 Percent* (Fraser, Arruzza and Bhattacharya, 2019).

disintegrating element through the perpetuation of antagonism, power and the hierarchy of the social, which is materialised in the state, representative politics, political parties, male leaders and antagonism, thus embodying patriarchy and its universalising politics. On the other hand, the feminine side stands out as the locus of the possibility of communal living through care, or through the affective and expansive gathering of bodies, where corporeality and affects arise as the opposite of power. All of which translates into the horizontal, collective and assembly organisational form of feminisms. It is at this clear-cut dichotomy where Biglieri and Cadahia, rather than finding the sources of feminist potentiality, find its limits: basically, on the failure to recognise how political articulations for feminist struggle are produced – as any other political struggle, which always involves conflict and is intertwined with power relations – and on the risks that this type of position has when it comes to generating links of solidarity and political imagination towards other instances of political struggle.

In contrast to these approaches, the authors boldly argue that the feminisation of politics and the politics of care should not be divorced from their antagonistic dimension and, drawing on two valuable theoretical contributions with a psychoanalytical imprint, they take seriously the possibility of reconnecting the two. The first of these inputs is the notion of *perseverance*, as developed by Joan Copjec in her book *Imagine There's No Woman* (2002). There, Copjec explores the distinction between the fixation drive and the perseverance drive through her analysis of Sophocles' Greek tragedy *Antigone*. As Biglieri and Cadahia argue, this distinction proves to be very enriching when it comes to conceiving social antagonism. For, unlike an antagonist action guided by a drive of fixation – that is nourished by the belief that there is a good to follow which is built on an idea of the law (Creon's masculine behaviour) – the perseverance drive allows to conceive a mode of antagonism constructed on the need for a loving bond – coming from desire – which preserves the irreducible in all idealisation and in all law (Antigona's action). That is to say, the drive to perseverance antagonises the law, the state and institutions by denouncing what cannot be replaced by them and preserving the irreducible, making possible a way of constructing the common through that which is irreplaceable[3]. For the authors, then, it is this way of thinking about antagonism that opens the door to conceiving the feminisation of politics as linked to the construction of an antagonism

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[3] It is interesting here to mention Judith Butler's reading of Sophocles' play Antigone (Butler, 2002). According to her, Antigone's action is "partially" outside the law, as her disobedience of Creon's rule involves both rejection and assimilation of the authority of the law. In this sense, Antigone does not act in language by placing herself outside of the law which Creon invokes; on the contrary, she anchors her language in that same law and by appropriating it, she appropriates the authority wielded by Creon. What is interesting about this other reading is that it underlines how the antagonistic action also implies a moment of appropriation/identification with the law it opposes, and that it is precisely from there that its subversive effects take place.

through a de-totalising loving bond. And it is at this point in the argument that a second theoretical figure is invoked: the ethics of the not-all of Lacanian psychoanalysis, as a way of thinking about the possibility of imagining feminism as a rupture with the masculine logic of totality. A totality that – in Luce Irigaray's terms – has characterised, not flesh and blood males, but the male phallogocentric position of the All and the One (Irigaray, 1985). Precisely, by embracing the indeterminacy of reality, this logic assumes the non-existence of previously constituted identities, contradicting the gender binarisms that seem to reappear in the feminisation of autonomist-rooted politics and thus paving the way to radical heterogeneity.

In our view, this critical displacement of the autonomist framework from which the feminisation of politics and the politics of care are usually approached – and whose implications are barely noticed – is crucial to address the problematic and confrontational development of feminist articulations today. However, it seems to us that the authors do not fully grasp the radical implications of these shifts in their own argumentation. To start with, what we have our doubts about regarding Biglieri and Cadahia' strategy, are the reasons and criteria by which the centrality of the category of 'care' should be kept as defining feminist politics. In effect, we recognise that the politisation of care has been central to articulate various feminist demands linked to the recognition and valorisation of unpaid domestic and care work mainly carried out by cis women[4]. And we also see that, as fundamental for the reproduction of the labour force, it has been the category that best synthesises the political strategy of socialist and Marxist feminism today, opening for this political tradition the greatest possibilities for the articulation of feminisms with the popular camp: with class, racial, indigenous, postcolonial, and environmental struggles.

But it is because of the aforementioned that we consider that Biglieri and Cadahia's effort does not fully undermine the restrictive and structural approach that still privileges the emancipatory character of relative positioning within the labour force. In other words, by what criteria can care be understood as a common ground between feminisms and as a starting point for their radicalisation? Raising this question does not mean that care has not been an overarching demand at a certain point in time, or in some specific circumstances, but can we establish in advance that this category has a crucial (inherent) political role? Why holding on to this category and giving it the political role of bringing together the feminist struggles?[5]. Or even, is this the category that can be universalised from the South and then be the main attribute from which to radicalise populism? According to Nancy Fraser, and her

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[4]   The category has been broadened by feminist economics and activisms to include not only domestic work and care for dependents but also care for all people, for interdependent relationships and also, in its broadest version, care for nature.

[5]   Regarding this point, the *Ni Una Menos* movement in Argentina, unlike articulating and popularising its struggles around care or abortion right – as other interpretations usually dismiss – expanded through the demand against women´s violence. See Martínez Prado, 2018.

collective proposal of a *Feminism for the 99%*, there is indeed a structural connection between social reproduction and gender asymmetry. But do Biglieri and Cadahia also assume this? Sometimes it seems that the authors are not particularly concerned with releasing this category from its structural economistic roots, for if this were the case, *care* would no longer have to be privileged as a category of emancipation and political analysis. In other words, their remarkable effort to link the feminisation of politics with antagonism, understood no longer as an oppositional relationship guided by an ideal – which would generate the illusion that at some point such antagonism could disappear – but as an opposition faithful to irreducibility, would not seem to open the way to an uncertain scenario of indeterminate and unknown political categories, demands and struggles.

In addition, we find it polemical, but at the same time extremely interesting, to think of the feminisation of the political as a disruption of the logic of totality and as an introduction of radical indeterminacy, which is nothing other than the manifestation of the logic of the not-all in psychoanalytical terms. Indeed, for Biglieri and Cadahia, the feminine position performs 'a double operation: from the ontic perspective, it is the materially existing force that allows us to short-circuit from within the master's totalizing discourse embodied in the figure of the dominant, white, heterosexual man. But, from the ontological perspective, it is a catacretic figure used to think when names fail' (127). From our perspective, this theoretical approach could certainly be very productive in addressing and understanding the different ways in which feminisms act and situate themselves in the social domain, and the forms in which the singular and the multiple – as opposed to the One and the other – prevail in feminist politics, confirming its constitutive heterogeneity. In this respect, there is no feminism that can represent successfully the whole of them: just as 'woman does not exist', 'feminism does not exist'. Nonetheless, as soon as the feminisation of politics is posed in these terms, a main question arises: how is it possible to conceive even the gesture of unifying a politics that is in itself multiple and heterogeneous? This first issue opens up a couple of others that may be useful to address.

Firstly, if the logic of the not-all points to the de-totalising gesture of feminist politics, showing its 'always open character and its hospitality to otherness, enabling a singular-plural that brings no One together, how would this politics marked by its perseverance towards the heterogeneous coexist with the inevitable drawing of closures, frontiers and fixations of populism? That is to say, it seems to us that it is very productive to think of feminisms as a political tradition that *par excellence* has brought heterogeneity into the field of the political, and that this attachment to indeterminacy definitely functions as an antidote to the essentialisms and binarisms that easily find their way into politics. But it is not clear in the authors' argument how this de-totalising gesture aligns with populist interventions, in particular with the specific populist way *of doing* with antagonism (Biglieri, 2020). In other words, we

wonder how the political praxis that the authors link to the notion of perseverance, as that which opposes the One in the name of the irreducible, finds its communion with a form of antagonistic politics that, while making visible the irreducible tension between the part and the whole of the community, *still* involves a moment of fullness and closure, a moment when the *plebs* claims to be the only legitimate *populus*. Because, at a certain point, this particular understanding of feminist antagonistic politics, which, in the words of Biglieri and Cadahia, 'points beyond our fixations and preserves, from within the storage chest of our desires that which cannot be substituted – but only sublimated' (124) seems closer to that ethics from which they aimed to differentiate themselves, or even more to queer politics[6], than to a populist logic of articulation. A logic that – as the authors well know, following Laclau's theoretical developments – always oscillates between openness *and closure* through precarious and partial fixations around multiple names of the people – social justice, equality, Peronism, human rights – establishing a dividing boundary that has the fundamental role of avoiding, rather than embracing or caring for, (all) others.

Secondly, directly linked to the above, and bringing a problem that has always been a pressing issue for feminisms, we also wonder how a feminist politics which is faithful to heterogeneity can accommodate hegemonic politics *tout court*. And here we are thinking not only on the equivalential moment of politics to which Biglieri and Cadahia anchor populism's inclusive and egalitarian impulse – and which we can understand as close to feminist horizontality – but on the moment of the equivalential chain's representation to which they barely refer to: namely the hegemonic dimension itself and the very possibility of universality in feminist politics. In specific terms, how is the moment of representation inscribed in the horizontality and openness assumed in the consensual and anonymous form of decision-making of most feminist assemblies? In our opinion, the authors do not seem to be willing to discuss these questions in the field of feminisms, nor to address their analytical implications, which would require a discussion of the categories of leadership, identification, hegemony. In fact, when analysing the experience of feminist mobilisations in Argentina around the demand of *Ni Una Menos* [Not One Less] as a way of exemplifying a de-totalising feminist politics, the universal function of this demand is already assumed, taken for granted, with no traces of its political becoming. That is, they are not dealing with how NUM managed to obtain that function, if it still has it, or how it has been transformed since its emergence. And these are key questions when it comes to thinking about new ways of connecting feminist and populist politics. Actually, the current *Ni Una Menos* assemblies are having enormous difficulties in articulating collective actions, beyond agreeing on

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[6]   As Miquel Bassols (2021:19) has pointed out: "Can there be a queer politics? It would be a politics that would not be defined by opposition with respect to another term, but by something incomparable, something that does not have an identity of its own, ontological, but is always so singular that it is removed from any binary definition".

an annual collective manifesto. Although most interpretations of the potential of the NUM's feminist assembly politics focus on its first massive outburst or on the way in which these assemblies moved towards the already existing political fronts of Argentine feminisms, little is said about the process of opening up and metonymic displacement by which the NUM came to successfully *represent* other demands. For it was precisely in this process of emptying and de-particularisation of this singular demand that the possibility of closure and representation of the chain of solidarities between different feminist claims was achieved. A political closure which, for some sectors within the assemblies was nonetheless the possibility of expanding feminist politics beyond national borders, while for others it was the beginning of its end[7]. That is to say, the *Ni Una Menos* demand, which originally emerged as a particular claim against femicides and violence against (cis) women, began to lose its particular content while gaining its universal function through a language and political tradition that managed to impose itself over other present discourses. Against this background, even if some of the NUM assemblies across the country may still continue to be heterogeneous, we must not fail to pay attention to what and whom these assemblies actually represent at any given time and what discourses inscribe and overdetermine their demands[8]. But as we said before, this requires bringing into discussion different views and categories on how the process of representation actually takes place within feminist politics.

In this sense, if Biglieri and Cadahia's proposal, by assuming the de-totalising gesture of the logic of the not-all, harbours an understanding of the way in which feminisms assume the particular in its irrevocable singular multiplicity – its unrepresentability –, it does not seem so clear that their approach problematise the tense unfolding of that ubiquitous – but always relative – universal that marks all political practice, even the feminist one. That *wandering All* which, after the critique of the metaphysics of the emancipatory subject, some feminist critique came to understand, as Linda Zerilli (1998) did once long ago, as that 'universalism which is not One'.

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[7]   Let us recall that in order to achieve the openness to new demands that became a hallmark of NUM, their first *Manifesto* explicitly excluded the historical demand of Argentine feminism, the right to abortion. This claim's later inclusion is what for some sectors represented the beginning of the NUM's politicisation and the end of its potential for social articulation.

[8]   In this sense, we share Biglieri and Cadahia's mistrust of an apparent immanent feminist power of assemblies resultant of the 'political performativity of bodies', and we are also definitely wary of the idea that the 'proximity and displacement by conflict' is produced by a supposedly gathered 'collective intelligence' (Gago, 2020: 175-6).

2.   WHO RADICALISES WHOM? POPULIST MILITANCY AND ITS ABSENCE OF GUARANTEES

As we have already mentioned, the other authors' crucial turn in their attempt to bridge the gap between feminism and populism is to problematise existing populist conceptualisations and proposals. Drawing on the theoretical developments of Ernesto Laclau, the authors raise two crucial points for understanding this phenomenon. Firstly, and put it in very simple terms, they argue that populism must be understood in its ontological dimension and not as 'a political moment nor a merely conjunctural political strategy' (Biglieri and Cadahia, 2021: 13). In effect, pursuing Laclau fundamental steps 'to make politics thinkable again' (Laclau, 2008: 12), they not only grant populism the status of a political category, but they also conceive it as 'a singular way of theorizing the being of the social' (Biglieri and Cadahia 2021: 18). Secondly, and in close relation to this first point, they further assert that populism's insurrectional character and emancipatory potential do not allow it to be linked to just any kind of content or politics. For them, populism only occurs when equality, among those at the bottom (against those on top), is achieved by privileging the logic of equivalence which allows for the articulation of heterogeneity, i.e. the radical inclusion of differences, rather than their erasure or suppression. Populism can therefore be conceived as synonymous with the politics of equality and inclusion, hence as the authors suggest, 'it can only be emancipatory' (35). From these premises, they introduce a watershed in the current intellectual and political debate: populism is either left-wing or it is not. Moreover, while the notion of fascism is still at play, it is possible to dispense with the left-right, inclusive-exclusive qualifiers, and speak – without apologies – only of populism as opposed to fascism.

Once again, we find Biglieri and Cadahia's approach highly suggestive. Indeed, their approach brings to the understanding of the link between populism and feminism a fruitful debate and a renewed perspective that breaks with the empirical interpretations of 'really existing' populisms – mostly right-wing of the global North – which tend to attribute a pejorative character to this form of politics. Moreover, it also invites us to reflect on the controversial distinction between left-wing and right-wing populism which has been the object of debate in recent years within populist studies and, in particular, in the field of post-structuralist discursive approaches to populism (Stavrakakis, 2017; Panizza, 2005, Mouffe, 2018; Devenney, 2020; Glynos and Mondon, 2016). In this respect, let us first say that we share their suspicion on the extent to which this left-right distinction, as well as the inclusionary- exclusionary differentiation (Mouffe, 2018; Marchart, 2018; Stravakakis, 2017), may actually contribute to understanding populism as such, or whether it rather does not bring more confusion to the political discursive approach to the matter. By pointing out that populism is one form of political articulation among others, with its own internal logic of functioning, Biglieri and Cadahia raise an entirely valid question: 'How could it be both ontologically and strategically correct to conflate fascism with

a populist form of popular construction?' (2021: 39). In effect, from our view, this kind of typology that aims at capturing and accounting for different types or degrees of populist discourses (Stravakakis, 2017), does little to actually sharpen the focus on populism and to allow for its distinction from other political practices and discursive interventions, such as democratic-authoritarian-totalitarian ones (Panizza, 2014; Barros, 2013). In contrast, it frequently contributes to homogenising them by bringing together very distinct ways of constructing the people and dealing with the tension between the *part* and the *whole* in the structuration of the community's order. As has already been pointed out, what clarifying distinction can we speak of when such dissimilar forms of politics, as the political experiences of Trump, Orbán, Lula, Bolsonaro, Perón, Kirchner, Chávez or Morales converge under the same political category?

Yet, it is precisely because of this need to separate the *wheat from the chaff* that we have some reservations about the rapid assimilation that the authors establish between populism and the emancipatory project of the left. We think that by identifying the traits of the left, as if they were specific and proper to populism, this logic becomes too close to the notions of equality and inclusion which, in any case, are also found in other forms of political articulation, such as the democratic one. This consequently leaves populism's own features still in the shadows. In our view, once we put populism back on the left-right axis – as Biglieri and Cadahia acknowledge Laclau himself tried to avoid –, we again run the risk of losing sight of its specificity, that is, of the internal logics through which populism functions, the types of popular identification it involves, and how it actually tends to perpetuate the (always conflictive) tension between the legitimate *demos* and the set of popular identifications in which it operates (Aboy Carlés 2005; Barros, 2013). Since the publication of *On populist Reason* (Laclau, 2005), if not before, the task of further characterising populism has given rise to very interesting theoretical crossovers, many of which have been carried out by Biglieri and Cadahia themselves (Biglieri and Perelló, 2019; Biglieri, 2020; Coronel and Cadahia, 2018), among other scholars within the post-structuralist field of study across the globe (Critchley and Marchart, 2004; Glynos and Howarth, 2007; Stravakakis and Katsambekis, 2014; Aboy Carlés, 2005; Barros, 2006; Panizza, 2013). Therefore, we wonder whether a return to this mode of characterisation might not be somewhat counterproductive to the developments that have taken place with the decisive passage from *normative* to *formal* and *discursive* approaches. Moreover, we ask ourselves if this synonymy would not end up giving back to populism a series of distinctive ontic contents – as Wendy Brown (2021) suggested in the book's foreword –, which would certainly go against the authors' attempt to understand its ontological specificity.

Now, it is precisely from this problematisation of populism, and by putting forward their own understanding of this concept, that Biglieri and Cadahia can begin to draw a possible way of conceiving populism alongside feminism. As we

mentioned before, for them populism differs from other logics of political articulation in its specific way of dealing with differences *vis-à-vis* equivalences. While populism supports constitutive heterogeneity of differences in the construction of the people, right-wing politics, which they identify as fascism, organises them through homogeneity. Contrary to general views that only see in populism the homogenising effects of an antagonistic politics that divides the social field into two opposing parts, the egalitarian and inclusive populist logic makes this type of politics hospitable towards the heterogeneity of differences. In this way, this hospitable aspect opens up a productive link with the heterogeneity and inclusion present in current feminisms and to the care politics that this implies. That is, this aspect also allows the approach of a dimension of care that apparently has gone unnoticed in populism[9], because, as the authors argue, for populist logic to embrace the heterogeneity of differences, first of all, it needs to take care of them. As we can see, once the authors disentangle populism from right-wing politics and link it to left-wing egalitarian and inclusive politics, the path to feminist politics is fairly straightforward. It is only then that they can begin to think on how these two phenomena can mutually potentiate each other, how feminism can radicalise and expand populism across national borders, and how populism can politicise feminism, giving it back its antagonistic politics.

Now, from this point of departure, the authors – as *militants* – dare to imagine a populist-feminist emancipatory project by appealing to two 'current images' of our latitudes. In these images, they find some glimpses of this popular construction crossed by a feminist tint or, we could risk, a *populist feminism* in the making: the *Ni Una Menos* (NUM) [Not One Less] movement, to which we have referred before, and the political appeal of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, former President of Argentina and the current leader of the Peronist movement: *La Patria es el Otro* [The Homeland is the Other]. We are interested in the analysis of both figures because from this analysis some questions arise about the way in which the authors pose the communion between feminisms and populisms.

Biglieri and Cadahia envision in the NUM feminist mobilisation an unprecedented restructuring of the popular camp. For them, this movement has managed to weaken the antagonisms that have marked Argentina's political history, drawing new frontiers within the social field and taking feminist demands beyond nation-state borders. In this process of internationalisation of feminist demands on a global scale lies the effective possibility of imagining a *feminist people*. In their words: 'A massive, global and historical image of resistance and living struggles against patriarchy' (Biglieri and Cadahia, 2021: 128).

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[9]   We say 'apparently' bearing in mind the enormous attention that care policies have received in Latin American populism and their effects on women's lives – to name just one case, the one we know best, let us remember the role of the Evita Foundation. In this sense it is hard to appreciate this supposed lack of attention.

While we may agree with Biglieri and Cadahia on the restructuring effect of NUM, we still have reservations on whether it is possible to find in this form of transnational feminist politics a form of populist articulation. That is to say, can this internationalist feminism, which today carries the claim of 'Ni Una Menos' onto a global scale, be approached under the rubric of populism? For we must not ignore the fact that the internationalist reading that permeates feminisms today is conditioned by a discourse that bears the universalising imprint of socialist-Marxist ideology. And even if we can agree that under the Marxist tradition there are innumerable and more or less equidistant political languages – whose closeness allows for the formation of alliances and common fronts – as political analysts and theorists we cannot ignore the tensions and differences between one another[10]. In other words, would there not be differences between the transnational politics of Marxists and populists?[11].

For the authors, this does not seem to be an entirely valid or pertinent question, since, as we explained above, they begin this discussion by assuming the proximity of populism to the left. Yet, from our position, this form of politics of internationalist feminisms is not exactly, nor necessarily populist, since the presence of an antagonistic division of the social field between feminists and patriarchy does not ensure the emergence of populism. For the time being, we consider that the left politics that has dominated transnational feminist mobilisations has not yet proved to have populist traits. Its predominant mode of articulating differences, though gradually widening, does not cease to antagonise the 'dual system of oppression' – as Marxist feminisms recognise the combined oppression of patriarchy and capitalism – under the assumption of a resolution of the tension over the boundaries of the legitimate *populus*. This implies, at the same time, the continuous hierarchisation of the 'structural' differences which, on both sides of the frontier, prevail over the rest, according to an order (of oppression, or of emancipation) which is presented as unfailingly, and not so secretly[12], overdetermining its horizon. In contrast to this

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[10]   We cannot ignore the debate that Laclau and Žižek had on the subject (Butler, Laclau and Žižek, 2000; Žižek, 2006; Laclau, 2006). Among feminisms, although Fraser has recently approached the Laclauian framework and populism as a political alternative for the emancipation of the left (2017), Gago's reading rejects it out of hand (Gago, 2020: 202-6).

[11]   For De Cleen et. al. (2020) a *transnational* populism is distinguished from an *international* one because rather than an allusion to a 'cooperation between national populisms', the transnational one requires 'the construction of a 'people' that goes across national borders' (2020: 153). For Cadahia and Biglieri, this distinction is problematic because it implies ignoring that '(national) particularities are ineradicable in the conformation of a transnational people' (2021:94). We believe that De Cleen et al. would agree with them on that point as well. What is overlapping in both analyses, in our view, are the differential ways of constructing that people that prevail in progressive sectors, which make some populist and others not.

[12]   To paraphrase Žižek who pointed out that 'in the series of struggles (economic, political, feminist, ecological, ethnic, etc.) there is always one which, being part of the chain, secretly overdetermines its very horizon' (Butler, Laclau and Žižek, 2000: 320).

way of articulation, populist discourses exacerbate that tension over the borders and give visibility to the ultimate arbitrariness of social division. This is because, in a populist articulation, the popular subject is presented both as the victim of a harm that demands reparation (*plebs*) and as the embodiment of the communal 'whole' (*populus*). In its pendular movement, this tension between being *part* and being *whole* is exacerbated and does not find a definitive resolution (Barros, 2013). In fact, it is in this failed attempt to represent the *whole* that the popular subject distances herself from her particular condition, which allows her to generate unprecedented links with other popular identifications. Thus, unlike political discourses that are articulated through other logics, in populist interventions there is no privilege of differences, and any social claim or struggle can be part of either side of the frontier. Someone who is considered an enemy at first sight, someone who is 'at the top' or who is part of the 'establishment', i.e. 'the elites' (such as the national bourgeoisie, rural producers, groups represented by the light blue anti-abortion scarves[13]) can, at a given moment, be identified as 'those from below', as 'members of the people'. This more porous, contaminated and ambivalent politics is what gives populism its disruptive and radical potency and what differentiates it from political struggles circumscribed to pre-ordained enemies, prefigured by universal systems of oppression.

In this light, we are not so optimistic about the second image either – the Kirchnerist appeal: 'The Homeland is the Other' – which the authors refer to as a 'distinct form of populist work that (...) is not articulated through the domination of the other but embraces the other of the self as that polemicist who must be cared for in order for things to flourish' (Biglieri and Cadahia, 2021: 131). For Biglieri and Cadahia, this signifier would in fact reveal the emancipatory structure of the logic of articulation of populism which, according to them, 'asserts itself through the care of the self as the other of the self' (130). That is to say, in the syntagm coined by the Kichnerist political discourse, the other would be that irreducible element that constitutes us, so, as they say, 'far from something to be eliminated' (130), we should take care of it. From their point of view, this populist gesture would already contain an effective dimension of care that has gone unnoticed, or rather, devalued by feminist politics with an autonomist slant. In effect, in this form of identity configuration there would be a space for sheltering and promoting the care of the other, and its *sororal* drifts, without neglecting the oppositional and articulatory dimension constitutive of populist formations. Recovering this dimension, therefore, would be crucial for imagining one of the ways of radicalising feminist politics through populist politics.

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[13]   The sectors that oppose the legalisation of abortion in Argentina use light blue headscarves as a symbol of their struggle and as a way of differentiating themselves from the green headscarves of feminist activists. In this regard, in a controversial speech, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner called for the formation of a social and political front that includes both headscarves, generating great controversy among her supporters, most of whom were in favour of abortion.

Now, even if we can appreciate the possibilities that this political gesture opens up for the articulation of feminist and populist political practices – and which the authors rightly point out – we nevertheless also believe it is fundamental to highlight the limits and challenges that populism still represents for feminist politics. For if the appeal 'the Homeland is the Other' sums up the logic of openness and inclusion of otherness in similar terms to a 'populist normativity', it is far from defining its political practice: oriented towards the construction of hegemony through antagonist politics. That is, first and foremost, in the back-and-forth between the *whole* and the *part* proper to populist hegemonic politics, the notion of caring for differences loses its effect. For it is not a criterion of care that will safeguard those differences from the shifting of populist boundaries. Hegemonic investiture has unpredictable effects, including the underestimation or discarding of some of the differences that were present in the first place. Secondly, the logic of populist inclusion is not infinite, nor indistinct, and, above all, it is not defined *ad hoc* by a criterion of indiscriminate openness to otherness, as many feminisms and left-wing activisms seem to assume when they conduct their political praxis by a supposed political correctness of accumulation of social differences by definition[14].

For all these reasons, and unlike some feminisms that are now questioned for their moralistic practices of 'nullification' or 'aggravation', populist praxis leaves open the way in which political differences are settled, involving then conjunctural and singular judgements that will have the agreement of some and the opposition of others. Populist inclusion is thus radically unpredictable, so that sometimes those who were previously on the opposite side of the fence join its forces; and at other times strategic alliances are forged with sectors even of the opposition – with the right, with the light blue scarves – to represent the elusive whole. This is why populism is the logic of political articulation *par excellence*, as Biglieri and Cadahia have affirmed on countless occasions. And therefore, not all feminisms would be willing to go along with it. Therefore, we should also ask ourselves what it would mean for feminisms to allow themselves to be radicalised by populism. As we have tried to show, accepting the ineradicable nature of the antagonism does not seem to be enough. It is also necessary not to elude the always unsuccessful displacement of political borders present in the failed attempts at closure and plenitude that populist hegemonic process implies. Only in this way can heterogeneity be thought beyond the acceptance of differences and acquire its radical character.

[14]   In other words, intersectionality does not always translate into the politicisation of differences; on the contrary, the mere aggregation of differences is often a means of depoliticising them.

OPEN CONCLUDING REMARKS: 'A NEBULOUS NO-(WO)MAN'S-LAND'[15]

To conclude our intervention, we would like to invoke once again the spirit of openness that Biglieri and Cadahia bring through their intervention to the apparent and sedimented antinomy between populism and feminism. As we have shown, the authors make a remarkable effort to work on the traces of a possible encounter between these two historically distant, but currently fascinating political phenomena. As they point out, their aim is to translate certain practices and experiences located in the South – equating or contrasting them with those prevailing in the Global North – with the expectation of tracing contact points which are often overlooked or dismissed out of hand.

But in doing so, as we have also tried to show in our intervention, the authors have not discussed nor acknowledged two assumptions underlying their own militant and analytical approach: on the one hand, their translation exercise was carried out on the basis of assuming an internationalist framework intimately linked to the tradition of the Marxist left which, as we pointed out above, is far from making possible the radicality of the contingency of political borders – and their overdetermined and singular inscriptions – which, whether we like it or not, populism presupposes. On the other hand, they remained distant from the discussion on how the heterogeneity inherent to feminisms can deal with the hegemonic dimension of populism. That is, even if we admit, along with them, that the logic of the not-all definitively recognises this gesture of radical assumption of singularities as something exceptional and distinctive of feminist politics – an absolute apprehension of the heterogeneous – it remains to be analysed how the moment of closure and representation, inherent to populisms, can be assumed therefrom. Following that path, it may be productive to recall Butler's reading of Antigone (2002) to which we referred earlier on, especially her insistence that heterogeneity is not without the law, which is why Antigone's action is only partially outside Creon's Law.

Now, if for Cadahia and Biglieri populism and feminism can radicalise each other from antagonism and care, for us it is instead from the tension between openness and closure, between social heterogeneity and hegemonic articulation that we can glimpse the greatest challenge to their coexistence. That is why we consider that it is still necessary to proceed with caution, but with no less enthusiasm, in thinking about their communion. This may require also an analytical register guided by a logic that operates on a case-by-case basis, and that unfolds in a singular and situated manner, which can be attentive to the specific and distinctive moments in which

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[15]   Alluding to the words that Ernesto Laclau once wrote: '(...) between left-wing and right-wing populism, there is a nebulous no-man's-land which can be crossed — and has been crossed — in many directions' (Laclau, 2005: 87).

populist glimpses permeate feminist politics[16]. For that, this analytical path must be faithful to the indeterminacy of the social and always aware of the contingent and arbitrary locations of social struggles. Many times, this may go against the militant spirit which always tries to make history happen.

So, let us provisionally close the opening of this dialogue, then, by recalling, with reference to Hannah Arendt's reading, that one of the main limits of Marxist political philosophy, apart from the privileging of a Subject that makes history, was precisely that politics ended up deriving from history as a *making*. And as she herself also said, only Marx understood that a conception of 'making history' implied accepting that, as every craft of making implies a certain end (a made, fabricated product), 'history will have an end' (Arendt, 2018: 127). And we, as feminists and populists, know that, although we are moving in a nebulous land, our story has only just begun.

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[16]   An outline of this type of approach can be found in Barros and Martínez Prado 2019; 2020).

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FEMINISM AND POPULISM: STRANGE BEDFELLOWS OR A PERFECT MATCH?

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ABSTRACT
This essay discusses Paula Biglieri and Luciana Cahadia's intervention concerning the relationship between populism and feminism, agreeing with the authors that the articulation of progressive populism and anti-essentialist feminism is necessary. The most pressing related issues, it argues, are i) the book's seeming understanding of feminism as *necessarily* being a 'smaller', perhaps even more particularistic, movement than populism; ii) its strong emphasis on the ontological necessity of one leader; a question which the essay argues is an ontic/empirical one, as well as one which might be one of the most serious obstacles for a successful articulation of the populism and feminism, and; iii) that the book's proposal of a 'ruptural institutionalism' offers a promising route for further political and theoretical investigation, which might help feminism to steer an alternative route between current hegemonic (neoliberal) feminist articulations on the one hand, and neoconservative opposition to 'gender' on the other.

KEYWORDS
Populism, feminism, anti-genderism, neoliberalism

I have approached my reading of Paula Biglieri and Luciana Cahadia's thought-provoking and skillfully argued *Seven Essays on Populism* (2021) not as an opportunity to 'review', but as an invitation to think together. The discussions raised by Biglieri and Cahadia and their attempt to grasp what from their perspective can be universalisable (xxiii), speaks to many of our shared political commitments, and their contribution in this book far exceeds the issues I will be able to cover within the bounds of this brief text.[1]

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[1] As the authors position themselves as women, academics, Latin Americans and "political militants traversed by the various antagonisms that, between populism and neoliberalism, have emerged and continue to exist in our region", it makes sense for me to 'position' myself too. Speaking from Scandinavia (Sweden, to be specific) committed to popular feminism, an economic equality which simply cannot be achieved in today's system of global capitalism, a democracy which does justice to its proud name, sexual, reproductive and intimate freedoms, anti-racism, a transformed relationship between humans and other species, as well as to the urgent need to restructure human co-existence for true climate sustainability means that the world that we live in is a daunting place. Adding to this

With this limitation in mind, this commentary shall focus specifically on what I see as a key question for political strategy of our times, namely that of articulating progressive inclusionary populism and feminism. Like the authors, I am convinced that an articulation of such populism and feminism constitutes the most promising route to build more equal, democratic and sustainable societies. Agreeing with Chantal Mouffe (2018), from the position where I stand (Europe, Sweden), I think it is blatantly clear that the 'diagnosis' that she has made of Western Europe is correct, and, that her analysis is valid also more globally. What had, at least not yet, become as clear when her book *For a Left Populism* was published was just how central issues of sex/gender, sexuality and reproduction would become for the 'populist moment' she there describes (see Gunnarsson Payne, 2019). Since its publication, however, an increasing number of, especially feminist, scholars have paid the issue more attention (e.g. Barros and Martinéz, 2020; Biglieri, 2020; Graff and Korolczuk, 2021), and I welcome Biglieri and Cahadia's innovative intervention in this ongoing debate, which I hope will continue and develop even further in the years to come.

To this end, I shall here discuss a few related issues that concern the theorisation of populism and feminism; some of which I think have been overlooked within post-Marxist populism theory more generally and which I hope will make their way into the field, and others which are more specific to Biglieri and Cahadia's approach, and which I think require some clarification.

I will begin with arguing for the necessity of feminism's de-totalising impulse when it comes to both historical and contemporary attempts to constitute a people-as-one, as issues of sex/gender, sexuality and reproduction are at the very core of these. In short, I therefore believe that this de-totalising impulse is absolutely central for the construction of a people which is both multiple and (agonistically) divided. (This is not to say that *all* feminisms serve this function, but I shall return to this later.) Thereafter, I will discuss the extent to which contemporary feminism already follows a populist logic, first emphasising the articulatory logic of contemporary feminist mass-movements in Europe and Latin America, and second in relation to (part of) the movement's long tradition of horizontal organisation, including its uneasy relation to the idea of the One Leader. Third, I will, based on experiences from hegemonic Swedish 'state feminism'[2] and with inspiration from the authors' proposal of *ruptural institutionality* argue that this idea might be a way forward for beginning to re-think feminist institutionalism in the context of a welfare state. In doing

that, just by committing to these causes as an academic means that I pretty much tick all the boxes for the enemy picture being painted by what in common academic vernacular is referred to as rightwing populism, in a way that I only a few years ago could not have even imagined.

[2] Since the first version of this article was written, the hegemonic position of 'Swedish state feminism' has become increasingly challenged, also among people in governing positions. At the time that this article is published, the long-term consequences remain to be seen.

so, I shall pose a set of questions concerning the compatibility – or not – between feminism and the kind of populism that the authors propose.

REPRODUCING THE PEOPLE-AS-ONE: ANTI-GENDERISM, NEOLIBERALISM AND THE DOUBLE-BIND OF FEMINISM

As both I and others have previously argued, a wide range of rightwing political parties, movements and leaders have come to formulate their exclusionary notion of 'the people' not just around ideas of the nation, but also increasingly around a heteronormative and essentialist understanding of 'the traditional family', considering it the very bedrock of Christian and/or Western civilisation. Indeed, this development has made many of us talk about 'a happy marriage' between rightwing populism (or what the authors simply call fascism) and anti-gender movements, a 'marriage' which manifests itself in the shape of concrete alliances between Christian ultraconservative organisations and exclusionary nationalist rightwing political parties, in the form of political proposals such as restrictive abortion legislation, the infamous 'Don't Say Gay bill', the demonisation and defamation of Gender Studies, or the rhetoric that gender mainstreaming is nothing less than a worldwide conspiracy by a global elite (Gunnarsson Payne and Korolczuk, 2021).

As I have argued with Maria Brock (2023) 'although there is no *intrinsic* compatibility between the two political projects, their formal similarities have eased their mutual articulation'. These formal similarities consist of the division of the social field into two antagonistic camps, and the construction of an underdog (a people) and an oppressive regime (an elite) – here conflating an exclusionary notion of a national people with an idea of 'common people' consisting of 'traditional' heterosexual families with their 'own' biological children. The political promise they offer is to restore national sovereignty and autonomy of 'normal families', as against a powerful and corrupt global elite, consisting of foreign influences, such as immigrants, 'imported' feminist and queer ideologies, supra-national organisations, and transnational corporations. Their internal logic can easily be recognised from other exclusionary movements, insofar as they are mobilising 'their power by creating specific fantasies about threats to the nation and that they as a result have put themselves forward as the protectors of 'what is in us more than ourselves', that is, that which makes us part of a nation' (Salecl, 1992: 52; see also Gunnarsson Payne, 2019). The 'happy marriage' between these exclusionary nationalist populist projects and anti-gender politics – their 'opportunistic synergy' to speak with Graff and Korolczuk (2021) – furthermore consists in the fact that the latter offers further 'substance' to the former's construction of 'the people', and, importantly, offers an effective 'psychic tool' for the creation of a people-as-one.

Their mobilisation for 'traditional family values', I argue, is indeed a central component of it, as it "creates powerful fantasies about not only 'the good citizen' but

also about the '*potential enemy in every individual*' leaving every individual 'exposed to the pressures of the fantasmatic agency which 'sees and knows all'' (Salecl, 1992: 50). As I have argued elsewhere, these fantasies are especially effective for the creation of a totalising people-as-one, because they speak 'directly to commonly felt 'forbidden desires', making them 'particularly prone for triggering the politically potent feelings of fear (for the Other) and guilt and shame (for one's own forbidden desires and 'dirty deeds') in the individual' (Gunnarsson Payne, 2019; see also Gunnarsson Payne and Brock, 2023). This relates closely to Biglieri and Cahadia's formulation that in 'fascism, the 'self' can only exist, on the one hand, through its negation and rejection of the other, and, on the other hand as something previously given' (130). In this way, as I understand it, the 'work of the self' that they speak of, where 'what is opposed is the other to be destroyed' (130) serves the double function of destroying both (imagined) 'external' others, *and* the (imagined) 'internal' other (manifested in forbidden fantasies, desires and 'dirty deeds'). The relation of property of self and others that the authors write about, thereby, paradoxically leads to a destructive domination of not 'just' the 'other', but also of the parts of the 'self' which must be eliminated (but will only ever be repressed). The compatibility and psychic 'grip' of anti-gender politics and what the authors call fascism (and many others refer to as rightwing populism) are further enhanced by this 'under-the-skin-politics' in which the articulation of race, ethnicity, kinship, reproduction and sexuality function to create a very specific version of the-people-as-one.

How, then, has anti-genderism come to function so well rhetorically for the creation of an anti-establishment narrative? Would its repressive nature not be hard to convincingly combine with the rhetoric of the 'underdog'? The answer, I believe, lies in the fact that policies for gender equality and sexual diversity since the 1990s has become implemented through post-political measures and thereby become articulated in a neoliberal discourse. In a time when gender equality ideals and tolerance of sexual diversity is implemented via gender mainstreaming by (some) states and supra-national organisations such as the European Union and United Nations, and promoted by transnational corporations via advertisements and social corporate responsibility projects (Gunnarsson Payne and Tornhill, 2021; see also Tornhill, 2019), gender equality and sexual diversity have become easy targets for conservative forces that are using anti-establishment rhetoric and claiming to be the voice of 'the people' as against a global elite. Moreover, as gender equality and sexual diversity are implemented in a post-political way, they not only lose their truly emancipatory potential but they become part of neoliberalism's totalising logics where gender equality becomes reduced to productivity and availability to the job market and sexual diversity to pink-washed marketing strategies. As Tornhill and I (2021) have argued, this situation has placed contemporary progressive feminist and LGBTQ+-struggles in a double-bind, with conservative anti-gender politics looming

on one side, and washed out 'lean in' feminism and pink-washed economics on the other.

In this context, feminism and LGBTQ+-movements need to acknowledge the totalising logics of *both* anti-gender conservatism *and* neoliberal capitalism and function as a de-totalising counter-hegemonic alternative to both. Also here, it is easy to agree with the authors that a 'feminism of the 99%' is necessary to take on this task. In this context, I argue that the impressive feminist intersectional and transversal mobilisation which exploded with *Ni Una Menos* (Not One Less) in Argentina and *Czarne Protesty* (Black Protests) in Poland as well as similarly inclined mass-mobilisations such as *The Women's March* and *Black Lives Matter* (emanating from the US) offer the most promising alternatives of our time. With the risk of simplifying these diverse movements, I still think it is safe to say that a mutual challenge for them and for progressive populism concerns how to keep their radical and de-totalising momentum, while finding strategies to build hegemony (see also Biglieri, 2020).[3]

ARTICULATORY FEMINISM = POPULIST FEMINISM?

Biglieri and Cahadia clearly state that an anti-essentialist understanding of the subject is a necessary pre-condition, and this too is easy to agree with. At a first glance, one might say the same about the statement that 'feminism has to be part of something bigger, and even broader political project' (Fraser, 2018: xii), but this statement also raises questions with which feminists of different political inclinations have struggled since the movement's very inception. The first question relates to 'whom' should be included as the subject of feminism, and concerns both internal critique of the movement's own exclusionary mechanisms, for instance for refusing to include or acknowledge specific demands from e.g. Black women, working class women, lesbians, and trans-people. These internal critiques and conflicts have historically been, and continue to be, central for the possibility of expanding the chain of equivalence with demands to be included under the name of Feminism (or other empty signifiers, such as Sisterhood[4]).

Considering the fact that large strands of the movement today have adopted an intersectional and transversal approach, and includes demands of not only these groups, but also articulate feminism with indigenous struggles, climate activism, demands for a secular state, and economic equality – then it is relevant to ask: How big would be big enough *not* to need to become part of something 'even bigger'?

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[3] As the emergence of this wave of mass-feminism is rather recent, there is still little scholarly work done on their potential influence over and entry into parliamentary politics. An ongoing PhD-project by Aleksandra Reczuch is, however, currently investigating this in the Polish context.

[4] For a more detailed discussion on feminist articulatory practices and the empty signifier of Sisterhood, see Gunnarsson Payne, 2012.

To be clear: I agree that following Laclau (2005) we cannot *assume* that feminism is *the* privileged struggle, but it is of equal importance not to theorise its articulation with populism in a way that reduces it to a kind of particularistic movement which it not necessarily is. Indeed, in many ways, contemporary intersectional and transversal struggles already offer 'something bigger', and already to a large extent follow a populist logic (as previously mentioned, not all feminist practices follow this logic, but here I will focus on those doing so.)

The call for feminism to join forces with something 'even bigger' also, at worst, reminds us of previous similar debates, such as that discussed in Heidi Hartmann's (1979) long-lived text 'The unhappy marriage of Marxism and feminism: Towards a more progressive union', in which she described the relationship between Marxism and feminism as one 'like the marriage of husband and wife depicted in English common law: marxism and feminism are one, and that one is marxism'. Criticising previous attempts to unite them for seeking to subsume feminism under the more privileged and 'more important' struggle against capital, she drew the conclusion that: 'To continue our simile further, either we need a healthier marriage or we need a divorce' (1979: 1). Knowing full well from Laclau that articulation does not equal subsumption, such historical examples might still serve as important fingers of warning that those making claims to represent the 'something bigger' will necessarily need to consider. In other words, the mutual articulation of struggles need to be just that – mutual – and in the current situation, it is necessary to self-critically ask: Is it really the case that populism automatically *is* this 'something bigger' – or may we not say that in some contexts the proportions may be reversed? I am aware that this question might be provocative, and it is deliberately so. To push this question a bit further, it may be helpful to look at a couple of empirical examples from the aforementioned feminist movements.

As I have discussed elsewhere, empirical examples from the Polish movement show that the demand for legal and safe abortion in the middle of the 2010s swiftly expanded from abortion to larger issues of democracy and against the oppressive regime, as the movement presented a list of postulates including, among other things, 'free and available sexual education, restoration of democratic procedures and a secular state'. They described abortion as the mere 'tip of an iceberg' and announcing that 'there is a lot to do in Poland in order to build a truly equal and democratic civil society' (Gunnarsson Payne, 2020: 13). A very similar document of demands was created by the Argentinean movement in preparations for the 8 March International Women's Strike in 2017, as cited by Malena Nijensohn (2020):

> 1. We strike because we are part of a collective and international history [...] . 2. We strike because we make visible the map of labor in feminist terms [...]. 3. We strike because we demand legal, safe, and free abortion [...]. 4. We strike to defend our sexual and gender dissidences [...]. 5. We strike to say enough violence [...]. 6. We strike to pronounce that the State is responsible [...]. 7. We strike because we demand

a secular state [...]. 8. We strike, and we construct the women's movement as a political subject [...]. (Ni Una Menos in: Nijensohn, 2022: 10).

Indeed, a number of Argentinean scholars, including Biglieri herself, has shown the same expansive tendency of not least Ni Una Menos and the subsequent 'green wave', but also of earlier feminist mobilisations in Latin America (Barros and Martinéz, 2020; Biglieri, 2020; Di Marco, 2020; Gago, 2020; López, 2020; Nijensohn, 2022). A particularly interesting aspect of the empirical work done on this is that it shows on an ontic level *how* articulations take place agonistically 'on the ground', offering us very clear examples of how articulatory processes are not necessarily smooth and easy, and how they may require both conflict and renegotiation.

In another telling example from Nijensohn's work, she discusses for instance how the National Encounter of Women between 2016 and 2018 renegotiated their approach to the issue of sex work, so as to include sex workers despite the presence of anti-prostitution activists in the movement, here quoted at length to capture the complexity of the negotiation:

> One of the most heated debates in the assemblies for 8M 2017 concerned sex work. Sex workers had already participated in the assemblies for June 3 and October 19, 2016. On the first of these occasions, they suggested that the slogan "Ni Una Menos" should be extended to encompass other types of violence against women beyond femicide, such as violence against sex workers. During the strike, their participation had been very active, as they were the ones who introduced the discursivity of the alternative ways in which people could strike, posing the idea of the "sexual strike". In addition, in the National Encounter of Women 2016, the workshops discussing sex work were re-opened after ten years and were full, with more than 700 participants. It was in these circumstances, in which sex work was visibilized, that in assemblies for 8M 2017, there was a strong attack from anti-prostitution feminists. They did not acknowledge sex work as work and therefore did not want the demands of sex workers to be included in the document. At that moment, sex workers had two struggles: one for labor rights and another for institutional violence. Although they understood that the debate regarding sex work was not resolved, they demanded recognition as part of the feminist movement. After three meetings of intense debates and discussions centered only on the question of sex work, in the last assembly before the strike, the importance of including as many demands as possible to shape a diverse, plural, and broad movement was brought to the fore. This allowed the debate on sex work to be left aside and enabled sex workers' voices to be heard; both of their demands were included in the unique document. [...] On the conflict around participation of sex workers, for 8M 2018, a paragraph demanding justice for the femicides of sex workers was included in the document. Although some anti-prostitution campaigners were involved in some following assemblies, they stopped attacking sex workers and started focusing on the system of prostitution (Nijensohn, 2022: 142-143).

In an example from María Pia López's recent book *Not One Less – Mourning, Disobedience and Desire*, we learn how the slogan of the International Women's Strike in 2018 'We are all workers' encompassed *all* workers, thereby expanding and re-signifying the very meaning of work:

> whether at the machine in the factory or sewing at home, in a neighborhood organ-
> ization or in the family kitchen, in the classroom or behind the wheel of a truck, caring
> for other people or writing about them. To strike is a diverse, multiple interruption.
> Its modes are as diverse as the female workers. The key notion of socialist struggles,
> "equal pay for equal work," is insufficient. Beyond equivalence, *we must demand the*
> *recognition of all productive and reproductive work.* (López, 2020: 49)

Though framed as a 'women's issue', this formulation, at least when articulated
with anti-essentialist understanding of 'women' and an intersectional expansive ap-
proach, already represents 'something bigger' than the name and some of its slogans
at first thought might do justice. Hence, while I fully agree that feminist struggles
have the most potential to achieve social and political change when articulated with
a broad political project, its already thoroughgoing potential for radical transfor-
mation for the 99% ought not to be underestimated.

Feminist issues such as abortion, femicide, sexualised violence, rape culture or
sexual harassment have acted as 'starting shots' for mass-mobilisation, neither be-
cause they are new problems nor because feminists have not previously protested
against them. Rather, in addition to being defining and often life-threatening issues
to which many can relate personally and others can easily sign up against, these
movements (and others around the world) have managed to effectively 'frame', nar-
rate, and symbolise experiences of frustration, and even despair, already present the
lives of *many*, in a way which could not be captured within hegemonic discourses
(see Laclau, 2005: 26).

FEMINIST REJECTIONS OF THE IDEA OF THE LEADER

From what I have discussed so far, we can conclude that this kind of feminism
to a great extent follows almost precisely the populist logic described by the authors,
except for the final point – the necessary emergence of a leader. It is this final point
that I believe is the biggest obstacle for a 'happy marriage' between current intersec-
tional and transversal feminist mobilisation and the authors' definition of populism
– and one, which I, unlike the authors, consider to be empirical rather than onto-
logical.

Following Laclau (2005), according to Biglieri and Cahadia populist mobilisation
necessarily i) begins with an experience of a lack, which is shared by many; contin-
ues with ii) the inscription of this lack in terms of a demand (like in the case of
Argentina '¡Ni Una Menos!'); iii) the primacy of the logic of equivalence over the
logic of difference, and the creation of a collective political subjectivity (a feminist
'people'); iv) the antagonistic division of the social space into two antagonistic camps
('the feminist people' against 'capitalist heteropatriarchy', and, finally; v) the emer-
gence of a leader for that collectivity (2021: 16).

Even though feminism, neither historically nor in the present, has been devoid of leaders and leader figures, some strands of it are highly skeptical, or even outright critical, of the very idea of attaching their struggle to One Leader. While feminist movements have often both had *de facto* and symbolic leaders who have served as surfaces of inscription, autonomist traditions have indeed played a part in promoting, experimenting with, and not least *identifying with* 'leaderlessness'.

This can, of course, take more forms than is possible to discuss in this brief text, but a quote from the document entitled 'Rules and responsibility in a leaderless feminist revolutionary group' in 1969 serves as an example of how the very idea of a leader has often been associated with the very patriarchal structures which the movements has sought to dismantle, and have even been described as inherently exploitative: "Since there are no leaders or officers, *nor are these considered desirable as they involve exploitation,* it is necessary that all members develop equally and to the extent that leadership in other groups would require" (Kearon, 1969). The idea of leaderless and structureless groups have often been seen as an antidote to patriarchal modes of organisation (including within the left) but were also sometimes criticised for being not only ineffective but also for their propensity to obscure existing power structures within the movement (see e.g. Freeman, 1972: 152).

More recently, it has been said that leadership is no longer a 'dirty word' within feminism, not least since the so-called third wave of feminism, in which leadership has been reformulated as something which 'stems from women's real lives and recognises expertise as a product of experience', defining leadership as an activity which works in a similar manner to the consciousness-raising groups of the 1960s and 70s 'except that all individuals who call themselves feminists become leaders, moving from leaderless activism to an activism where everyone can play a role in leadership' (Sowards and Renegar, 2006: 62).

And even though Biglieri and Cahadia explain (via Freud and Laclau) that populist leadership in their definition is quite different from the oppressive patriarchal type shunned by many feminists, it is unlikely to be easily articulated with many feminists' strong belief in either leaderlessness or more horizontal and multiple understandings of leadership. This, in turn, is also related to both the fact that feminism is not, and has never been 'just' one movement, but rather is constituted and continuously reinvigorated by differences and conflicts; and that in this very process new (often informal) leader figures are produced, representing different and sometimes opposing feminist strands. These strands tend to co-exist, often in conflict, and these very conflicts are often what drives the movement forward.

The libidinal bonds described by Biglieri and Cahadia via Freud and Laclau is theoretically compelling in its emphasis that the relation with the leader 'is not one of being in love or idealization, but also one of *identification*' and therefore 'the link with the leader is also endowed with the same type of libidinal bond that operates between *peers,* i.e. other group members' (85). Compelling as it may be, the

problem with this model is, as I see it, that its *ontological* status can be questioned; the question of whether the members of a group needs to be held together by the attachment to one embodied leader, or whether the libidinal tie can be formed around the shared attachment to an idea, or a cause, is, I believe rather of ontic-empirical nature. Consider, for instance, the affective investment on a horizontal level are *not* mobilised via a mutual and shared bond with a leader, but rather through a shared attachment to a movement which rejects the very idea of the One Leader: may then not such a shared attachment still have potential to hold a group together? May not this depend on towards 'what', rather than towards 'whom' libidinal bonds are formed? And if so, can representations of these demands not be made by more bodies than one?

BEYOND LOGIC-OF-DIFFERENCE-FEMINISM: RUPTURAL INSTITUTIONALISM AS AN ALTERNATIVE ROUTE

Even if Biglieri and Cahadia do not explicitly link their argument on populism and institutions specifically to feminism, from the geopolitical position from which I write – Sweden, a country where it is possible to talk about 'state feminism' since many years – I found their ideas here highly relevant for potentially re-thinking what a populist feminism could look like in the context of a welfare state.

In a country such as Sweden, for example, gender equality reforms have mainly occurred through a significant number of feminist and, in recent years, LGBTQ+ demands being selectively met by the state. Importantly, many of these feminist reforms have focused on easing the possibilities for women to combine work and family, and to become financially independent from a partner or spouse – and thereby to become available as workforce, albeit in a strongly gender segregated job market (where typical women's professions are paid less). The royal road to gender equality, in other words, has to a great extent been seen as wage labour (and provisions such as decent parental leave pay is tied to this). In a similar manner, lesbian, gay and transgendered citizens now have access to marriage equality and reproductive healthcare (including subsidised medically assisted reproduction) making it possible to create same-sex nuclear families, as long as they do not stray too far away from the couple-norm and bilineal kinship constellations.

There is no denying that these policies, which in brief have been gradually implemented through a logic of difference (through the absorption of individual feminist and LGBTQ+ demands), have led to many highly cherished real-life improvements for women and LGBTQ+ people, especially with regards to sexual and reproductive rights and family law. Yet these policies tend to disproportionally benefit the middle classes with stable employment and 9-5 jobs, not least as daycare in general more or less follows office hours, and parental leave and compensation to stay home with an ill child, is tied to previous or present income. Queer ways of living

together outside of the homonormative coupledom (with or without children) are not receiving the same protection as twosome 'respectable' marriage or cohabitation – and as some of these provisions depend on citizen and/or residency status, yet more people fall outside of the welfare safety net. Therefore, the current incorporation of some feminist and LGBTQ+ demands into the neoliberal welfare state, may effectively be an explanation for the absence of the same kind of broad popular feminist movements as we have seen in Argentina, Poland and elsewhere. Instead, when threatened by anti-gender mobilisation, the loyalty among its opponents to existing gender equality and sexual diversity policies is likely to remain or even be strengthened.

These provisions and this 'tolerance' have indeed already led to a widely spread loyalty to Swedish gender equality and 'LGBTQ+-friendly' policies, and they have become a central part of national identity, to the extent that they have become a component of the country's nation branding. Political leaders of parties to both the left and the right call themselves feminist, and state authorities (including the Army and the Police) are participating in the annual Stockholm Pride march. In a country in which the establishment, at least on paper, are committed to gender equality and LGBTQ+ rights for those who live up to certain norms of respectability and productivity, these issues are effectively 'de-politicised' – leaving the playing field open for 're-politicisation' by conservative and exclusionary political projects, for which demands for gender equality, reproductive rights and sexual diversity are being articulated with 'the elite', as against 'normal' and 'common people' (see also Gunnarsson Payne and Tornhill, 2021).

In this context, Biglieri and Cahadia's idea of *ruptural institutionality* offers an interesting opening for re-thinking an alternative to neoliberal and post-political state feminism, which have tended to articulate gender equality and sexual diversity in ways which obscure the conflict between 'those on the top' and 'the underdogs'. The state has positioned itself as the homonationalist and femonationalist protector of 'respectable' same-sex couples with or without children, and middle-class working women – while the precariously employed, those whose work does not lead to self-realisation and secure pensions, those being denied citizenship and residency due to increasingly restrictive migration policy, sexual 'deviants', and immigrant women who are not defined as properly 'integrated' (read: assimilated) into Swedish society as their 'too many children' are seen as preventing them from entering the job market. As I hope that this list of examples has clarified, current hegemonic ideas of gender equality and sexual diversity, through granting welfare and legal protection to many women and non-heterosexual citizens, simultaneously serve a disciplining function, as they are being conditioned to a great extent to 'respectability' and 'productivity'. What we see here is a tendency that much resembles that of the authors (via Bertomeu and Doménech) insofar as the 'alleged universalizability of republican freedom [is] deceptive, since only those whose material conditions of

existence are guaranteed [are] able to enjoy it' (70). Absorbing feminist and LGBTQ+ demands differentially, in other words, has hitherto allowed the Swedish state to absorb them and put them to use for productivity and discipline while at the same time keeping the fantasy of Sweden as the epitome of gender equality and tolerance intact.

A populist feminism in this context, then, would need to dare challenging the exclusionary and disciplining mechanisms of current gender equality and LGBTQ+-friendly policy and legislation, and find ways to include and represent those excluded from it in institutional settings. Although the ontic question of the 'how' – what would such institutional structures and procedures look like? – remains, it opens up for beginning to think feminism in the context of a welfare state, beyond either loyalty or the oft-repeated Foucauldian critiques that (for good reasons) have been aimed at it.

TOWARDS A 'HAPPY MARRIAGE' BETWEEN FEMINISM AND POPULISM?

Biglieri and Cahadia's book offers a brave and much welcome contribution to the theorisation of populism. The topic is highly timely, and considering current global and national problems of increasing exclusionary rightwing nationalism, geopolitical polarisation and a raging climate crisis which necessarily hits already vulnerable people the hardest, their contribution on how to radicalise politics is not likely to become obsolete anytime soon. For populism to be part of the solution, I am convinced that its thorough engagement with intersectional transversal feminism is essential, and I believe this to be the case both theoretically and politically. Biglieri and Cahadina's intervention in this regard is both thought-provoking and original, and I hope it will spur further discussion in both fields.

In many ways, the feminist mass-movements which we have seen emerging in both Latin America and Europe in recent years are testament to their compatibility with progressive populism. Feminism's expansive articulatory logic is not new: this is precisely how anti-essentialist, intersectional and transversal versions of it have developed over time (and I agree with the authors that Laclau's theory captures this more adequately than Gago's). The division of the social field into two antagonistic camps with a 'feminist underdog' against a 'heteropatriarchal elite' also has a long history within the movement, even if some feminists resist *naming* it an 'enemy'. And, even though its relationship to leaders and leadership is far more fraught than the one described in the author's definition of populism, the movement is neither devoid of *de facto* leaders nor of historical and living persons who have come to serve as surfaces of inscription for feminist struggles. At the same time, feminism is an unruly movement with internal agonistic and antagonistic conflicts which makes it highly unlikely that it will ever be possible to unite it under *one* leader. This, I

think, would be one of the greatest obstacles for the authors' proposed articulation between the two, and I am not convinced that this criterion is either essential or even necessarily desirable.

Moreover, I think that the attempt to articulate feminism and populism would need to be even more thoroughgoing – and perhaps more importantly, more open-ended – than the one proposed by Biglieri and Cahadia. The proposal to articulate care and antagonism is highly relevant, and indeed reflects much of what has been theorised and practiced by feminists for a long time, like for example in the Wages for housework campaign of the 1970s, and Social Reproduction Theory (see e.g. Bhattacharya, 2017). Without paying careful attention to these and other political actions and feminist theories, and recognizing the possibility that these contributions may actually reveal shortcomings of, and point out new directions for, populism, I believe that feminists may sooner or later end up echoing Hartmann (1979) and demand a healthier relationship or threaten with divorce (or never accept the proposal to marry in the first place). This is *not* to say that I do not appreciate the book's attempt to theoretically articulate the two, but rather, that I think that there are good reasons to further expand this theoretical discussion in the future, so as to include more thought from the vast body of feminist writing and open-endedly explore what this can bring to the table.

For as necessary as I think that progressive populism is to tackle the multiple crises of our time and offer a forceful alternative to exclusionary rightwing nationalism on the one hand, and neoliberal capitalism on the other, I think populism cannot afford *not* to learn from feminism's continuous de-totalising efforts. Indeed, what the authors call feminism's 'insistence that the reified distinction between men and women is the result of the totalizing logic of the masculine' (125) has had transformative effects, both historically and in the present, as it has redefined not only what it means to be a man or a woman (or neither) and who can be considered a citizen or a political subject, but in addition also challenged the very meaning of what it means to be human. Its expansive articulatory logic is a result of these continuous de-totalising efforts – and these, I believe, *are* absolutely necessary in order to create the multiple-and-divided-people that progressive populism requires.

Relatedly, I believe that Biglieri and Cahadia's intervention on *ruptural institutionalism* may be an important key to reinvigorate discussions of institutional feminism, in a way that would better honour precisely its de-totalising efforts, and keep re-activating them, also in context where they have made their way into power. Only so, it will be able to keep its emancipatory promise alive and offer a convincing alternative to the two contemporarily strongest totalising forces, rightwing conservative anti-genderism and neoliberal capitalism.

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POPULISM WITHOUT ADJECTIVES, OR, POLITICS BETWEEN HISTORY AND ONTOLOGY

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ABSTRACT
Seven Essays on Populism: For a Renewed Theoretical Perspective, written by the duo of Argentine philosophers Paula Biglieri and Luciana Cadahia, is an audacious, lucid, and urgent book. It is also a text traversed by an unresolved tension between two approaches: a first, ontological approach, indebted not only to Martin Heidegger's thinking of ontological difference but also to the mobilisation of this difference in political theory in the work of Ernesto Laclau and Jorge Alemán; and a radically different, historical or conjunctural approach, for which the authors find inspiration in the evidential or indexical paradigm of Carlo Ginzburg. This review discusses the advantages and shortcomings of these two approaches, reading Biglieri and Cadahia's book, as it were, against itself.

KEYWORDS
Populism, ontology, post-foundationalism, evidential paradigm

Seven Essays on Populism: For a Renewed Theoretical Perspective, written by the duo of Argentine philosophers Paula Biglieri and Luciana Cadahia, is an audacious, lucid, and urgent book. Its audacity depends on the clarity of its proposals and the force of the conviction with which the authors commit themselves to their ideas. Its lucidity, which is palpable on every page, is the result of an effort in conceptual clarification that in my eyes is unparalleled in contemporary political theory. And its urgency, which is equally clear, speaks to us about the need to imagine an alternative to the nightmare that we are currently living on a global scale with the resurgence of the extreme right, the climate crisis, and the general collapse of the people's trust in our democratic institutions.

The book avoids the facile jargon of today's theoretical consensus. It is committed to explaining the reasons for a militant practice nourished by the ideas of Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe and Jorge Alemán, but also by the living struggles of 'actually existing politics', above all in Latin America as an alternative site from where to produce theory, different from the European perspective of critics of populism such as Mauricio Lazzarato, Eric Fassin or Slavoj Žižek. As the authors explain from the very start of their introduction, 'this book is an avowedly militant one in which we embrace our political position as a way of taking responsibility for our own subjective involvement' (Biglieri and Cadahia, 2021: xxii). In this sense, we are in the presence of a rigorously honest book.

At the heart of the book sits an obscure secret: the secret of the power of the people, or of the plebs. As Biglieri and Cadahia explain in the first essay, this power constitutes the secret nucleus of all politics, or even of the political, since it is impossible to think the political without putting into play the power of antagonism at a collective level. Now, contrary to the arguments of someone like Mouffe, the authors do not believe in the conceptual usefulness of the opposition between right-wing and left-wing populisms. It is precisely due to the confusion between these two categories that critics like Žižek reject the emancipatory nature of populism and instead prefer to label it fascist, racist, or xenophobic in principle. For Biglieri and Cadahia, on the contrary, it would be better to reserve the name 'populism', without attributes, for the collective and constitutively emancipatory dimension of the power of the people, whereas the identitarian, reactionary, sexist, and racist forms of populism, which are ubiquitous today from Brazil to the United States, would be better treated as neoliberal versions of fascism. As the authors write in the second essay: 'Let's just say 'populism' as a synonym for left-wing populisms or inclusionary populisms without having to apologize, without having to clarify with adjectives. We will leave the rest for neofascism or post-fascism' (40).

A major part of the book's argument revolves around what the authors call the 'ontological dimension' of populism, for which they adopt a point of view that Laclau had inaugurated in the chapter 'Towards a Theory of Populism' in his *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory* (Laclau, 1977), and culminating in the great summary that is his last book, *On Populist Reason*, which intends 'to grant populism the dignity of a theory and to turn it into a political ontology for theorizing political articulations in general' (Biglieri and Cadahia, 2021: 5). In this sense, the authors distinguish three levels or three points of view on the subject of populism: the mediatic (generally pejorative), the empirical (or the historiography of concrete cases), and the ontological (or the theory of the political based on the being of the social as constitutive lack). It is on this third and last level that the authors situate the originality of their proposal:

> Now, it is within the third line of enquiry – the constitutive dimension of the political – that the pejorative interpretation of populism begins to be undermined and the foundations will be laid to think about its ontological dimension, i.e. to what extent populism becomes a logic constitutive of the political itself – not a deviation from it – and how this logic articulates material forms of social being. (11)

The authors do not want to limit themselves to studying 'populism as a merely conjunctural strategy', but instead they agree with Laclau, insofar as 'the importance of his work on populism can be summarized in how he managed to grant populism the status of a political category in its own right' (13-14).

To continue the debate that is their book, this is where I would like to introduce a first series of questions for my two friends: Where does this need come from to give populism a theoretical and ontological 'status' in its own right? Why does populism acquire the 'dignity' of the concept only through an ontology of the political? What is, finally, ontology, if not, as I will try to show with the words of the authors themselves, a partial sedimentation of the history of a long series of existing politics?

To understand the problem, it is useful to go back to a forceful statement in the book's first chapter:

> It is feasible to say that a particular political articulation can be disarticulated, a specific people and its leader can be defeated politically, but populism as an ontology of the political is ineradicable. That is, in an ontic sense, and as an articulation linked to a specific form of political expression in a specific context, populism can come to an end, but, in a fundamental sense, linked to the very ontology of the political, populism is simply ineliminable (17).

This use of the ontico-ontological difference based on Martin Heidegger's thinking, which will have been familiar to readers of Laclau and several of his disciples such as Oliver Marchart, appears to me to be profoundly problematic – even, I must confess, contrary to my own principles and convictions. Therefore, I find myself in a paradoxical situation as a reader: politically, I am in complete agreement on nearly every point with the authors; but theoretically or philosophically, I am a bit perplexed, because I cannot bring myself to endorse the argument about the need to project the debate onto the level of an ontology of the political.

I fully understand the reasoning behind this argument, which the authors make explicit throughout their book. They wish to give populism the dignity of an ontological concept to save it from its detractors, by discussing as equals with their European counterparts. The defense of populism as such, without the need to add any adjectives or attributes to convince its European critics, in this sense requires an ontological outlook. Conversely, only an ontology of the political will allow us to salvage populism from its right-wing or fascist stigmata. This double aim already was part of Laclau's original

project: 'De-stigmatizing populism within the theoretical field means simultaneously transforming the way the ontological dimension of the political is understood' (17). However, as Wendy Brown also suggests in the criticism she formulates in her 'Foreword' to Biglieri and Cadahia's book, there also exists the risk that by rejecting the tension between right-wing populisms and left-wing populisms we end up with an overly clean theoretical definition of populism, in a kind of continuous stipulation freed of all the dregs of the historical, the conjunctural, or the strategic, that is, a populism purified of everything merely 'ontic', to use the Heideggerian lexicon.

Now what exactly defines the ontological dimension that in this reading would reveal itself in a privileged, if not unique, sense in populism as such, without attributes? In the authors' account, this depends on the recognition of a constitutive lack at the heart of the social, as a lack of being:

> This new way of reading the being of the social helps us understand that the political is nothing more than working through the constitutive negativity of that lack – a way of working on the social through a logic articulating this constitutive lack. What political theories, currents, and traditions cannot tolerate is not the deviation that populism engenders, but the ontological indeterminacy into which it throws us (18-19).

For my part, I believe that this ontological indeterminacy implies a strange formalism, no matter how deconstructed or postfoundational the authors make it out to be, in which what is lacking or what functions as an absent cause is precisely the power of the people. But, conversely, this power obtains its dignity only when in its thought in its ontological dimension, defined as constitutive lack or fracture. We find ourselves before a kind of structural ontologisation, or before an ontological type of structuralism, which precisely insofar as it is based on a lack of foundation can also be considered a form of poststructuralism.

This is not just a question of nomenclature. Even if they had accepted to speak of right-wing and left-wing populisms, instead of proposing an opposition between populism as such and neofascism, the authors still would have kept defining the difference between these two positions in terms of the ontological lack on which the political is based: this lack is negated or disavowed in neoliberal fascism and fully recognised only in the populism that they defend in their book. In whatever terminology we adopt to talk about populism as such or emancipatory populism, in its 'ontologised' version of the political, the 'failure' or 'flaw' of really existing politics seem all too easily inverted, as if this were the moment of revelation not of a contingent lack (in a misguided form of concrete politics) but the constitutive lack of the being of politics (the lack that is the void around which the essence of the political is articulated).

Time and again, ontology acquires a heuristic value by being revelatory of (the lack of) a secret, or of an (absence of) essence. In this way, far from constituting an obstacle,

the impossibility likewise may convert itself in a paradoxical condition of possibility. It is almost as if the necessary failure at the heart of the political were to serve as the guarantee of populism's success, at least ontologically speaking:

> Thus, the secret of the constitutive uncertainty and indeterminacy of being that Laclau's populism reveals, and which is symbolized in the heart of the political field, can be read today as the unconfessed inverse of those who needed to declare its death. What many could not bear was precisely the paradoxical nature of political work that populism revealed – namely, the impossibility of the social as a condition of possibility for political praxis, a praxis far removed from rational procedure and normativity and closer to the plebeian forms through which Latin America has built the social from the political. The ontological dimension that Laclau opens up, then, frees us from the stigma associated with the "failed" character of Latin American politics, and offers us the possibility of discovering in that failure not a deviation to correct but an ontological indeterminacy to work through (19).

The effects of such an argument (which the authors share with many other postfoundational political theories) turn out to be doubly problematic. On the one hand, in the passage from the ontic to the ontological, or from politics to the political, the failure or fissure of a concrete politics turns – as if by a magician's trick – into a kind of promising condition of possibility. On the other hand, from the perspective of ontology, any consideration not worthy of being ontologised for this same reason runs the risk of being dismissed as 'merely' political, conjunctural or strategic, since it does not reach deeply enough into the ground or essence of the political. Thus, in the beginning of the second essay, the authors state that 'populism cannot be limited to a mere political strategy, but that it must be understood in its ineradicably ontological dimension' (20). And they immediately add: 'For this reason, in this essay we will explore in greater detail the difficulties of maintaining only the strategic dimension of populism, i.e. all that is lost by subjecting it to a merely conjunctural plane, and even more so when the conjuncture in question responds to a European script' (20, translation modified).

It seems, therefore, that the point of the debate is missed no sooner than it is phrased in terms of a hierarchical difference in which the European scripts, instead of being refuted on their own terms, are relegated to the 'merely' strategic or conjunctural, whereas only an ontological point of view, inspired by Laclau's work from Latin America as its locus of enunciation, would allow us to reach the conceptual 'dignity' of the political. But would it not be more effective to show that the European critics are downright mistaken in their judgments about populism, without having to invoke the hierarchy of the ontic (including the difference between left and right) and the ontological (the logic of the political based in an ineliminable, originary, and absolutely prior antagonism, before all such differences)?

And yet, there are other instances in Biglieri and Cadahia's book where they go in the opposite direction, contrary to the ontologisation as the destigmatisation of populism 'as such' or 'without attributes'. And if a first series of arguments in this regard is still ambiguous in terms of their possible use as self-criticisms, in the final chapters of the book the authors openly choose a plebeian, situated, or 'dirty' approach to politics, which runs counter to their own ontologising tendencies.

As an example of an ambiguous argument that could be read as a self-criticism, in the second essay it is interesting to see how in order to avoid falling in the same trap as intellectuals such as Lazzarato, Fassin or Žižek, who generalise the European situation is if it were the only legitimate way of – pejoratively – interpreting the experience of populism, Biglieri and Cadahia invite us to 'pay attention to how actually existing political struggles work' (28). Such a reading of the struggles in the streets and public squares of Latin America would allow us to move beyond the formal critique of populism, when the Slovenian thinker for example opposes the pure self-relating negativity that *is* the subject as such to the populist displacement of this negativity onto some excluded other: 'Along these lines, Žižek suggests that such an operation would be an externalization of our own self-negativity, since we would be projecting onto the other the fracture or lack that is within ourselves' (27, translation modified). On this topic, the authors formulate an objection to Žižek that we could equally apply to them: 'When Žižek counterposes the figure of self-negativity as something prior to the struggle against an adversary, he is also setting out from a positivized way of theorizing antagonism – namely, our self-negativity' (28, translation modified). Does not the same apply to the authors' own argument, when they articulate a whole ontology of the political based on the prior nucleus of a constitutive, structural, and ineradicable lack at the heart of the social?

We can find confirmation of this ambiguity when we observe how the authors support the notion of a constitutive lack or gap in the case of the work of the Argentine thinker and psychoanalyst Jorge Alemán, when the latter argues that capitalism 'attacks precisely what is proper to the subject – namely, its constitutive flaw, the flaw that functions as the condition of possibility for the subject to exist through it' (32). Once again, moreover, this constitutive flaw, lack or dislocation according to the authors must be interpreted on two different levels or dimensions – the sociohistorical dimension and the structural-ontological one – which should not be confused, even though under neoliberal capitalism they are in fact dangerously close to being flattened out into a single plane: 'While these two dimensions (ontological and socio-historical) appear as mixed, they follow different logics. The first implies an ineliminable dependency, whereas the second is a socio-historical construct susceptible to transformations' (33). Here, the authors seem to be defending an argument from Alemán that they had previously

rejected in the case of Žižek. Based on an ambiguous mixture of elements of Derridean deconstruction (in the case of Laclau and Mouffe) with elements of Lacanian psychoanalysis (in the case of Žižek and Alemán), this argument consists in taking for granted a fundamental distinction between an ontic lack or gap (a flaw that is conjunctural and thus can be overcome) and the ontological lack or gap (a flaw that is structural, constitutive, and therefore ineradicable). Finally, could we not say the same thing about the use of this argument in *Seven Essays on Populism* as what the authors write about Eric Fassin, another European critic of populism, namely, that in their display of an ontology of the constitutive lack of the political there is 'a sort of essentialism and a fixation' (29)?

For my part, I do not think that actual politics need 'the dignity of a theory' or 'the status of a political category in its own right' through an ontology of the political. Terms such as 'dignity' and 'right', moreover, belong in their turn to historically specific and concrete forms of politics. What we should interrogate, rather, is not only where this relatively recent need comes from to give all existing politics the categorial apparatus of an ontology but also to what extent such an ontologisation in the name of radical theory often ends up closing the path toward understanding the actual possibilities of effective practice, which rarely will be up to par with the radical philosophical theory.

As far as the first of these questions is concerned, I would say that political ontology today offers the royal road to a certain philosophy of defeat. To turn the failures from the past into the irrefutable expressions of a constitutive failure or flaw in our very own being allows the defeated to participate in a kind of ontological transfiguration of the status quo. This is what I suggested earlier by talking about the success of failure. And it has a long trajectory in the post-Marxist Left, beginning with the fall of the Berlin Wall. It finds its most systematic expression in the debates between Judith Butler, Laclau and Žižek, in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*, a book in which the formulas are legion about the inevitable failure of any representation of the totality, or about the radical impossibility of a complete suture of the social in a transparent society. This unbreakable faith in the necessity of failure or the impossibility of society, not as a defect, a failure, or a shortcoming but as a condition of possibility and even as a promise, also permeates many pages of *Seven Essays on Populism.*

As for the negative effects of this ontologisation for actual politics, I think it is useful to recall a basic question raised first by Gilles Deleuze and soon thereafter by the Brazilian philosopher Marilena Chaui about Baruch Spinoza: Why did this Dutch philosopher decide to give his great treatise of ontology the title of *Ethics*? The reason for this is both simple and persuasive: because questions about being are always questions about ways of acting and being acted upon. The same, however, cannot be said about

the inverse operation. If it is always useful and persuasive to treat ontology under the title of an *Ethics* or a *Politics,* inversely ethical and political questions cannot and should not be reduced to a treatise in *Ontology.* And in many cases the ontologisation of the political, if it clearly serves the philosophers, leads rather to the blocking of concrete processes of politics.

I would even go one step further to state that there is no such thing as an ontology except as the sedimentation of concrete historical and political practices, whose operative categories can become elevated to the abstract dignity of the concept only based on a constitutive forgetting of this prior anchoring in such practices. Due to the distance between the unblemished purity of the concept and the dirty empirical nature of the ontic, this ontologisation always runs the risk of falling in the trap of a certain moralism, which ends up defending a must-be in the name of that which supposedly always already is.

Here we touch upon a sensitive point that has to do with the difference in professional formation of philosophers as opposed to those who, like me, are formed in a strange mixture of literary or cultural criticism and critical theory. However, while both are philosophers of international fame, the authors of *Seven Essays on Populism* also do not rest on their laurels, glorifying the dignity of the concept of the political based on the constitutive lack or gap in the logics of articulation of emancipatory populism. On the contrary, especially in the last chapters of their book, they repeatedly declare themselves opposed to any attempt to purify their conceptual oppositions through a gesture of absolute positivisation that would leave the terms used in a relation of strict exteriority.

In the fourth essay, 'Profaning the Public: The Plebeian Dimension of Republican Populism', they convincingly show that there is no a priori exteriority between the populist interruption or decision, on the one hand, and the consolidation of the republican institutions, on the other: 'As a result, establishing an external relationship between the decision and the institutions a priori does not help us understand the real link between the two' (62). Taken to its ultimate consequences, such an articulation between the moment of disruption (the ruptural or destituent moment) and the moment of institutionality (or the republican moment) also could lead us to reject any relation of sharp exteriority or hierarchical subordination between the ontic and the ontological.

Instead of pursuing this path, however, the authors once more mobilise the ontological difference to defend their argument in favor of a populist or plebeian republicanism:

> Most ontic studies of populism are more interested in determining the "populist content" of particular historical experiences in their political conjunctures than in examining the assumptions on which theories of populism are based. The problem is that this

> approach combines the descriptive and the normative levels in a confused way (Ionescu and Gellner, 1970), attempting to study "concrete" examples of populism in order to determine, on the *level of the given*, a series of characteristics that should be *normatively* applicable to all cases. (63)

I would say that perhaps things become much worse when it is not 'the given' but 'being' that serves as the fundamental presupposition of one's normative framework. The authors also have faith in a fact of absolute authority, except that in their case it is an ontological guarantee: the fact of an incalculable excess within the political character of the institutions. Based on their own arguments, though, they could have come to a radical questioning of this presupposition, too.

Similarly, the authors argue, 'we could say that there exists a tension within studies on republicanism that rests on a bifurcation between a liberal and a popular republicanism' (68); and later they repeat: 'But, above all, there is a clear need to distinguish between two kinds of republic: an oligarchic and aristocratic republic versus a democratic and plebeian one' (70). Now, if in this sense a scholar like Julia Bertomeu is right, so that 'it is difficult to speak of republicanism "plain and simple"' (70, in the original Spanish the authors use the expression '*a secas*'), I think we are justified in wondering why the authors think that in the case of their object of study it is in fact possible to speak about a populism 'plain and simple', without apologies (95, again *a secas* in Spanish). And the same question comes up in relation to the use of attributes to corroborate the fact that, following José Carlos Mariátegui (whose *Seven Essays of Interpretation of Peruvian Reality* obviously receives a homage in the title of the book of our authors), 'in contrast to reactionary or identitarian nationalisms, it is possible to discover affirmative (or national-popular) nationalisms capable of giving shape to a local subject that can contribute to universal emancipation' (91). Why would we not be able to draw the same conclusion about populism 'as such' or 'plain and simple' as what the authors here affirm about republicanism and nationalism?

In the fifth essay from which I just quoted, 'Toward an Internationalist Populism', Biglieri and Cadahia with good reason denounce the illusions of autonomism, technocracy, and liberalism. Their argument in this regard is as clear as it is convincing:

> In all these cases, the same symptom operates: namely, the belief that there is a kind of order beyond the decisional instance – i.e. an order that depends not on the singular corporality of the one making a decision, but on an abstract force operating outside of any singularity (78-79).

After which the authors immediately offer the following detailed explanation as to why such approaches in their eyes are mistaken:

> The problem with these beliefs is that they seem to share the same ontology: the existence of a non-contingent order, an order that exists outside of our here-and-now, so that any singular incarnation – any corporality that takes up that order – does nothing but contaminate it, betray it, and stain the purity of its origin (79).

However, this same belief in the existence of a non-contingent order, an order outside our here and now, is operative in the idea of an absolute ontological presupposition, based on the 'constitutive lack' or 'structural dehiscence' of society (according to Laclau) or of the subject (according to Alemán), which the authors adopt in other parts of their book. Would it not be worth reconsidering the priority of the contingent, the here and now of our singular corporeality, outside of any ontological presupposition that political philosophy would take for granted?

In the sixth essay, 'The Absent Cause of Populist Militancy', the authors provide us with more elements for a critique of political ontology when, quoting their friend and fellow traveler Gloria Perelló, they recall that Laclau and Mouffe 'argued that contingency permeates the real of necessity, and that the latter can no longer be understood as an underlying principle dictating the structuring of social identities' (103). But could we not say the same thing about the thinking of the ontological difference according to Heidegger? The ontic, too, permeates the sphere of ontology, just as the latter can no longer be thought of as a set of underlying principles that would dictate the structure of sociohistorical identities.

The danger with this argument about the contingent articulation of politics around an ontological antagonism or dislocation is that this last presupposition quickly starts to function as an absolute guarantee that contradicts the very premises of the postfoundational theory. If this is what must be avoided at all costs according to the authors, perhaps we should similarly question their dependence on the hierarchies of the ontological difference:

> When we argue that radical contingency implies traversing necessity, we return to the idea that sedimentation never manages to fully domesticate reactivation and, vice versa, that reactivation never means the complete *tabula rasa* elimination of sedimented practices. Every political intervention – no matter how radically innovative – always takes place on an established hegemonic terrain (111).

Precisely at this point of their book, Biglieri and Cadahia begin to hedge closer to an impure theory of actual politics, more attuned to the partial sedimentations of the history of struggles than to its purely ontological postulates:

> When we say that no intervention takes place as a pure act that creates something new and uncontaminated, we are ultimately saying that any irruption of the subject and new subjectivity thereby created intervenes on already partially sedimented terrains. Hence,

> also the tension between its antagonistic power and its limits, because what would it be like to intervene politically from a pure and uncontaminated exteriority? (111-112).

And when, following Laclau in *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time* (1990), the authors add in a note 'we can equate the notions of necessity and sedimentation and argue that the latter is nothing more than an always partial and failed attempt to limit reactivation' (142 n. 7), can we likewise conclude that ontology is nothing more than a series of partial sedimentations of the historical real? Unless we take this to be a purely theoretical discovery, due to the genius of Heidegger or Laclau, one day we will have to explain, for example, why the 'absent cause' has become a key term for defining the postfoundational terrain of politics today, precisely at the time when capitalism appears to be completely dominant across the global landscape.

It is in the seventh and final chapter, 'We Populists are Feminists', where Biglieri and Cadahia no longer participate in the philosophies of defeat that always ends up ontologising the given. On the contrary, instead of finding inspiration (via Laclau or Alemán) in the Heideggerian thinking of the ontico-ontological difference, here they present themselves as the feminist followers of the evidential (or indexical) paradigm of the Italian historian Carlo Ginzburg, insofar as 'he is referring to a conjectural, plebeian knowledge that neither seeks nor offers a finished picture of reality – one based on the sensory experience that sets different planes of what we have come to call the human into motion'; they add: 'But we can also see that there is something plebeian and feminine operating in this form of knowledge, a way of inhabiting not knowing, conjectures, and uncertainty that fosters a series of sensory connections still to be explored in all their radicalism' (119). Personally and methodologically, I find myself much more in agreement with this uncertain, tentative, and conjectural kind of knowledge, bordering upon nonknowledge, than with the certainties of a postfoundational political ontology.

Furthermore, it turns out that this preference is not just a matter of personal taste but corresponds perhaps to an effect of sexual difference, if we understand the masculine and the feminine as ways of positioning oneself with regard to desire and not as fixed identities established once and for all by nature. In fact, in a kind of sexual differentiation to the second degree, these two ways of understanding sexual difference could well be associated with the masculine and the feminine.

> ... one that assumes the existence of two completely separate sexes, as if the identity of each sex had its own self-determined existence. Thus, the elimination of one (the masculine) means the freedom of the other (the feminine). The other view focuses instead on the problem of love (between feminine and masculine) and invites us to interrogate the classic "masculine" dichotomy of the feminine and the masculine. Or, in other words, it helps us understand that it is the masculine locus of enunciation that has tended to create a totalizing and biologistic (positivized) separation between the two sexes. (125, translation

modified to keep 'masculine' and 'feminine' instead of 'male' and 'female' where the Spanish has *masculino* and *femenino*)

Is it then a coincidence if the ontological discourse appears in the context of a fairly homogeneous, 'masculine' (or even 'male') frame of reference? Or if in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality* Laclau decides to situate himself firmly on the side of Žižek, to argue in favor of an 'ahistorical', properly ontological kernel of historicity itself, as opposed to the alleged 'historicism' and 'culturalism' that both thinkers attribute to Butler? This is because, due to a kind of structural deformation, the discourse of political ontology only with great difficulty can give itself the luxury of listening to the voice that comes to it from the other – feminine or nonbinary– side of desire:

> From this other side of desire, then, feminine and masculine are not understood as a simple "opposition" – typical of masculine discourse – but as selves contaminated from within by the other of the self, whose perseverance continues to work on and shape the feminine and the masculine on the basis of difference and processes of identification not idealized by the masculine perspective (126).

Once again, this argument could be applied to the contamination between the political categories put into play in *Seven Essays on Populism*. In this sense, I believe that Biglieri and Cadahia's book brings out the secret of a surplus in the social, regardless of its exact name, whether it is called the people, the popular, the plebeian, or still otherwise. This surplus or excess, so often vilified by the elites in power, but also by the organic intellectuals of the status quo, is what is mobilised in populist politics. But in that case, I do not think that we can purify the emancipatory kind of politics as populism 'plain and simple' or 'properly speaking', while reducing the right-wing populisms that are xenophobic, racist, sexist, and transphobic as mere neoliberal 'fascism'. Populism, too, is the terrain of 'a self contaminated from within by the other of itself' (*un sí mismo contaminado desde dentro por lo otro de sí*), as the authors write so eloquently about the 'opposition' between the masculine and the feminine.

Methodologically, we can conclude that a sharp opposition between the ontic and the ontological corresponds to a 'masculine' point of view that we will have to overcome. And we should understand how the categories of political philosophy, far from having to derive their 'dignity' from the discourse of ontology, are always determined by the ontic contents that the theorists seek to think through those categories. Referring to another work written in collaboration, this time between Biglieri and Perelló, we can argue that 'the socio-historical order informs those categories through which we theorize the ontological' and that 'since theoretical categories are produced in a specific socio-historic context, they cannot escape it', that is to say, 'these categories are "contaminated" with ontic content because that is the only way they can be inscribed within the dominant discourse of the time' (126-127). Finally, with these explanations about

the inevitable contamination between the ontic and the ontological, we come back full circle to the issue of the profound honesty of the authors of *Seven Essays on Populism*. Thus, in a long endnote to their final essay, they add an observation that should alert us against any attempt to distance ourselves from the actual struggles in the name of an ontological theory – no matter how sophisticated – of the being of the political:

> Moreover, we would add, sophisticated debates often occur within academia that wind up distancing themselves from the sphere of concrete political struggles, and the terms that these same struggles use to express their discontent and to seek social transformation. [...] this attitude of renouncing certain words can lead to a kind of naïve voluntarism of naming – as if, by naming things differently, we were already creating the new and pushing back oppressive logics – that, paradoxically, reactivates the worst remnants of the omnipotence of theories of consciousness. (146 n. 1).

And promptly they make clear everything that this position, anchored in the contingency of historical struggles and their effective truth, can contribute to a critique of political ontology, based on the purity of being:

> Perhaps the problem lies in believing that the name exhausts our entire identity, and that once we name things differently it is possible to recuperate the purity of one's being. Perhaps the secret of emancipation is not so much about assigning the "correct name" as it is about theoretical movements that support our contaminated and non-totalizing use of words to name the world. (146 n. 1)

In this sense, it matters but little whether we decide to name the thing populism 'plain and simple' or 'left populism', as opposed to 'right-wing populism' or neoliberal 'fascism'. What matters, and therein lies the intellectual force of Paula Biglieri and Luciana Cadahia's book, is to understand the movements of thought that propitiates the contaminated use of our words to name our world in its struggles, its defeats, and occasionally, in its victories as well, such as the ones that we were able to witness in the last few months in Latin America.

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OBSTINATE RIGOUR: POPULISM WITHOUT APOLOGIES AUTHORS' REPLY TO CRITICS[1]

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ABSTRACT
In this article we offer a response to each of the authors who participated in the exchange. But instead of responding to each one separately, we decided to organise our writing around three themes. In the first place, we propose an intellectual, militant and biographical description that helps to put the original motivations of our book *Seven Essays on Populism* into context. Secondly, we offer a reflection on the role of ontology in our text, paying special attention to the critiques made by Barros & Martínez Prado, Bosteels and Marchart. Thirdly, we conclude with a deepening of the link between populism and feminism, paying special attention to the lucid observations of Barros & Martínez Prado and Gunnarsson-Payne.

KEYWORDS
Populism, feminism, ontology, antagonism

I.

We would like to begin by discussing how the idea came about to write this book together. It is not especially common to explain the biographical and contextual threads

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[1] The article, originally written in Spanish, was translated by Camilo Roldán.

that tie together the writing of a book that aims to be theoretical. But we believe, in this case, it is important to do so. Above all else, because the theoretical operation that we attempted in *Seven Essays on Populism* (2021) is completely interwoven with our biographies and with the political situation in our region. For nearly a decade, we had been thinking together in academic, political and militant spaces, and principally from within Colombia and Argentina. As we were writing this book, Argentina was ruled by the government of Mauricio Macri, whose oligarchic project sought to dismantle all of the achievements associated with social justice and human rights while also fostering a political and legal persecution unseen since the last civic-military dictatorship. Among the harshest measures taken by the Macri government, it is worth highlighting the needless acquisition of the most aggressive foreign debt that the IMF has ever designed. If putting an end to the government's policy of borrowing had been one of the rallying cries for the national-popular movement that Kirchnerism embodied, along with recovering the political and economic sovereignty that every nation requires for organizing a project for the future, Macri, on the contrary, placed us back under the yoke for another hundred years. In Colombia, on the other hand, we had just had a very tragic presidential election. Uribe's fascist forces won the election against Gustavo Petro, the first plurinationational-popular leader to create an antagonistic bloc since the death of Gaitán. And the return of Uribe brought the return of massacres and the political persecution of the opposition. This included one of us, living in Colombia, who was fired from her university position for publicly defending the political project that Petro was leading. The outlook was very similar throughout the region. Popular forces were suffering a clear setback in their collective conquests, and the oligarchic reaction shook the whole continent. At no moment did we think that the 'populist cycle' had come to a close, but we were certain that it was suffering an important *impasse*. This was the scenario when the Critical Theory Programs Consortium that we both belong to proposed we write a book together on populist theory. At the time, the consortium was under the direction of Judith Butler and Penelope Deutscher who, together with Polity Press, took the initiative in creating a committee of women academics from the global south. The purpose of that committee was to develop a series of books produced in the south that would begin circulating—in English—certain texts and problematics that are poorly (or mis-) understood in global academia. In this spirit, we proposed writing a book about populism in Latin America. We liked the idea because, despite having no plans to make a book together, attempting to organise and theorise the experiences and debates we had taken part in as activists and academics wound up being very stimulating. And this is how we realised that we shared a lot of ideas about what we wanted to say in the book. In that sense it was a very good experience because we were constantly complementing one another and the ideas started to flow in a very organic way,

as if they were dictated by the very processes that we wanted to bear witness to. Also, it was an opportunity to disseminate a series of intellectual debates that aren't typically familiar to academia in the global north (or in anglophone literature), which is more accustomed to theoretical production on university campuses or the compilation of exoticizing experiences from 'peripheral countries.' We wanted to disrupt the deeply colonial idea that academia in the global north produces theoretical frameworks while the south is limited to making sociological descriptions of its political experiences. Both of these intellectual attitudes are very troubling for us, and our objective was quite clear: to take advantage of this political impasse and construct a *disruptive theory artifact*. We thought (and we continue to think) that it was necessary to shake up a set of issues and procedures in current political thought. And to do so, we needed to construct a provocative and irreverent *gesture* that, without betraying our own Latin American legacy, would disrupt the reading that political thought itself has outlined as its task and its privileged places of enunciation that should shape that task. This means shaking up not only the issues under discussion but also the procedures for pursuing the task. In part, that implies reiterating the theoretical-political gesture of Ernesto Laclau in *On Populist Reason* (2005), a title that from the get go is a provocation and a revelation of the astute choice of granting logic and rationalism to that which (precisely for being considered anomalous, irrational and imprudent) has historically stigmatised politics in Latin America: *populism*. In strategic terms, this logic could have been given a different name, and Laclau would have saved himself quite a few headaches, but avoiding the pain would have meant conceding to a certain liberal *ethos* that permeates theoretical discussions (both on the left and the right). From the European and Anglo perspective, populism (and its theorisation) bears a certain illegibility that is highly stimulating for our continued work. Our book is an attempt to work with an incomprehension that we don't want to translate into the academic language currently in use. And we do it, paradoxically, within the philosophical archive that, of course, we adopt as our own. All of which seems to us a political (and aesthetic) gesture that helps to break the habits where the field of western philosophy has been trapped. But things get more complicated when Laclau decides to postulate populism (with all that the use of postulates implies for philosophy) as a political ontology. This gets unwaveringly declared in the introduction to his last book, *The Rhetorical Foundations of Society* (2014), where he collects a series of articles that precede *On Populist Reason* and promises to develop this position in a future book that, unfortunately due to his death, never saw the light of day. Therefore, only snippets of this postulate remain scattered across his different texts and, for that selfsame reason, there remains a set of questions that cannot be answered based on them, among which we might mention: in what sense does Laclau talk about ontology? Why did he choose this field of problems for discussing populism? How

does he relate logic, rhetoric and psychoanalysis to ontology? And, why does he take on the Heideggerian distinction between the ontic and ontological? In *Seven Essays*, we open the book by taking on this ontological postulate, but in a direction that may not always follow Laclau's hints. At certain points, we bring this ontology into contact with negativity and the Hegelian dialectic, something that Laclau would have roundly rejected from his Italian reading of Hegel[2], while at other points we bring it to psychoanalysis and the attendant notions of lack, jouissance and affects. Though this will be developed with greater precision in the section dedicated to conversing with our colleagues' texts, we can say now that we offer an exercise in philosophical and political imagination according to challenges dictated by the context itself. This explains why the book becomes ever more propositional and ends up setting out a series of political figures for *unearthing the future*. In some ways, this resonates with what Oliver Marchart proposes in his book *Thinking Antagonism*, when, reviewing some of Bosteels' pertinent criticisms of ontology, he suggests that postfoundationalism corresponds to an epochal 'ontological turn' (2018: 8). And he adds that this ontological turn comes from the ontological difference developed by Heidegger and radicalised by the post-structuralist thought that would become known as 'leftist Heideggerianism' (8-30). Along those lines, the post-Marxism that Laclau and Mouffe propose gets inserted, according to Marchart, within that ontological turn. But, on the other hand, he heralds something that, to our understanding, undermines this interpretive hypothesis, or at least places it within a more complex perspective, since he suggests that Laclau's originality lies in returning to introduce antagonism. We are interested in the idea of rein-

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[2] In 2016, an important Workshop was held at Brighton University, organised by Mark Devenney (through the university's Centre for Applied Philosophy, Politics and Ethics) and by Paula Biglieri (through the 'Cátedra Libre Ernesto Laclau' at the University of Buenos Aires). The event was titled 'The Politics of Populism' and there we had the opportunity to hold a roundtable discussion with Oliver Marchart titled 'Theoretical Questions: Is Populist Politics Radical Politics?' Marchart gave a talk titled 'In the Name of the People' and Luciana Cadahia gave another titled 'Mediation and Negativity: Resituating Dialectics from the Theory of Populism.' Our discomfort with the strictly Heideggerian turn attributed to populist theory was already clear in this debate. We even went so far as to propose that the Hegelian turn toward negativity and antagonism that Laclau himself disdained could play an unconfessed role. In the book *Thinking Antagonism* — published by Olivar Marchart — and in the chapter titled 'La tragicidad del populismo: hacia una reativación de su dialéctica' — published by Luciana Cadahia in the collective book *A contracorriente: materiales para una teoría renovada del populismo* (Cadahia, Coronel and Ramírez 2018) — one can see this debate and the importance of the Hegelian legacy for thinking populism through antagonism (Marchart) and through negativity and the dialectic (Cadahia).

troducing antagonism. Why? Because as Marchart also suggests, 'The question of antagonisms is the question of modernity' (50), which is to say, this problem has been at the heart of German Idealism, Romanticism and Marxism.

The Laclausian operation thus opens in two different directions: on the one hand, a direction that points to the ontological turn Heidegger opened (in the terms of ontological difference) with his postulate of factic life (as an alternative to the practical life) and, on the other hand, a direction that gathers the sediments of Marxism, examining which theoretical and practical decisions were taken in its historical evolution, which alternatives were rejected in its own undercurrent, and which get reupdated with the inevitable return of the repressed. Here, a first question emerges for us, because we aren't so sure that it is possible to reconcile the Heideggerian path with the post-Marxist path of reactivating the modern legacy. How to can we read this gesture that would seem to point in two conflicting directions (the Heideggarian rejection of modernity and the desire to reupdate its inconclusive sediments)? Or, how do we read ourselves in this gesture provoked by a Latin American thinker? Here we will put forward a hypothesis that is, perhaps, not entirely clear in our book. We assume the populist theory as an emancipatory ontological turn that emerges, among other things, from Marxist sedimentations—and the modern philosophical legacy of Marxism—that have been discarded or obstructed by that same tradition. We see ourselves this way within the tradition of Marxist-critical thought, not in a position of exteriority from which to signal and criticise the impasses of a given argument, but in a position where, accounting for our own subjective involvement, we can follow the hints and immerse ourselves in the hiatuses that, as Jorge Alemán proposes, allow us to problematise the unthought in theory. Therefore, we feel that the understanding of antagonism and negativity put forward by this populist political ontology reactivates a latent sense of modernity that is not found in the ontological turn Heidegger gave rise to. Furthermore, this turn forecloses it. One mustn't forget that this entire European philosophical operation of ontological difference (and here we also include post-structuralism and post-operaism) has been taking shape together with processes of decolonisation, revealing a philosophical unconscious anxious to pay off its own imperialist past. Thus, we ask ourselves, what role has Latin American thinking and praxis played in the production of modernity? That is to say, if modernity has been characterised by discovering the keys to necessity in history and a strong foundation that organises our society, our present age, on the contrary, assumes the contingent character of history and the discovery of the absence of any kind of foundation. For that reason, we believe that the question of antagonism posed by populist theory reactivates a sense of modernity that was latent within the ontological turn.

But, at the same time, this dispute over modernity responds to a kind of thought inscribed in the same Latin American legacy. In other words: the reactivation of antagonism and negativity is a game of translations between the thought of Latin America and Europe and the possibility of understanding to what extent Latin America produces this ontological turn. What we propose in our book, then, is that the ontological turn is a movement of colonial rupture, but one that does not necessarily imply an abandonment of modernity, but rather the possibility of updating its emancipatory legacy. In that sense, we would like to clarify that we reject the 'relativistic conceptions of modernity,' wherein each place has conducted its own 'unique and untranslatable' experience. It seems to us that there is a multicultural trap in this retrospective interpretation of the past segmenting the possibilities of understanding the 'historical knots' that organise our present. This is why we prefer to think in terms of unfinished sedimentations of modernity, rather than in terms of diverse interpretations. And, at the same time, this ties us back to a particularistic thought and doesn't account for how all these supposed particularities are produced and related to each other in a great epochal and conceptual plot.

But we also distance ourselves from the decolonial interpretation, since it seeks to challenge the entirety of modernity as a history of oppression without further ado. From this point of view, on the one hand, modernity would be identified with Europe and oppression and, on the other, Latin America with otherness and passivity. Thus, two opposite and independent poles are configured with reference to each other and, as a consequence, our emancipation from the European yoke would hinge on our responsibility to recover our ancestral 'otherness.' It seems that this interpretation, which also rejects the concepts of republic, state, democracy, and a long *et cetera*, has two problems. On the one hand, it leads us to a deadlock, namely: in all praxis and all theory (even in language) we will find an impure element that has functioned as a form of oppression of the 'other'. Still, and this is paradoxical, it is leading us to reactionary arguments typical of the right. For instance, the claim that 'class struggle' is a Eurocentric and patriarchal concept, which we must therefore reject. However, we do not consider that this operation performed by decolonial theory is an inherent characteristic of it; rather, it responds to a way of thinking of our time. We sincerely believe the legacy of Levinas is present in all theoretical proposals where ethics prevail over politics. Once again, each theoretical proposal is assumed to constitute a singularity but ends up reproducing a more general form that becomes 'unthinkable'.

On the other hand, the decolonial interpretation does not attend to historical processes and does not pay attention to all the archival work that historians such as Valeria Coronel (2022), Marixa Lasso (2007), James Sanders (2004) or José Figueroa (2021)

— to name a few examples — have been doing on the history of 'actual' existing republicanism.[3] The work of these historians helps us think about two aspects: on the one hand, the active role of the popular sectors (Indigenous, *campesino*, Black and female) in the construction of more egalitarian and emancipatory republics and, on the other, the active role of these sectors and intellectuals in the configuration of modernity itself. In this sense, we consider modernity a general and dialectical process, a process in tension between a reactive movement and an emancipatory movement. And there, in this process, Latin America does not have a peripheral but a central role in the construction of these two movements. In our case, we are interested in thinking about what the emancipatory possibilities are that Latin America engenders for modernity. And Latin American populisms are one more link (theoretical and practical) in a long historical accumulation of democratic experiences of plebeian republicanisms. In that sense, it is not a matter of thinking of Latin America as an exception but rather as part of a broad process where we shape forms of emancipation for the world. We are also the political imagination of the future. Thus, one must note the difficulty that certain segments of the European intelligentsia have in understanding this and their oscillation between thinking of politics within Latin America as remnants of the past (as if 'Europe' were part of some vanguard) and as an exotic otherness to be protected in a paternalistic (or maternalistic) way. We believe that the field of populism studies offers an interesting twist—of course, this is not the only case, but it is the one we know from within. And this has to do with the fact that a relationship of greater equality emerges in the production of knowledge. We build international networks on an equal footing and we read each other in two directions: North-South and South-North. This allows a dialogue that pays attention to both the particularities of each region and their commonalities.

The wish to think of ourselves as 'in the world' (and not as a particularity that thinks exclusively in itself) finds its origins in various traditions of Latin America and the Caribbean. On a more regional level, we feel influenced by two great currents that find their roots, on the one hand, in the 19th century plebeian and socialist republicanism of Simón Rodríguez and José Martí, which gave rise to a whole continental experience of articulation between popular and emancipatory democratic institutions, and, on the other hand, in the legacy of the heterodox Marxism that José Carlos Mariátegui inaugurated with his aesthetic-political assumptions reflected in spaces such as the journal *Amauta*, the black Caribbean Marxism of intellectuals like Frantz Fanon and Aimé Césaire, and the influence of Andean thinkers, like Zavaleta Mercado and Silvia Rivera

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[3] Marchant proposes some objections to our reflections on the importance of the republican hypothesis for thinking emancipation. We recommend all of these authors, whose historical-critical publications help us build connections between populism and republicanism.

Cusicanqui in Bolivia and Agustín Cueva and Bolivar Echeverría in Ecuador and Mexico.

Regarding the currents in Argentina, we recognise ourselves at the intersection of two traditions: national-popular thought and the Lacanian left. It is important to clarify that, in the tradition of Argentinian theory until the '70s, the opposition to the oligarchy had been coming from a left with liberal roots. That is, politics was divided between a rightwing liberalism and a leftist liberalism. A popular national agenda was taking shape between those two positions, which is the tradition we belong to. This is why in Argentina there is both a rightwing and leftwing anti-national popular movement. It is in this juncture that we can place the classic works of Ernesto Laclau (and those intellectuals who influenced his early thought, such as Arturo Jauretche, John William Cooke or Jorge Abelardo Ramos), passing through José Aricó, Juan Carlos Portantiero or Emilio De Ipola, to more current references, like Horacio González, María Pía López or Jorge Alemán. It is important to add that all these authors and currents mentioned have been configured as a dense network of postcolonial thought, and that decolonial theory is one more expression within this historical accumulation. We make this clarification because, in the English-speaking world (and especially in the United States), it is often believed that postcolonial Latin American and Caribbean thought starts with the decolonial theory of the 90s, omitting the historical role of plebeian republicanism, heterodox Marxism and populism from the struggle for epistemological and political emancipation in the global south. Now, all this intellectual production of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries shares a common trait, namely that it is eccentric thought. What does this mean? As Jorge Alemán proposes in his book *Neoliberal Horizons in Subjectivity* (2016), which he gathers from the tradition of Argentine literature, eccentric positions are not those that are passively assumed as the periphery, but those that have the ability to create a location that escapes the center.

We could add that we come from very different disciplines where neither of us feels entirely comfortable (political science and philosophy) and so we would like to intervene in them and approach the problems of political thought in a way that can reconnect theory and praxis. This is why the book begins with an explicit declaration of our place of enunciation and our roles as both activists and academics. But our belonging to militant spaces made us very aware that this book was the result of collective work. Which is not to say that this book is here to *narrate* or *reflect* what happened in those spaces. What happened (and happens) there far exceeds what we have managed to express in *Seven Essays.* Furthermore, we always distrust the attitude of whoever, because of their activism in a movement or in public space, later becomes, through his or her books, the official spokesperson for that experience. There is something a little

deceptive there. We prefer to think of our book as an exercise in *translating* that collective experience to the field of political theory and contemporary philosophy. This is why we say that our efforts in the book are about trying to think through what, in all of those experiences, is translatable for current political theory. This exercise in translation, at the same time, supposes a kind of distancing: we don't want to identify ourselves with the 'thing', as if our voice were the exclusive owner of a political experience, rather we attempt to persevere *within* the *lived* thing, being very aware that there is an irreducible distance between us and the thing *thought*. But that distance doesn't exempt us from the historical responsibility of trying to affect praxis with our theoretical postulates. We are not interested in theories that only function within the limited spaces of global academia to the delight of a select group of intellectuals. We worry that theoretical production renounces the task of continuing to imagine the world differently. At the same time, it seems to us that all of these political experiences put many of the declarations often made in the field of political theory to the test. Thus, the challenge was to show the limits of theoretical frameworks when they are checked against reality and, at the same time, trying to think about where we can take political thought when it passes through these experiences. If we could summarise how we tried to intervene in this field of operations called 'political thought', we could say that we sought to generate the following practical effects: a) the production of a theoretical-political artifact coded in an uncomfortable name for European and Anglophone philosophy; b) the ousting, as other thinkers have already done, of the pejorative reading that the global north has made of populism; c) a contribution to epistemological decolonisation, which involves distancing ourselves from the place assigned to intellectuals from the global south that says we should limit ourselves to describing our own experiences or, at best, to offering theoretical frameworks for our region; and d) an intervention in the field of philosophy and contemporary political thought with a body of theory as eccentric as populism, daring to alter what is meant by the very exercise of political thought.

In what follows, we would like to gather several points put forward by colleagues who, with great generosity and rigour, drew upon on our book. We have taken the decision not to respond to each text separately but to gather common problematic cruxes, which could be summarised in the following way: the ontological problem of populism and its connection to feminism.

II.

We would like to begin the second part of our text by saying that the debate under consideration is not confined to the texts that each author created for the present dossier. It seems much more interesting to us that these articles (and our book) should

function as 'an excuse' for that which the authors themselves helped to propitiate, namely a debate of ideas. Although it is a common-sense expression—debate of ideas— it seems increasingly difficult to foment this kind of intellectual encounter with its unpredictable effects, organised around 'the thing itself' of the political. We are readers of the intellectual explorations of each author we invited to participate in this discussion. And it seems to us that in each text, not only do we find a reflection on the proposals and arguments from our book, but each author's intellectual (and vital) wager appears as well. Thus, we could even talk about a spiritual debate, if by spirit we refer to the living material that is imbricated in (and as) the political. If there is an attitude or disposition that we share with the authors of this critical exchange, it is a deep discomfort with a certain ethos inherited from the political philosophy of the late 20th century and the early 21st. This discomfort that we share has to do with a disposition or attitude in contemporary political thought that can be summarised, in Hegelian terms, as a 'flight from existence', upon considering that existence will not be found at the level of what the thinking demands. For us, this translates into a preemptory withdrawal that rejects collective political practices, their institutional wagers (insomuch as they are republican, democratic or feminist laboratories), and their emancipatory imaginaries. And, at the same time, it aims to make of political thought (and its etymological games) the only locus of authentic political transformation. The idea that the commons, the people, the revolution, democracy or emancipation is always something *yet to come* ends up creating the perfect alibi for intellectual political commitment to avoid concrete action, passing instead onto the disinterested and lucid judgment of those who determine at what precise point the reality—of any social process—failed. It seems to us that the great paradox of our era consists in believing that the most radical act of thinking would imply a withdrawal of the political from practical (and social) life. This intellectual operation, therefore, not only spurns the sphere of praxis, but it also comes to take its place, making philosophy the demiurge of reality. We agree with Marchart's and Bosteels' claim that this epochal issue began with an ontological turn (Marchart, 2018; Bosteels, 2014), and what this turn encapsulates is addressed in our book from cover to cover.

In that sense, the critiques and commentaries regarding our ties to ontology (and the proposal for a political ontology) have helped us to think about the type of ontological operation that takes place in our book, how we relate to the philosophical tradition that has thought this problem, and why this appeal to ontology aims neither to locate philosophy in a position above praxis nor to set up a procedure for 'purifying' thought. These commentaries also help us to understand that, even if we are indebted to Laclau's ontological wager, our understanding of ontology takes a different path that we would like to set out here. As such, it seems important for us to define what kind of

purpose we grant ontology, to then position ourselves in regards to Marchart's and Bosteels' proposals.

The point of confluence in our book is populist theory (in its national-popular aspect) and the Laclausian vocation of a political ontology. And this connects to two different ontological approaches that were complementary over the course of the book: the question of lack in Lacan and the role of negativity in Hegel. Paula's work gets inscribed within the first legacy, continuing the entrance into psychoanalysis that Laclau himself pursued and making it applicable to the findings contributed by Jorge Alemán. Luciana's works are inscribed within the second legacy, based on a reupdating of negativity in Hegel and its subterranean ties to Foucault's 'ontology of the present'. The encounter between these two ontological legacies is not without its tensions, but we feel that those tensions have been fruitful for trying to articulate two inheritances that confront each other: the intersection between the non-historical (the constitutive lack) and the historical (the ontology of our selves) to place them in the service of a philosophy of praxis. It is worth adding that we do not feel tied to any of these inheritances in the absolute. Our core concept and point of departure has always been the sphere of praxis, from there we have made, if you like, a completely 'irreverent' use—in a nod to Borgean philosophy—of the philosophical (and ontological) archives. We have played with these traditions and we have taken from them only what has been fruitful for connecting our concepts and directing thought according to the pulse of historical-practical problems. Over the length of our book, we have tried to relate the historical and the non-historical in a way that could break the spell of that flight from existence and make thought an instrument in the service of the emancipatory imagination. The question that has guided our wager has been the following: is it possible to create a theory artifact for thinking emancipation opened by political experiences in Latin America?

But let us return to the issue of the ontological turn. The first thing we would like to clarify is that reupdating ontology for the field of politics is not exclusive to the 20th century, and we can find its roots in the very tradition of modern thought. The second issue is that this contemporary turn can be treated through two legacies: the Heideggerian line and the Foucauldian line. And, regarding the second aspect mentioned earlier, we coincide with Marchart in taking back the power of ontology from philosophers. He would seem to give Heidegger a very timely turn of the screw in *Thinking Antagonism* when he tells us, 'Every thinker, as Heidegger used to say, follows the line of a single thought. What he forgot to mention was that no thought belongs to a single thinker. They always come from somewhere else, from a place 'out there:' an intellectual tradition, an academic teacher, a school of thought, a social movement, an academic or non-academic discussion…'. (Marchart, 2018: 1). Likewise, we agree with Marchart when he points out that ontology is not a separate sphere (nor a more

fundamental sphere) from the political but rather the possibility of a treatment that escapes the mainstream logic of social scientists and the type of hallowed treatment that these disciplines grant the empirical. Yet, like Marchart, it seems to us that ontology is not a path for disregarding or turning our backs on what positivism calls 'the empirical', rather it is a way to think the formations of the 'given'. We also see ourselves in his search to relate the problem of ontology to the issue of antagonism and the latter to the fundamental problem of negativity. We believe that in *Thinking Antagonism*, Marchart Hegelianises himself and contributes to a certain rupture (though not complete) with his Heideggerian legacy, though his stance seems a little ambiguous in this regard: at times he would seem to foster a kind of fusion between Hegel, Marx and Heidegger and, at others, a recognition that the ontological turn Heidegger propitiated, by putting an end to negativity (and antagonism), would present serious challenges for shaping an ontology of the political: 'It is true, Heidegger also knows about the terror before the 'nothing' and annihilation, but the negative is not given by him any productive function in a conception of 'ontic' action. He criticised Hegel for retaining a notion of negativity that was not sufficiently radical (which is the case indeed, given Hegel's logicism), but did not provide us with a better alternative. Instead, he reverted to a Zen-like passivism devoid of all negativity' (Marchart, 2018: 6).

Therefore, we have distanced ourselves from what Marchart does in his older works by including populist theory within the legacy of leftist Heideggerianism. Furthermore, in our book we maintain that populism opposes this Heideggerian ontological turn given that it is one of the few contemporary intellectual wagers that reupdates the question of antagonism (and negativity) as a situated and conflictual dimension for addressing the political.

And this brings us closer to Bosteels' position, given that we agree with his suggestion that the Heideggerian ontological turn (and that of his epigones) entails a folding back of thought onto itself, a disconnection from the sphere of praxis and a backing down from emancipatory politics. In *The Actuality of Communism*, he becomes very critical of the 'ontological turn' favored by the contemporary leftist political philosophy scene (2014: 42-74). With unsparing lucidity, he strikes down the belief that politics must resort to ontology as an expression of its radicality and as a necessity for deepening a leftist project. He finds in that operation a kind of trap and a backing down from intellectual activity. When this ontological turn becomes trapped in the analytic of finitude (a Kantian legacy) and in the destruction of being as presence (a Heideggerian-Derridean legacy), political philosophy creates a kind of animosity toward the actually existing (being as presence) and a skepticism toward politics that emerges from social life. Bosteels very precisely demonstrates how this supposed radicalisation of leftist ontology ends up creating the fantasy that it would be, through its speculative leftists, the only

one capable of truly radicalizing politics. This disconnection from social life (from the people, we would add) ends up favouring a conservative retreat, given that reality always fails under the gaze of the radical philosopher. Either it fails, as Bosteels suggests, because the (unconfessed) utopia is placed in a 'yet to come' and that future can only be prophesied by the philosopher (with his or her back turned on the present), or, Bosteels would add, this folding back of thought onto itself favoured by leftist ontology suppresses the individual and militancy, considering them metaphysical illusions from the past, and thereby obstructs any emancipatory politics that does not proceed from its own theoretical presuppositions. We agree with the majority of the assessments that Bosteels presents—though his operation points to an actuality of communism (and not that of a populism)—and we distance ourselves in some aspects. We maintain, in contrast with Bosteels, that his critique does not apply to all attempts to think through ontology but rather, on the one hand, to the specific turn favoured by Heidegger and, on the other, to the shift that such a turn entailed for the role of negativity (and consequently for antagonism), since it replaces negativity with an ontological difference and a return to the problem of being. Thus, we distance ourselves from Bosteels when he assumes that the populist theory introduced by Laclau and Mouffe would be an end to this type of ontological turn (47), something on which he seems to agree with Marchart. Another point where our paths diverge has to do with the way Bosteels equates the philosophy of Heidegger and Lacanian psychoanalysis, understood as the two halves of the forceps that would come to create a disconnection between theory and social life. In contrast with other uses of Lacanian psychoanalysis, all of our efforts in the book have been to construct a theory of militancy and the emergence of the political subject based on the notion of lack. And, in agreement with that which Bosteels' proposes in his book, this leads to an attempt to take on the dialectic between the historical and the non-historical (and between theory and current reality) in a very precise way (269-270). Ultimately, Bosteels' question is something we completely agree on: 'Is this actuality under the present circumstances necessarily limited to being a pure movement of critique and destruction? Or is there place for a unified front of common affirmation and overcoming?' (19-20). And we wonder if this 'unified front of common affirmation and overcoming' cannot imply a game of shifted and eccentric uses of the ontological tradition. We ask ourselves if the gesture of our book does not connect with the closing words of his, where he tells us: 'This means that we cannot let the Western European history lessons, regardless of whether their master-teachers are despondent or enthusiastic or both at once in a manic-depressive oscillation, determine the agenda for the rest of the world. It also suggests, as I have minimally tried to do in the last chapter of the present book and as I hope others will do for other regions, that we look elsewhere

for models or counter-models to put to the test the hypothesis of the actuality of communism' (286-287). It is true that all of these questions point to the need to think the actuality of communism and not that of populism, yet, at the same time, they are also open to all of those who continue to wager on building, through our same social realities, an authentic emancipatory politics. It is possible that the construction of our wager needs several adjustments, but it seems to us that it cannot be refuted based on other conservative uses of psychoanalysis or ontology. In fact, it helps us, on the one hand, to prefigure a theory of the individual with the same theory tools used to defuse it and, on the other hand, generating programmatic effects that pull us from the impasse in contemporary political thought. To Bosteels' genuine question, 'Can emancipatory politics today still take the form of militant subjectivisation, or should the deconstruction of metaphysics also include all theories of the subject among its targets?' (73), we respond with a resounding yes to the first part of his approach. In fact, we also question 'the emphatic need for a leftist ontology today as a sign of something missed, namely, a truly emancipatory politics' (74). And we believe that this withdrawal can be overcome through a very simple (yet no less significant) reversal, namely, instead of using psychoanalysis and ontology to dismiss the truly existing—as the speculative leftists that Bosteels alludes to have—we put these legacies in the service (to the dismay of Lacan and Heidegger) of militancy and emancipation. And, for us in Latin America, that reversal has come to be called populist theory.

Therefore, to summarise our position, we could say that we agree with Marchart on the need to turn to the issue of ontology and accept that this is not a more elevated sphere of the social but rather a precise mode for addressing (as mass media or positivism can) a single object: the political. But, in contrast with him, and in line with Bosteels, we are critical of the ontological turn that, to our understanding, arises out of the Heideggerian turn. We believe there is a theoretical disposition to be found there that, by rejecting conflict and the modern tradition of thought, creates a disconnect between theory and praxis, discounts the conflictual dimension and rejects militancy and the configuration of a political (hegemonic?) subject for emancipation. Where should we then find the key for understanding the type of ontological turn that we have proposed in our book and how does it help us to think politics in an edifying way? We believe it is found in the return to the ontological problem established by the modern Hegelian legacy, which is to say, the legacy that does not back down from linking ontology to politics and history. And we believe, oddly enough, that both Marchart and Bosteels do not stand entirely apart from this position. In the case of Marchart, it is in his recognition of the limits of the Heideggerian ontological turn and the need to return to an ontology of antagonism coded in the modern problem of negativity. And, in the case of Bosteels, it is in his recognition of the need 'for a dialectical articulation of the

non-historical with concrete analyses of the historicity of leftist, socialist, and communist politics' (278). Or when, by critiquing in what sense the contemporary ontological turn reiterates Kant's analytic of finitude, he vindicates Hegel's dialectic of infinitude.[4] Hesitation around the abandonment or recuperation of ontology, thus, is not exclusive to contemporary philosophy, rather it has its precedent in modernity itself. The philosophical turn that Kant gave rise to, by introducing the critical method of thought, entailed, among other things, an attempt to substitute ontology (Wolff's *metaphysica generalis*), on the one hand, with the transcendental analytic, and on the other hand, to substitute *metaphysica specialis* with the dialectic.[5] Analytic and dialectic will come to be conceived of as the two critical (or philosophical) modes of proceeding opened up by Kant in the modern era, encompassed by his Transcendental Logic, and will be employed as a replacement for the dogmatic and ontological proceeding. Let's not forget that this critical operation, and the respective 'irreconcilable' split between noumenon (the thing in itself) and phenomenon (the world of experience), on the one hand, and the subject (*a priori*) and the world (of experience), on the other, would establish the foundations for an unconfessed suprasensible and normative philosophy as a guarantor for the world of experience. Hegel, for his part, will be the inheritor of this operation that Kant gave rise to, but would express his reservations regarding the disappearance of ontology as a purifying advance in critical philosophy and, at the same time, he will attempt to work this split opened by Kant in a different way. Furthermore, we could say that this purified and separate horizon of the world of experience is the first thing that Hegel would reject when he appeals to the historical and the speculative as part of a single immanent process. This is why all of his effort is dedicated to developing Logic as an *Aufhebung* (cancellation and preservation) of ontology. Beyond the strictly philosophical operation that each thinker gave rise to, what we would like to highlight here is the argument put forward by Hegel, in the first prologue to the Science of Logic from 1812, to explain why ontology cannot be cast aside without further ado. And the interesting thing to highlight is that he does not do so in the name of philosophy—as if ontology were to grant it privileged access in the order of being—but rather he does so in the name of the people (*Volk*).[6] Hegel is not as interested in the fate of philosophy,

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[4] 'Do these proposals open up a perspective for the actualisation of communism, or does our current ontological background, always more attuned to Kant's analytic of finitude than to Hegel's dialectic of the infinite, run counter to this orientation?' (Bosteels, 2014: 44)

[5] Here we are following the interpretation proposed by the Spanish philosopher Félix Duque in his preliminary study to his introduction to the 1812 Spanish edition of the Science of Logic. (Hegel, 2011: 18)

[6] This was discovered by Félix Duque in his preliminary study to the Science of Logic of 1812 (Hegel, 2011: 38).

when it renounces ontology, as he is in where such a decision would leave a people spiritually. Like Hegel, Kant also thought that metaphysics (ontology) could not be eradicated (at most substituted) and thus assigned it a marginal place (beyond the world of experience) but, paradoxically, it would remain reserved for the philosopher and the theologist who wished to dedicate his or her life to thinking about suprasensible subjects that concern nothing less than questions of liberty. Hegel, on the other hand, would not consider ontology to be something that an 'individual' produces in solitude, when posing big unanswerable questions, rather it is a material work wrought within the historical by the collective life of the people. Let us recall that for Hegel the spiritual dimension of the popular is not something suprasensible that soars above human beings, it is, on the contrary, the very social fabric that relates men to each other. There is nothing more material than the spiritual, and ontology, for its part, is the immanence of thought and existence whose real and effective dimension (*Wirklichkeit*) gets *articulated* as the people. Thus, for Hegel, the lack of a popular metaphysics (or ontology—which is the same thing in this case) is as impossible to eradicate as is politics or ethics.[7] But this idea does not appear for the first time in the Science of Logic, rather it is a constant concern across the different phases of intellectual development that can be found in the famous collectively authored pamphlet for *The Oldest Systematic Program of German Idealism,* passing through his writings on popular religion (*Volksreligion*), until reaching his efforts to think this problem within the logico-speculative system of his philosophy (Cadahia, 2017).[8] In all of them there is a constant preoccupation with thinking, through philosophy, the ethical (and political) life of a people. And philosophy does not have the normative role assigned to it by Kant that, from the purified realm of Ideas, determines the direction a people should have. Much to the contrary, ontology is a sort of stain that is born from the collective historical task of a people as a spiritual subject, and it becomes its sediment. Furthermore, in his early writings, when Hegel mentions the importance of popular religion, he does so, primarily, in regards to the place 'the heart and fantasy' occupy as a worksite for the popular ethos. Without these sediments that appeal to the affective dimension, the people would degenerate into a sum of limited individuals, or to put it in Foucauldian terms, to a mere population. That is, to a mere 'empirical' fact, instead of a political and spiritual subject. And,

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[7] 'Remarkable as it is if a people has become indifferent, for instance, to its constitutional law, to its convictions, its moral customs and virtues, just as remarkable it is when a people loses its metaphysics – when the spirit engaged with its pure essence no longer has any real presence in its life.' (Hegel 2010: 7)

[8] Even if object of this text is not to speak of Hegel's oeuvre, it is important to point out that his concern with the ontology of the people intertwines with metaphysics, popular religion (*Volkreligion*), mythology, aesthetics and fantasy.

to continue along this Foucauldian line, it is also important to recall that Foucault himself would employ this distinction between analytic and dialectic (as two paths opened by Kant) for inscribing, on the latter path (together with Hegel and the Frankfurt School), his own philosophical journey. Though, in Foucault's hands, this second path — opened by Kant and materialised by Hegel, Marx and the Frankfurt School — would undergo a new metamorphosis and dialectic thought would wear a new mask called the ontology of actuality (2010: 17-40).[9] If Kant had wanted to overcome metaphysics and ontology through an analytic and dialectic procedure, and if Hegel, for his part, made the dialectic procedure a way to keep the immanent place of ontology alive and to destroy the *a priori*, transcendental and solipsistic aspects of philosophy, then Foucault, with his return to ontology, would try to demolish the Hegelian-dialectic legacy and open a path for recuperating the historical and immanent character of the Kantian critical legacy.

We have taken this 'modern' detour through Kant and Hegel (and the recuperation of both by Foucault) to show that, beginning with Hegel, more than a word or a field of thought that opens to the question of being—something that, of course, mattered little to Hegel—ontology went on to become a philosophical procedure. And this procedure would come to be called dialectic and speculative as an attempt to construct a philosophy of experience and immanence, which is to say, contrary to the abstract formalism of Kantianism and tied to the historical development of peoples. And we do so to show that Foucault would withdraw the wager by explicitly uniting ontology with the problem of actuality, though sacrificing the dialectical procedure that he himself would exercise unconfessed and turning a deaf ear to the opening Hegel insinuated between ontology and the people. But we have also taken this detour because it will help us to understand which philosophical tradition we see ourselves in when we bring the name ontology back onto the scene. Because, for us, and in contrast to Laclau—but radicalizing his same presuppositions—populist theory is a theory of articulation for thinking the ontology of the people. And the people is nothing more or less than a political configuration. To that end, and in response to the ontological approaches of Barros and Martínez-Prado, we are not proposing an ontology of the multiple and alterity, nor for thinking populism or thinking feminism. The logic of the Not-All that we allude to is not an expression of the Spinozist and Levinasian ontology that other authors allude to. And

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[9] See: 'It seems to me that the philosophical choice confronting us today is the following. We have to opt either for a critical philosophy which appears as an analytical philosophy of truth in general, or for a critical thought which takes the form of an ontology of ourselves, of present reality. It is this latter form of philosophy which, from Hegel to the Frankfurt School, passing through Nietzsche, Max Weber and so on, has founded a form of reflection to which, of course, I link myself insofar as I can.' (Foucault, 2010: 21).

even less an expression that we are trying to think. Frankly, we are very critical of that interpretation. This is why the tension that they believe they have found between our populist position and our feminist position doesn't work, as if in each case we were maintaining two different ontologies. In short, the ontology of the people is Not-All (or the One that fails). Which is to say, the way we decided to organise with each other to imagine emancipation. Thus, Marchart takes up from the postfoundational perspective that we adopted (following what he himself developed (Marchart, 2007; 2018) to push our arguments further and affirms that 'Biglieri and Cadahia do not go as far as explicitly making the following claim, but, in my view, 'the people' are established by populism precisely as the contingent ground of society' (citation to his contribution in the exchange). Indeed, we could not agree more, and we summarise this quotation with a nod to Laclau and Mouffe (1985) and say that, if the people exists, it is because society does not. In any case, the people as political subjectivity emerges thanks to the constitutive lack, the irreducible heterogeneity or the impossibility of social closure, and it emerges to antagonise 'those above' in an attempt to mold an institutionality that includes 'those below'. This is where we diverge. Marchart wonders if our understanding of populism responds to a normative issue or to a wish list and questions the idea that 'populism *eo ipso* is emancipatory', which is the same as questioning the emancipatory nature of populism or the possibility of populism revealing an emancipatory ontology. For what runs through our entire text is the radical gesture of daring to think an emancipatory ontology from our Latin American political experience. Pulling threads and diving into the hiatuses of Laclau's theory is what allowed us to draw out the consequences of taking populist logic to the extreme: assuming aspects that could have been suggested by Laclau but that were never problematised led us to what remained unthought in his work. That is, if the equivalential trait of differences is taken to its ultimate conclusions, this can have no other outcome than the egalitarian project. What enables us to sustain the ontological dimension is to understand that the articulation of differences does not cancel heterogeneity, that differences never collapse into the fascist project of the people-as-one and that the logic of equivalence and difference belong to the ontological dimension of politics, all of which leads to the egalitarian and emancipatory character of populism. This is the reason why we do not accept the distinction between leftwing and rightwing populism, because following the line of thought we developed, they clearly present themselves as experiences of a different nature. But neither have we said, as Barros and Martínez-Prado suggest, that populism is only of the left. This is why we would like to take a moment to argue what we mean when we talk about populism plainly.

Nothing stands in the way of certain theoretical positions wanting to maintain the distinction between populism on the left and populism on the right. What we ask ourselves is if it is worthwhile to do so and what theoretical (or political) effect does it propitiate to maintain that distinction. The point is not to hew to the names but to ask ourselves, on the one hand, what we are doing with them when we set them to functioning within the field of political thought and, on the other, how fruitful or obsolete they are for accompanying, thinking and imagining the political processes of a determined period. In a strict sense, the name does not express the nature of a thing, but we do believe—and this is what separates us from those who uphold a distinction between leftwing and rightwing populism—that the names tie together historical accumulations. For example, the works of Gunnarsson-Payne laid out in this dossier open a very strategic path for studying the existence of a rightwing populism in northern Europe and its complicity with the patriarchy.

Additionally, we agree with Bosteels when, citing Deleuze and Chauí—though he does so to criticise our ontological proposal—he tells us that 'questions about being are always questions about doing'. Our stance, in regards to this, maintains that populism is the name that codes a very specific historical doing: that which has been organised for fighting against oppression and imagining emancipation. In Latin America, the intellectual work with that legacy has been called national-popular thought. It is from there, and with a calling to reupdate that historical-intellectual legacy, that we wrote our *Seven Essays...* And the entire effort of the book is toward thinking, under the name of populism, a theory of emancipation. We are aware that this position implies resituating the Laclausian legacy, given that in both 'Towards a Theory of Populism' (1977) and *On Populist Reason*, Laclau establishes a distinction between two types of populism. In strictly Laclausian terms, 'Our thesis is that populism consists in the presentation of popular-democratic interpellations as a synthetic-antagonistic complex with respect to the dominant ideology' (Laclau, 1977: 172-173).[10] But we go a step further, since

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[10] In regards to the Laclausian legacy, the proposal to radicalise his theory assumes a greater proximity to his first approaches to populist theory as reflected in his text 'Towards a Theory of Populism.' There, he makes a series of clarifications that would disappear from his following works, which are more interested in connecting the Lacanian legacy with the Gramscian legacy in regards to a social formation. In fact, that is the text where he explores the distinction between two types of populism in greater detail. In On Populist Reason, he abandons the terms 'populism of the dominant bloc' and 'populism of the dominated bloc' and, inspired by the work of Chantal Mouffe, goes on to use the distinction between leftwing and rightwing populism. However, in his last book, and despite using that distinction, he does not pursue a theoretical development that would help us to understand in what sense he makes those distinctions. In contrast, Laclau makes the distinction in 'Towards a Theory of Populism' between two types of populism because he is interested in thinking an articulation between populism and socialism. For his part, he distinguishes between two types of contradictions. On the one hand, we find the

Laclau, in the very text we just quoted, was interested in maintaining a distinction between two types of populism: a populism of the dominant bloc and another of the dominated bloc. We quote this essay because that is where the distinction between two types of populism unfolds in a more precise and argued way. While it is true that *On Populist Reason* reestablishes a distinction in terms of rightwing and leftwing populisms, it does not perform a theoretical explication that helps us in understanding the reach of this distinction within his renovated theory of populism[11]. Even if both types of populism develop antagonism, the first does so to implement a reformation of the dominant bloc, whereas the latter, for its part, does so to promote a revolutionary kind of socialist horizon. We do not agree with this distinction because it seems to us that Laclau's position is muddled in this regard and does not help in identifying the political nature of each of these articulations. To our understanding—and this is what we have argued in *Seven Essays...*—the types of political articulation found in the dominant bloc and the dominated bloc are completely different in nature. Laclau considers both cases populism because they both appeal to the antagonism of democratic-popular interpellations. But, for us, appealing to antagonism and popular demands is not enough for identifying a populist experience. We do not believe that the line dividing populist

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contradictions that are born from the modes of production and defined based on class struggle (socialist discourse). On the other hand, there is the contradiction of a social formation, and it is characterised by the popular democratic struggles organised by the tension between people/power bloc (populist discourse). The first is treated through classic Marxist theory, which is considered a specific type of discourse or radical popular theory. The second, by populism, which goes beyond class distinctions (but not because of that beyond the struggle against oppression). With this distinction, Laclau does not seek to take populism out of a Marxist frame. On the contrary, he is offering us the possibility of articulating the problem of the means of production with the problem of social formation and inscribing both in a socialist continuity. We could say that the great advance of populism has been in offering a theory for how the democratic-popular interpellations (which will end up being called popular demands) are capable of articulating an alternative social formation to neoliberalism (understood as another type of social formation), and taken up again from the perspective of emancipation. But the step we haven't yet taken is that of seeing how this social formation that struggles against the dominant bloc (or oligarchy) is capable of offering an alternative means of production to capitalism. It is also important to understand that it is not the same to make a distinction between two types of populisms (that of the dominant bloc and that of the dominated bloc) when the socialist question over the means of production is open as a horizon that enables the distinction that is to be established, a distinction between leftist populism and rightwing populism without that horizon in mind. Mostly because, on the one hand, one loses sight of the operative dimension that the distinction enables and, on the other, because it ends up equating two practices that enable incommensurate social formations. One points to emancipation and the other to a reformation of the power bloc.

[11] He mentions the distinction on two occasions and refers us to a text by Chantal Mouffe as the theoretical support for this distinction (p. 98). The text by Mouffe referred to is 'The end of politics and the challenge of right-wing populism' (see Panizza, 2005)

practice from the non-populist lies only in its relationship to antagonism, as if the political practices that develop antagonism should be called populist and those that neutralise it (and turn it into a differential system) should be called liberal-parliamentarian. It is necessary to delve a little deeper and try to understand the nature of each articulation and the specific way it employs antagonism. It is also necessary to leave behind the theoretical simplification that tends to identify the state or institutions with non-antagonistic political practices or with the dominant bloc and, thus, with the non-populist. We believe talking about populism requires something else. And we believe, at the same time, that there must be an emancipatory populist theory capable of understanding the role of antagonism (or popular-democratic interpellations) operating and transforming state institutions. We say that Laclau's position is ambivalent because, in his attempt to characterise the two types of populism, he gives us keys for understanding them as phenomena of a different nature. He maintains that the populism of the dominant bloc develops popular-democratic antagonism through 'a set of ideological distortions' (174) that end up defusing emancipatory potential and directing it towards a reformation of the power bloc. And this way of articulating popular-democratic interpellations, adds Laclau, supposes a different kind of articulation, given that popular interpellations are 'articulated in a way which would obstruct its orientation in any revolutionary direction' (173-174). If the so-called populism of the dominant bloc requires, on the one hand, the creation of an ideological diversion and, on the other, the promotion of a different articulation, then it is worth asking why it would make sense to use the name populism in reference to two forms of political articulation that are so dissimilar, especially when Laclau himself created the conditions for saying that populism is 'a peculiar way of articulating popular-democratic interpellations' (172) that appeals to a people tied to a specific antagonism between people/dominant bloc. Over the course of our book, we sought to explore, with greater precision, the ambiguity expressed in Laclausian theory itself, and we tried to think, in a much more concrete way, in what specific sense populism articulates popular-democratic articulations in an emancipatory register. Which means simultaneously developing and differentiating the specific type of articulation that establishes what has been called 'populism of the dominant bloc'. For Laclau, then, an experience becomes populist when 'popular interpellations appear in the ideological discourses of all of them, presented in the form of antagonism and not just of difference' (174), and that antagonistic form can be organised, whether by the dominant bloc or by the dominated bloc. For us, on the contrary, the type of articulation that takes place in each case is distinct and we go so far as to show that the way they establish antagonism is different. The 'populism of the dominant bloc' appeals to the 'popular masses' and configures an *unfolding of antagonism*, since the division people-elite remains contingent on another division presented as more fundamental (below-below)

and is conceived of by that same elite: a people-enemy of the people (migrant, Indigenous, Black, leftist, communist, sexually diverse, feminist, unionised, etc.). This type of antagonism (though one would have to check if the case in question were antagonism or a different way of organizing social discontent) is instrumentalised by one elite in its dispute with another for their place in the power bloc. We have given this form of political articulation the name fascist logic. The so-called 'populism of the dominant bloc' (or rightwing populism) does not constitute a people, rather it seeks to articulate popular-democratic interpellations to foment an interruption in the status quo that, while it never allows for imagining an emancipatory social formation, allows the configuration of a new reformation of the dominant bloc through a sacrificial logic. And we believe that it does not constitute a people because, first, it distorts the idea that the constitutive contradiction is produced between people/dominant bloc, and second, it causes the emergence of an internal contradiction in the dominated bloc: people-enemy of the people. As such, what defines populism for Laclau is a political articulation capable of developing antagonism—and only liberal-parliamentarian tendencies are excluded from populism. For us, in contrast, only popular articulations that give continuity to forms of emancipation whose constitutive contradiction applies to the state and institutions, eluding attempts to create a constitutive contradiction internal to the people, are populist. For us, and perhaps we allude to this when we say that we radicalise the path opened by Laclau, a popular articulation is populist not only when it manages to antagonise with a determined *status quo* (something that can also be found in fascist experiences) but also when it is capable of constructing an emancipatory continuity based on its constitutive antagonism (people/oligarchy). Without that emancipatory doing, there is no populism. In that sense, as Marchart suggests in his text, our book does not seek to be normative or descriptive. Rather, it is an exercise in a very realist political imagination, in the exact sense offered by Mariátegui when he wrote in 1921, 'We can only find reality along paths of fantasy (...) Fantasy, when it fails to bring us closer to reality, is of little use (...) Fantasy has value only when it creates something real'.

Additionally, when Bosteels questions us about 'where the need to grant populism a theoretical and ontological 'statute' 'with its own law' comes from?' and 'Why populism acquires the dignity of a concept only through an ontology of the political?' Our answer can be divided into several steps. First of all, we were interested in undoing the classic prejudice associated with the idea that Latin American political experiences, unless they can pass into use through conceptual filters, are considered 'failed' experiences indebted to 'theoretical frameworks' that they don't entirely fit. As if the problem were in our realities and not in the interpretive frameworks used for understanding them. Thus, when we use the expression 'with its own laws', we are exercising an epis-

temic emancipation that helps us to think about what types of theorisations we are capable of constructing based on Latin-American realities themselves. 'Where does this need come from?'. We might say from our very legacies of Latin American thought and praxis that never tire of shaping theories for thinking and inspiring our social transformations. And, in our particular case, there is the national-popular legacy. Second, we do not claim to grant it the status of ontology but the status of theory. And giving populism the status of theory does not imply 'elevating' it and granting it some type of special status that it previously lacked, rather it implies 'recognizing' in it a practical rationality (or logic) that is constantly denied to our processes under the gaze of certain canons of so-called political correctness, because we are certainly not trying to purify populism through its admission into the realm of theory. Instead, we are critiquing the reductionism with which all processes of theorisation are thought today. In short, we want to overthrow the theory of any kingdom and shatter the 'normative' and purified understandings of political theory so that when we talk about theory we understand a form of practical rationality's functioning related to everything expelled from its understanding upon use. If populism is the stain that expands until disrupting the classical comprehension of the political, its ontological dimension is the cavity or pinhole that we pull through to trip up whoever wants to find an idea of theoretical purity there. And to counteract that idea of purity we talk about the evidential paradigm. Evidence and ontology are not two different procedures but the attempt to gradually give form to an understanding of ontology that escapes the purifications and the *a priori* of thought. Thus, thinking an ontology of emancipation is not an *a priori*, as Marchart would seem to suggest. To believe that we cannot speak of an emancipatory ontology is, precisely, believing that ontology is a realm purified of political language. Our book does not establish an *a priori* ontology of emancipation in one hand and a reflection on Latin American populism in the other, rather it makes an emancipatory ontology emerge from Latin American populist praxis. And of course, to do this we play with the unilateral level of understanding (and thus our book is a kind of inverted mirror to Eurocentric liberal prejudices towards populism) but, at the same time, it is a dialectical work of the negative. Finally, Bosteels is right when he points to certain inconsistencies in our book and based on our efforts to think the play between the historical and the non-historical. But there is one that we would like to develop with greater precision. And it has to do with the distinction between ontic and ontological. This is a distinction inherited from the Heideggerian tradition and whose uses in the field of political theory would seem to reiterate the old Kantian rifts in modernity, as if they were two spheres separate and independent from each other. This positivist point of view (on understanding) for thinking the distinction between ontic and ontological is not where we see our work. In fact, we could have opted not to use that distinction and, in its absence,

employed the distinction between positive and dialectic. We believe that this could have helped us explain that they are not two different spheres but rather two distinct points of view for addressing the same phenomenon. Thus, from this dialectic point of view, we could say that the ontic and the ontological point to a distinction between the instituted and the instituting. And that the instituting supposes—though this is something we should continue to work on—a difficult play between the historical and the non-historical, having yet to explore with greater precision what effect we would seek to have upon installing a dimension of thought that hinders the Kantian and Heideggerian idea of finitude. Though we have not always expressed it clearly, the aim is not to employ it as a privileged or purified resource for maintaining a political position. Perhaps over-coming finitude passes as returning to establish the irreducible of the people, that is, something that cannot be measured in terms of duration.

III.

The final aspect we would like to explore has to do with the link we have established between feminism and populism. Even if all of the articles in this dossier defend the articulation between the two traditions, they also point to a series of limitations to our proposal. At this time, we would like to center mainly on the text by Mercedes Barros and Natalia Martínez Prado and the text by Jenny Gunnarsson-Payne, because both articles are organised around a reflection on the link between feminism and populism, but also because these three thinkers study feminism through the corpus of populism theory. When we ask ourselves about this relationship between feminism and popu-lism, we find very different positions, ranging from sensible negations of this relation-ship, to the empirical study of their connections (and disconnections), to an interest in constructing a theoretical articulation between the two. And here we find two clearly demarcated positions. On the one hand, those who assume that populism is antipodal to feminism and, on the other, those who find, not only one connection between fem-inism and populism, but the possibility of thinking a feminist people in a populist reg-ister. We see ourselves on the latter path of intellectual work, and we believe Barros, Martínez Prado and Gunnarsson-Payne may also feel great affinity with that proposal.

All of them, together with Graciela Di Marco, are pioneers in their attempts to think the problems of feminism in a populist register. And our last essay, dedicated to femi-nism, is inspired by the path opened by these intellectuals. They are primarily respon-sible for the possibility of weaving the idea of a feminist people from Laclausian coor-dinates. And this idea expresses two different movements absent from the common thesis of comparative politics that perceives this operation as an instrumentalisation, neutralisation or subsuming of feminism by the signifier people or leader. Along those

lines, Di Marco tells us: 'The emergence of the people exceeds feminism, but this is its nodal point' (Di Marco in Di Marco et al, 2019: 51). Though feminism plays a central role in its current articulation, the people cannot be reduced to feminism, nor does this issue blur the boundaries toward a normative evaluation (pure/impure). Instead, there is thought given in political terms to how the articulatory axis shifts with the incursion of feminism onto the scene in the field of the popular.

And, as Barros explores in some of her works, all of this allows for the shaping of *a feminist we*. Along with Martínez Prado, she works on this aspect in the important collective book *Feminismos y populismo del siglo XXI: Frente al patriarcado y al orden neoliberal* (Barros and Martínez Prado, 2019). There, thet uphold the thesis that, in the case of Argentina, there is an articulation between the feminist movement and Kirchnerism through the defense of human rights as a space for inscribing a feminist we that, without the emergence of populist governments, would not have been possible. Gunnarsson-Payne, for her part in that same book, shows us something not always considered when studying — within the sphere of political science — the advance of an antifeminist right, namely, the role of global corporations and gender equality's paradoxical complicity with 'progressive' neoliberalism in creating the conditions for the emergence of extreme rightwing experiences in Europe and Latin America. That is, she shows that the issue of populism (leftwing/rightwing) cannot be disassociated from the more structural issue of neoliberalism and the corporate powers (Di Marco et al, 2019: 47-60). Thus, it seems to us that the path opened by Gunnarsson-Payne for thinking, in a global register, the two conflicting types of feminism (neoliberal feminism and progressive feminism) is very illuminating for understanding the conflicts between populism and a certain neoliberal feminism. Yet, at the same time, as she herself suggests in her article, her research on the affinities (or articulations) that are being produced between 'antiestablishment' discourses and anti-gender discourses has been very important, given that the extreme rightwing is attempting, via those affinities, to identify the discourse of sexual diversity with the elite and to promote a popular reactionary sentiment towards feminism.

Having said that, Barros and Martínez Prado's warning indicates that the path of investigation we have opened runs the risk of once again closing due to the presuppositions that we are acting on, given that we run 'the risk of making a story that ends up hindering the amazement of populist politics and, most importantly, undermines the contingency, arbitrariness and power of the borders that all politics births and that populism par excellence places center stage'. The first thing to doubt is the centrality accorded to care within feminism. The authors ask us what the criteria is for giving such a prominent place to a term that is not always at the center of feminist debates. The

first thing we would like to set forth is that, for us, the problem of care is not the privileged place of the feminist struggle, nor do we intend to assign it such a role in the book. Our decision was not based on normative or evaluative criteria, but on practical or strategic reasons that the occasion itself presented. The reasons why we chose that issue are threefold. First of all, because the issue of care is a crossroads between the popular field and institutions. Both spaces work on this problem and create synergies that translate into public policy. Second, because even if we don't finish exploring it in this book, the problem of care has a long history in the western philosophical tradition. We find it in the entire Greco-Latin legacy beginning with the political/ethical problem of care and knowledge of self. But it is also present in the dawning of modernity through the ambivalence of the cartesian cogito — which means care as well as thought — until its contemporary reactivation in crucial philosophical projects like Heidegger's and Foucault's. We were thus interested in exploring what it could mean for feminism to treat an ancient problem like the issue of care and what its novel aspects could be. And finally, as we argue in the book, because it seems to us that a certain feminist interpretation of care — the one that supplants a Marxist framework for work with an ethical-normative perspective — creates the ontological obstacles to articulating populism and feminism. That was why we felt it was strategic to perform a very Hegelian operation of showing how that which is seen to be antipodal (care and antagonism) can actually be thought dialectically in a single theoretical register. On the other hand, we believe that Barros and Martínez Prado are right when they suggest that we have not finished thinking the most classical Marxist framework of care and its tensions with the populist reading. It seems to us that we should more rigorously explore, not so much the disagreements, but a possible connection between the popular-democratic articulations of populism and the question of means of production that domestic care work presents.

In regards to the ontological dimension of the question that Barros and Martínez Prado's text would seem to pose, we would like to make a clarification, mostly because it gives rise to some criticisms about how to think representation, difference and the ties between feminism and populism that have nothing to do with our own ontological approaches. Instead, they are related to the ontological positions that we ourselves critique over the course of the book. The logic of the Not-All that we use for thinking populism supposes an opening and a heterogeneity but at no time have we equated that with the idea of an absence of representation or a multiple conception of reality. The ontology of multiplicity, where feminist autonomism is situated, is precisely what we have come to problematise. Nor do we propose an opening toward alterity, given that we take a distance from this Levinasian tradition of thinking the political. Our position, instead, consists in assuming that the One gets articulated as Not-All. When we

take up Cristina Fernández de Kirchner's expression '*La Patria es el otro*' ('The home-land is the other'), we do so to show that this 'other' is the heterogeneity that constitutes us. And from there, we think both feminism and populism, which both require clo-sures, borders and attachments. All of them appear in any organisation that needs, at the same time, to define an identity and renegotiate it constantly. Without having to look further, many of the debates about which identities do (or do not) fall within fem-inism can be found there. If this were pure opening and hospitality toward alterity, all of the tensions that characterise the movement would not exist. We do not promote the 'Universalism that is not One' but the Universal (One) that fails. Nor do we think that feminism is marked, in its very constitution, by a differential logic. On the contrary, it seems to us that we are in a context where what we understand by feminism is under-going a series of mutations, and there are transformative questions about why move-ment logic — very particular to the 90s — is no longer sufficient for thinking about what is happening to the signifier feminism. As such, this is where our intellectual wager stands in the book.

The other problem that the authors of the dossier perceive, highlighted by Gunnars-son-Payne and Marchart, has to do with the challenge of thinking the figure of the leader through feminism. We believe that Gunnarsson-Payne's approach (which could serve as a response to Marchart) is very illuminating. Even if she does not put it in these terms, she suggests a tension between the history of feminism and the theoretical inter-pretations of the most hegemonic feminists. And this tension is due, on the one hand, to our many examples of important leaders within feminism, and on the other, to a feminist theory, of an autonomist kind, that wants to measure the strength of the move-ment by how multiple, horizontal and leaderless it is, while also identifying the figure of a leader with the patriarchy. The problem that Gunnarsson-Payne finds in our read-ing, therefore, is not so much about the effort we make to think the figure of the leader in feminism as it is about the type of ontological reading we make of this figure. Ac-cording to her, the Freud-Laclau schema does not work because, on the one hand, there would be a constant instability and confrontation in the production of feminist leadership roles (many of them informal). And, on the other hand, because the libidi-nal bond could be organised by an idea embodied in more than one body. We believe that these two objections are very important for continuing to think the possibilities of a populist feminism. In regards to the first point, we consider that the same approach that Gunnarsson-Payne offers could apply; namely, would it not be the autonomist the-oretical interpretation that equates the libidinal bond with an idea and not with histori-cal individuals who incarnate it and create the libidinal bond around the idea? Perhaps one would have to ask if these interpretations upon use don't end up infiltrating the reading of the praxis. In regards to the second issue, it seems to us that we will have to

wait and see how the figures of feminist leaderships evolve in spheres that escape the pure movement logic. We ask ourselves about the role of figures like Francia Márquez or Cristina Fernández de Kirchner who, even if they are not organised under the assembly logic of a social movement, articulate the popular field through their feminist leadership—though they are not exclusively limited to that figure. Perhaps we are entering a new phase that demands, as we said above, expanding the narrow interpretative frame of social movements and making it extend to more complex, transversal and proactive forms of popular organizing—instituting and instituted—to continue imagining a feminist, anti-classist, antiracist people in an emancipatory register.

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