Introduction
POPULISM AND ITS PARADOX

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Populism is a matter of major concern at this historical juncture. Often associated with rightist and virtually fascistic extremist possibility, populism augurs for many commentators an anti-democratic politics, which harks back to the recent past of nationalist, frequently racist, exclusionism (and other manifold prejudices). Much of the liberal critique of the extremism of populism is premised on an idealist conception of democratic orders. It obscures what Karl Marx recognised as the role of democratic ideology in the shoring up of class power, an aspect which many kinds of populist movements reveal (if often in a manner negating the aims that have initiated their inspiration). Liberal critiques leave unacknowledged the complicity of the dominant political system in reproducing new transmutations of populism, treating the latter as uncontaminated by hegemony.

We stress in this volume that populism has been integral to democratic processes since time immemorial (perhaps in one guise or another in most political orders, not least dictatorships). It is a vital dimension of the political history of Western democracies. Jacques Ranciere (2007) has described democracy (and the populism that he sees as integral to it) as the emergence of the political in its most complete form. From this point of view, populism

can be seen as a logical component of the political, as Ernesto Laclau (2005) has previously asserted. Our discussion here will address certain aspects of this proposition leading into a consideration of the paradoxes in the democratic-political, which populism and the discourses surrounding it expose.

The focus in this volume is largely on the contemporary manifestations of populism in Europe, the Americas and Australia, and mainly in political systems of representative democracy. Populism, of course, is a phenomenon that is apparent worldwide and in situations that are far from politically democratic in the mainly western ideological sense upon which the essays here concentrate. We emphasise that what is widely regarded as populism is shaped by the form and ideological (cultural) configurations of the socio-political orders and processes within which it emerges. In other words, populism is historically and socio-culturally relative although, as we will discuss, there are underlying commonalities.

Populism is difficult to define (see Goddard this volume), such difficulty probably being phenomenologically intrinsic to it. Populism, we hazard, is a political movement usually impelled within ideological contexts where democratic value, frequently egalitarian in spirit, is an ideal if not a reality. A widespread feature, often in the early stages of populism, is that it breaks with controlling or dominant socio-political orders attracting an almost cultic following usually focussed on charismatic leaders. Populism typically operates at the margins of or outside accepted organizations of the political and their ideological rationalities. Such is exacerbated by the cultic quality of much populism (in effect, a key organizational and unifying dynamic) and the fact that populism, by definition, appeals to values held by those who are ordinarily marginal to, oppressed by, or otherwise reduced or silenced in political agency.

Anthropologists might note that populism, especially of the current historical moment, has some affinity with

cargo cults, millenarian and revitalization movements (see Cohn 1970; Worsley 1957).[1] It is significant that these movements occurred at times of crisis in socio-cultural orders that accompanied, for instance, the dispossessions of colonial and imperial conquest in ancient or modern realities, or in the expanding inequalities and social restructurings associated with the emergence of capitalism and establishment of bourgeois orders.

Contemporary populism, which increasingly appears to be global, can be conceived as occurring at a major point of historical crisis and socio-cultural redirection. We contend that its current expressions, while historically and situationally specific, are driven within a potentially major moment of transition and transformation in global political and economic circumstances. In certain respects, populism might also be considered an agency within such processes—a sort of transformative impetus (see Laclau 2005, Comaroff 2011)—an important force in furthering dimensions of the changes, which have given rise to it.

The current emergence of populist movements is entangled with transformations in capitalism that have major global effects. Class contradictions have reached what seem to be an explosively critical point excited in the western hemisphere, especially by the reconfigurations of post-industrialism. This is manifest in the redefinitions and realignments of class relations (including an expansion of what may be regarded as the outclasses, driven, among other things, by chronic unemployment affecting the working and increasingly the middle class). Much of this is effected by neoliberal policies, but perhaps more exactly described in the globalising dynamics of corporatism where the erstwhile potency of sovereign nation-states is being eroded whereby the economic has achieved dominance over the political (see Kapferer and Gold 2018; Kapferer 2018). Key factors in these processes are the technological advances attendant on digitalisation, which might be having historically transformational

consequences that rival the dramatic changes that occurred in Europe following the printing press (the Gutenberg Revolution)—changes which reconfigured the architectures of power leading to modernity and the rise and invention of the 'West'.

These were times of ontical if not ontological import, but current times may prove of far greater global significance, and perhaps ontologically so, as a number of ideologues (specifically with regard to new technologies) are intimating (Kurzweil 2006; Harari 2017). The technological circumstances of contemporary realities are potentially creating a revolution in the nature of human consciousness and how human beings come to perceive themselves, their relations and the contexts and environment of their action. Contemporary populism finds its configuration within such a process. Its force and its very parameters may gain distinction in the new materialities created through technology. Furthermore, current populism, in its myriad dimensions, can be conceived as an index of the dislocations, reformations, and manifold uncertainties in the circumstances of social and political existence currently taking place that, moreover, mark both a continuity and a discontinuity with the populisms of the past.

The remainder of this essay will be directed to outlining further some of the features of contemporary populism. We focus particularly on the paradoxes contained in the rhetoric of its practice. Discussions of populism overwhelmingly concentrate on its reactionary and potentially totalitarian extremism. This is frequently the fact of the matter and is the concern of the essays presented in this volume. Populism as we discuss it is broadly democratic in impetus, it is the voice of the demos so often suppressed or silenced, yet its potential is the subversion of the ideals and values that may give it succour. The circumstances that may give rise to this in contemporary realities comprise our chief concern here.

Populism, Democracy and Its Subversion

Populism is a concept riddled with contradictions. It lies outside or at the margins of accepted or established political ideologies and institutions. The label, populism, is not in the same ideological register as, for example, anarchism, communism, liberalism, conservatism, socialism and so on. As a non-autonomous and co-dependent ideological system (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017), populism emerges in socialist, but also ultra-rightist variations, crosscutting and complicating political identifications, challenging and reconfiguring power, before it eventually reaffirms it.

Obviously, not all contemporary populism is ultimately anti-democratic in its extremism. Some of it, of course, is expressly liberating, for example, Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain. Populism mobilises (or represents) new assemblages of class or ethnic relations, for example, that do not always neatly fit into conventional, established visions of a traditional left/right kind (and the social relations that underpin their appeal). This makes hasty cross-cultural comparisons seem dubious and generalising, for the appeal of populism is deeply rooted in local meaningfulness and context-specific historical consciousness. In other words, populism relies on pre-existing theories of accountability: it curves reformulations of recycled interpretative trajectories—or political theodicies (Herzfeld 1992)—reconfiguring the relationship of ideas about justice, privilege, belonging and citizenship—but also, about well-being (Narotzky and Besnier 2014), and what is 'moral' and 'good' in a given society (Fassin 2011; Kapferer and Gold 2018; Laidlaw 2014; Lambek 2010; Robbins 2013). In its reliance on local meaning, populism addresses a wide spectrum of anthropological concerns (not least, its oft millennialism as already indicated).[2]

Populism captures the public imaginary in certain ways similar to that which Benedict Anderson classically discussed in his study *Imagined Communities* (1983) regarding nationalism—an imaginary whose popular effect has been unmatched by competitive models of political ideology and practice. Contemporary populism indeed has other, often quite explicit, overlaps with nationalism and evokes a similar rhetorical mass appeal, communion of experience and emotional unity overriding the diversities of different cultural and political economically situated circumstances. Perhaps all this is even greater in varieties of populism that are currently being expressed in which the egalitarian individualism at the root of so much nationalism in the west and the post-colonies (see Dumont 1994; Kapferer 1988) has intensified, manifesting as a modality of "dividualism" (see Marriott 1976, Strathern 1988) and expressed to some extent in identity politics.

The populism of today resonates to some extent with the kind of potent energy present in the French Revolution, in which the national and revolutionary pride of the People, *Le Peuple*—a reified imagined community—was harnessed to the transformational work of the Napoleonic state. Nationalism in Europe and later in imperialised colonial territories was vital to the formation of new political orders, extolling sentiments of freedom from erstwhile chains of elite and often foreign control. As such, nationalism emerged as a populist event that heralded the start of the democratic age of Western modernity: the pressure towards democracy as the legitimation of political authority, a *telos* in a self-propagating linear hierarchy.

We note here, that Anderson (1983) in his discussion of nationalism made great play of the concept of print capitalism. The populism of the current moment is very much influenced by visual media (see also, Moffitt 2016: 88–94) and has benefited from the media's failure to control misinformation (Freedman 2018). It is a populism intensified in its digitalisation. This enables a far greater mass outreach

than that of print and more direct appeal to the demos (it bypasses, for example, the differentiation and hierarchy of education). Digitalisation facilitates an individualisation, a personalisation, even intrusion into the very self of individuals—the mobile phone, the institutionalisation of the selfie—while facilitating a collectivising effect, a unity of experience (despite the differentiated individuated nature of such experience). If print capitalism was vital in the nationalisms of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the digitalisation of information (legible and visual), and its capacity to reach almost anywhere and everyone, is a critical driver of contemporary populism. Indeed, cyberspace as a contemporary arena for the expression of populist sentiments is a facilitator for movements of populism outside the orders of control of the recent past.

The Anti-Democratic Paradox

The populism of the present historical conjuncture, broadly recognised as such, is extensively condemned for its anti-democratic tension. Its paradox derives from the fact that in many aspects it is the spirit of the demos working against the socio-political hierarchies within which it is routinely submerged and controlled. As Jacques Ranciere (2007) and others stress (see Laclau 2005; Kapferer 2017; Stavrakakis 2014) populism displays what is at the root of democracy and expresses the potency of the demos. Its force is most intense at that prime democratic moment, at the time of democratic political elections—ideally the expression of free, uncoerced, individual decision, in which all—regardless of power, status, wealth—are placed in equal relation. It is at this time that the democratic system is, it could be said, democratically reborn, but simultaneously put at high risk.

Populism, as it is generally grasped, is looked at with suspicion, we suggest, because it is highly vulnerable

to forces that are potentially opposed to the system of democracy. The distinction of populism, and perhaps its singular distinguishing feature, is that it emerges largely from the *outside* of the instituted democratic system (or its margins) with the exception of the fundamental act of democracy at the election moment. This is underscored by the fact that those socio-political movements described to be populist are radically antagonistic to the political system in which they are spawned. The leaders of such movements often are rules unto themselves: they defy the constraints of the political parties and even social groups to which they may have been associated.

The populist leader is frequently typified as a person external to or in some way marginal to the socio-political order and its ruling groups. The charisma with which he is invested often derives from this fact. Moreover, the populist leader has many of the characteristics of a symbolic type (see Handelman 1980; Handelman and Kapferer 1980; Kapferer 1983; Klapp 1968) in that by means of performative style the populist demagogue achieves the heightened capacity of being able to tie together a heterogeneity of situated experience, opinion, that from various standpoints might otherwise appear contradictory. Symbolic types are generally internally contradictory—ritual clowns as Don Handelman demonstrates (see too Kapferer 1983); their performative play of contradiction in gesture and word, their vital dynamic for the ordering of the contexts whose diversity achieves a coherence or semblance of unity through the dynamic of contradiction. We suggest that populist demagogues have this ritual dynamic. Donald Trump epitomises it, as in a different way does Boris Johnson's ongoing populist buffoonery in the UK context of Brexit. Undoubtedly figures like Trump, and perhaps Johnson, gain added force in a contemporary media driven world where performance style has what J.L. Austin might note as enhanced constitutive performative force.

In rhetoric and in the style of political performance the populist leader—as a stereotypical caricature—is frequently an outsider and invested with charisma as an outsider: who in rhetoric and performance style crosses the boundaries of the system, can mould to any situation and embody its sentiments, capture and bring into some semblance of unity the diversities of experience that the democratic system as instituted does not meet or in itself appear to contradict. This was a potency that Trump was able to develop, harness and express. It is a potency that he shares with many other ostensibly populist leaders from ancient times to the present, apparent in such figures as Alcibiades and the Gracchi, through to this day. In the historical tradition of the US, the forces of populism have been long in play—perhaps fomented in the radical egalitarian individualism of its political formation as Alexis de Tocqueville describes in *Democracy in America.*

Much of the paradox of populism—its potential for the subversion of democratic systems and its reliance upon the very system it attempts to subvert—lies in its typical development outside the system (including such aspects as instituted political parties), and in its loose organisation usually around a charismatic leader. We should underline that charisma, in Weberian terms, is given to the leader by the audience, rather than already being psychologically given to the leader. From its marginal position, populism, in its very dynamic building, coalesces sentiments that are antagonistic to the socio-political order of the democratic system as it has historically developed. Inherently oppositional to the system, it is open to being the ground for the emergence of anti-democratic forces—especially right wing extremism.

The further anti-democratic paradox and potential is in the nature of its leadership. A populist leader is likely to tend to autocracy and to an aggrandisement of the self, so that he/she/they *becomes* the social movement, its icon. Here is the root of dictatorship emergent from the

ground of democracy that, furthermore, is already oriented against the democratic system in relation to which it becomes defined. Thus, we see the formation of fascism, especially Nazism, in the recent past and perhaps the totalitarian possibility of some right wing populism at the present (cf. Mudde 2007; Stavrakakis *et al* 2017b).

What is more fascinating to note, however, is the long-established ability of populism to move from the margins of the political establishment to its very core—a further facet of the paradox inherent in populism. In fact, most populist movements achieve political legitimisation over time through association with the political systems they have previously defied. Two years after its electoral success, Brexit populism has become embedded in UK state policies and government; it is now hard to separate populist political expediencies from action taken to ameliorate the consequences of Britain's EU exit. In the past, successful left-leaning populist movements, such as those led by Andreas Papandreou in Greece, or Eva Perón in Argentina, acquired, in time, systemic political resonances and generated their own (non-strictly-populist) political elites. As with most resistance movements, populist confrontations with conventional politics are not decontaminated from power (Gledhill 1994, 2012; Ortner 1995; Theodossopoulos 2015). In fact, the ease and speed with which victorious populist movements become integrated in dominant political structures substantiates our initial statement: that populism, despite its ephemeral marginality, is integral to dominant, Western visions of democracy.

The People of Populism

The idea of 'the people' in populism is problematic. It is a totalising all-incorporating concept which is simultaneously open to divisive, sectionalising and exclusivist use. 'The people', Giorgio Agamben (1998) argues, is open

to all-encompassing, as well as discriminating exclusivist usage. His approach introduces a contrast—or better, an oscillating movement—between a vision of inclusive political existence (the People with a capital P) and vulnerability (the people with a lower-case p, the excluded, those seen by power-holders as the poor and the needy).

There are infinite possibilities for conceptualising the people. For 'the people'—in singular form—does not really exist, as Rancière (2016) maintains: there are only figures of the people, reconfigured by privileging different criteria. Which prompts us to argue that the notion of 'the people', as reconstituted by populism, is a totalising (all-encompassing)—yet flexible and porous—category: a singularity within which heterogeneity is absorbed and anonymised. Despite its heavy reliance on pre-existing variants of national consciousness, the idea of 'the people' in populism transcends the state to adopt a potentially revisionist position from the outside. 'The people', in populist rhetoric, is morally endowed to question state authority (during an electoral campaign), and pliable enough to engulf state power (after electoral success) or de-potentiate it.

In its manipulable flexibility, the idea of the people is remarkably hollow, an observation that has some parallel with classic anthropological theories of ethnicity; for example, Clyde Mitchell's (1956) discussion of categorical relations on the Zambian Copperbelt, and later, Edwin Ardener's (1989) work, on hollow categories. In these analyses, categories of ethnic identity[3] are fluid, open to shift in content and relative to context.[4] The idea of the People (operating in a manner similar to the categorical relations that both Mitchell and Ardener discuss) is open to the incorporation of diverse and continually changing meaning.

A crucial feature of the concept 'the People' is that in most usage it is a flat, effectively egalitarian term. This was its sense (*le Peuple*) in the French Revolution and

persists in ideological usage. It refers to the body of the mass as an all-encompassing category assumed to be or presented as being united in agreement. The idea of the People has much similarity with the imagined community of the nation in Benedict Anderson's analysis of nationalism, evocative of similar and perhaps greater evocative power than that of the nation (it has de-territorialising and re-territorialising potential in a Deleuzian sense). Trump and the Brexiteers redoubled the potency of their populist appeal as an instrument for nationalistic re-territorialisation.

What is important to note here is that ideas about the people—as much as ethnic categories—are constructed by both insiders and (more or less privileged) outsiders. For example, the ascription of the label 'populist' is rarely a choice of the populists themselves (see Canovan 1981; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017: 2)—and it is often used pejoratively to marginalise (Stavrakakis 2017; Stavrakakis *et al* 2017a). In most cases, populism is ascribed to categories of people, without the people's consent. As a discriminating label, the adjective 'populist' reveals more about the prejudice of its author, than the qualities of its intended target: populism, the label, operates in a world of hierarchies. Inequality seems to be antecedent, as much as the awareness of inequality. Without awareness of inequality, there would be no populist dynamic, no people upon which to found populist movements—or, in Laclau's terms, no demands generating equivalent chains.

Political awareness is fundamental for the constitution of the people in populism; which provides us with another reminder that the people of populism are not blind, passive and mindless automatons. Here we see scope for optimistic reflections, such as that populism does not have to be—as it has been mostly so far—a pejorative label ascribed by Others; for example, those who exclude themselves from 'the people' (with a lower case p, in

Agamben's terms). Chantal Mouffe has recently made the empowering proposition that our ideas of the people can be actively and consciously reconstituted to support progressive versions of populism—oriented towards the 'defence of equality and social justice'—in contradistinction to right wing and xenophobic variants (Mouffe 2016a: 2, 2016b, 2018). Such forward looking and empowering visions, we would like to add, come with the realisation that every categorical inclusion—however benign—draws yet another boundary of exclusion. The critical issue for every critical analysis of populism remains: who is the ultimate author of the notion of the people? And to what degree do 'the people' participate in it?

Populism and Anthropology

The limited participation of anthropology in wider interdisciplinary discussions about populism has been noticeable, especially given anthropology's major concern in recent years with the marginalised and oppressed: a direction that took form in the 1960s especially in reaction to what many had seen as its colonial complicity. Patterns of resistance such as the upsurge of dominated populations against controlling authoritarian external power—colonialism and imperialism particularly, anti-witchcraft movements, cargo cults, and so on—which we consider have some affinity to contemporary populism, suggest the potential of an anthropological understanding.

Anthropologists were influential in an early discussion of populism held at LSE in 1967. Ernest Gellner edited the book that came out of this meeting—*Populism: its meanings and national characteristics* (Ionescu and Gellner 1969)—which had a wider interdisciplinary impact. The leading anthropological voice in that volume was Peter Worsley (1969) who, interestingly, had made a major contribution to the understanding of Melanesian

cargo cults as anti-colonial resistance. He advocated a comparative and depathologising approach contra to that which commanded opinion and which in many ways still does. Instead of trying to demarcate populism's ideological content—which is variable—Worsley conceptualised populism as 'a dimension of political culture', manifested distinctly in different geopolitical and cultural contexts (1969: 245). This proposition encouraged a departure from defining populism in terms of substantive and unchanging organisational characteristics (Goddard, this volume)—a direction that was liberating for the interdisciplinary scholarship on populism (Moffitt 2016: 15).

Worsley's recognition of populism's weak ideological content is still evident—although greatly unacknowledged—in contemporary approaches followed by political theorists, such as, for example, Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser's (2017) emphasis on the thin ideological constitution of populism, which is representative of a widely accepted definition of populism in political science (Stavrakakis and Jager 2017). The influence of Worsley's insights have been most evident in the seminal study of Laclau (2005), whose work generally asked for a revision of classical Marxist approaches that were over-determined (in his opinion) by the specific historical experience of the industrial north of England. Laclau (1979, 2005) stressed the significance of different histories and ideologies (or cultural factors) in the formation of populist politics opening towards a more historical and culturally inflected understanding of class dynamics. Laclau, as a political theorist, was an advocate of (at least) three kinds of approach that can be described as anthropological: (1) the rejection of the ethical denigration of populism as representative of an inferior mentality; (2) the recognition of populism as a constant dimension of political life, not merely a secondary—'clumsy', somewhat unorthodox—type of politics; and (3) the impossibility of defining populism in terms of static, universal characteristics. This

last point, which we trace directly to Worsley (1969), sub-stantiated Laclau's (2005) turn towards the 'context' of populist reason, as opposed to its ontic 'content'.

There were many years until we saw comparative anthropological work focusing on populism explicitly as a main theoretical theme—although admittedly anthro-pologists kept on returning to populism in the context of nuanced accounts of the phenomenon in specific regions. In Latin America, for example, attention was given to the generation and erosion of national-popular visions and their influence on identity politics (Hale 1997) or the relationship of indigenous groups with the state through national allegiances and populist-*indigenismo* (de la Peña 1992, 2005). John Gledhill (1994) has underlined the uneasy populist combination of middle class leadership and working class representation from below, expanding his comparative analysis—one of the few that recognises populism as an important concept for anthropological analysis—from Latin American to Africa. Gledhill's per-spective indicates that there is no single comprehensive model for explaining class contradictions in populism, which, in turn, accentuates the value of historically informed anthropological engagements (see Gledhill and Goddard contributions to this volume). The anthropology of India has provided us with additional (and culturally embedded) reflections on populism (see Banerjee 2014; Corbridge and Harriss 2000; Hansen 1999). Populism here, is once more considered within broader discussions, but with a frequency that competes with Latin America and Europe.

During the last decade we have seen increased anthro-pological interest in European populism. This is partly inspired by new manifestations of the extreme right and fascism in Europe more broadly, which anthropolo-gists have tried to tackle with their usual attention to contextual complexity (see for example, Gingrich and Banks 2006; Holmes 2000). In a volume which explicitly

addresses populism, Don Kalb and Gábor Halmai (2011) pay systematic and comparative attention to local disenfranchisement and discontent with national elites and transnational neoliberalism. The ethnography-rich accounts in that volume shed light on hidden histories of dispossession, unemployment, and class alienation (see Vetta 2011; Halmai 2011; Petrovici 2011), resonating with a broader anthropological refocusing on subaltern resentment towards global cosmopolitics in the first decade of the new millennium (see Comaroff and Comaroff 2001; Theodossopoulos and Kirtsoglou 2010).

Another distinguished feature in the direction taken by the volume edited by Kalb and Halmai (2011) is a strong interest in class, especially the working class, which comes with two analytical advantages: (a) it adds rationalising context to the elitist denigration of working class populism and (b) sheds further interpretative light on populist opposition to privileged cosmopolitanism, liberalism and foreign migrants (see Kalb 2011; see also Kalb 2009). We congratulate this renewed anthropological attention on class[5], but we are also sceptical about the identification of populism with the working class (in particular) and their tendency to underestimate the radical disjunctions of the present—for example, by constraining their analysis to terms over-determined by an earlier historical and material era. A narrow identification of populism with the working class may pave the way for the pathologisation of both populism and the working class. In contrast, recent political developments make visible populism's implication with the middle class. We are now in a position to know, for example, that the British middle class has not been immune to Brexitpopulism (Bhambra 2017; Dorling 2016; Flemmen and Savage 2017).

Adopting a wider analytical scope than most recent anthropological accounts, Jean Comaroff (2009) has recently engaged with the contradictions of populism in a brief article that was later expanded and republished

(Comaroff 2011). Her position is strongly inspired by Laclau, especially in acknowledging the emancipatory potential of populism. 'A certain populist radicalism', she argues, 'is necessary, if not sufficient condition of mass transformative movements' (Comaroff 2009: 3). Yet, at the same time, Comaroff feels compelled to outline some of the limitations of populism: its inability to effect sustained social change, its homogenisation of socio-cultural difference and complexity. Contemporary populism, she adds, 'seems to take on particularly disquieting features' (2011: 103), a reflection that anticipated the recent increase of xenophobic populism.

Generally, Comaroff stands ambivalent in regard to her double-edged recognition that populism, in its late modern form, has a positive, radically transformative dimension, but also, reinforces essentialism, stereotype, and discriminatory dualisms. Writing at the end of the first decade of this century, she indirectly predicted what we understand today as Trumpism or Brexitism and its relationship with the anger of everyday citizens towards financial elites and transnational corporatism (cf. Comaroff and Comaroff 2001). Such a recognition of people's disillusionment with politics is fully contemporary and takes us face to face with a dilemma we address in this book: what can be regarded as the reactive possibility of populism and its complicity in processes that may destroy the very democratic potential that gives populism movements their opportunity.

Such observations lead us back to the main contradiction we aim to highlight in this volume: populism is pervasive and integral to contemporary, representational democratic systems, despite its superficial opposition to the dominant political establishment. The contradiction is not confined necessarily in populism as such. We stress Laclau's position of the importance of placing populist movements in their historical and socio-cultural contexts. The upsurge of intense and widespread movements of populism which

attack the status quo—and are at the current moment glob-ally widespread with particular intensities, such as Trump and Brexit—reflects what Zizek and others have referred to as a general cynicism towards established political orders, that in many respects (as Marx said long ago) are largely democratic in name only. In the understanding we advance here populism refracts a global crisis. It is an effect rather than a cause, an implication in Comaroff that we would take issue with. Furthermore, what populist movements become ideologically is not within populism as such, but in the orientations that are set in the encompassing and locally relevant socio-cultural and political field.

We suggest, in addition, that the reactionary dimen-sions of much populism as it develops (often taking more rigid form) is a consequence of its very lack of organisational and ideological systematicity, upon which depends its emergence as a space for the expression of the People. Hardt and Negri (2017) have argued that all social movements—however inchoate their beginnings—demand organisation for direction. In the socio-political fields of populism's emergence (and certainly in contem-porary times) there is a plethora of small extremist groups who are defined in their extremism as being outside the very system that they oppose. It is often such groups which position themselves in such a way to capture the movement that has burst virtually spontaneously onto the political scene. This was the case with the French Revolu-tion, later with the Russian Revolution, and certainly with the rise of fascism and Nazism in Europe. It is this feature of the political field in which populism movements spring to life that is a potent factor in swinging such movements in an anti-democratic direction. The paradox of popu-lism is largely contained in its very asystemacity and its capture by groups that have pre-existed its contemporary manifestations (e.g. Golden Dawn, in Greece).

In the last year, and as a consequence of Brexit and Trump's electoral victories, anthropology has started

responding to the interpretative and analytical challenges set by populism. Indicative examples represent forums in two of the leading European and North American anthropology journals: one on the Brexit referendum in *Social Anthropology* (see Green et al. 2016) and a second on Brexit and Trumpism in *American Ethnologist* (see Edwards et al. 2017). These two sets of spontaneous and critical anthropological reflection point at the disillusionment of social groups, but also the complex social demography of populist vote, which, as Gusterson (2017) underlines, includes not only blue-collar workers, but also the petty bourgeoisie. In a similar critical spirit, Kapferer (2017) and Pina-Cabral (2017) have recently discussed some of the paradoxes of contemporary populism in two short articles: the former reflecting on its democratic base and subversive nature, while the latter on its historicity and ontogenetic dimension (which contributes to ideas about personhood and 'the people').

Analytical Directions

The recent interventions we discussed above indicate a renewed anthropological interest on populism, which follows two interrelated directions. The first, attempts to provide context and historical depth, departing from the presentism of many media accounts and political commentary. Good examples represent the chapters by John Gledhill, Victoria Goddard, Melinda Hinkson and Jon Altman in this volume. Their analyses combine the strength of a diachronic perspective with the nuanced understandings of context specific referents and meaningfulness. For example, Gledhill's contribution provides scope for appreciating how populist variants have a proclivity to recycle themselves, but also, how neoliberal regimes are minimally affected by economic crises. His account of Brazilian populism examines left and moderately-left

populist politics, outlining a tradition that started with Getúlic Vargas in the 1930s and continues to the present with Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (Gledhill this volume). John Gledhill, here, provides us with valuable context to understand more recent political developments in Brazil that took place while he was writing his chapter.

Goddard's analysis of populism in Argentina echoes an anti-pathologising commitment inspired by Laclau. She recognises the transformative and emancipatory opportunities, but also the constraints, ambivalences and 'traps' engendered by populist politics. Noticeably, Argentina represents a 'classic' context for thinking about populism, as is evident in different incarnations of Peronism, from the 1940s to the present. Goddard's diachronic perspective identifies a distinctive gender dimension, encapsulated by two emblematic leaders: Eva Perón and Christina Fernández de Kirchner, who have introduced a new model of ethic of care, community and femininity in Argentinian politics. Goddard notes that Argentinian populism—as reflected in its leadership, but also in local participation—has offered opportunities for change that have been 'highly gendered'. Although such opportunities addressed practical gender needs, Goddard adds, they have not challenged the balance of power in private or public life.

Gledhill and Goddard entertain the possibility that populism may have a certain emancipatory potential, but they also recognise the limitations, contradictions and overall persistence of neoliberalism or gender inequality. Hinkson and Altman's account (in this volume) shares a similarly critical (and cautious) predisposition towards recurring populist patterns in Australian politics. The focus of their analysis are long-standing debates about the position of Indigenous people—their difference or sameness, as categories that may deprive rights or homogenise—in relation to the Australian constitution. Hinkson and Altman trace the effects of popular and populists' ideas regarding Indigenous Australia in the last 50 years: from the 1967 constitutional referendum to the

2007 Northern Territory Intervention and the contemporary campaign for constitutional recognition and reincorporation. The sequence of these politics provides scope to recognise how the idea of 'the people' oscillates between assimilating inclusion and discriminatory exclusion, or the superfluous neoliberal suspension of racial discrimination and the verification of embarrassing racism (*a la* Pauline Hanson).

As we have seen so far, anthropological accounts that examine recurrent and socially emplaced manifestations of populism, over a long period of time, tend to highlight the contradictory complexity that emerges from the observation that not all versions of populism are equally reductionist or politically conservative. This realisation encourages caution against homogenising generalisations, opening a window for acknowledging—what Goddard (this volume) describes as—the 'unintended' and potentially (or partially) emancipatory consequences of particular popular policies, but also the subtle nuances that separate popular from populist political campaigns (see Hinkson and Altman).

There is a second emerging anthropological direction which rejects populism independently of its left or right orientation. For example, Susana Narotzky (in this volume) forcefully denunciates populism variants—of all kinds—as unsatisfactory responses to more encompassing predicaments: the constraining, hierarchical effects of illiberal capitalism and the concomitant disillusionment of local actors with the promise of Enlightenment liberal democracy. Narotzky uses the notion of 'illiberal capitalism' to refer—not merely to totalitarian capitalist regimes—but to all capitalist manifestations: capitalism is inherently illiberal for it structures inequality, privilege, and dependency. Narotzky prefers to move beyond the illusionary dilemma of choosing *either* between an inclusive pluralist liberalism *or* an exclusionary (left or right) populism. Populism, much like liberalism, seems to reproduce hierarchies of deservingness, competitive versions of either liberal or populist Darwinism.

Michael Herzfeld also rejects populism as a misleading and socially unjust political project. To expose its devious nature, he unravels the way populism works and employs one of his favourite concepts, 'cultural intimacy', the mutual self-recognition of shared familiarity, embarrassment and pride in contexts of insideness protected from outsiders (Herzfeld 1997). Cultural intimacy, Herzfeld reminds us, also includes prejudice, vulgarity, sexism and racism, which populism manipulates and turns to a political strategy—the deployment of embarrassing secrets disguised as popular attitudes or cultural traits, 'what everyone does and knows about'. As such, populism is for Herzfeld (this volume) a 'cynical imitation of genuinely popular politics', a 'trap' that appeals on cultural intimacy to deceive the disenfranchised, who are not the beneficiaries of populist politics.

Although Narotzky and Herzfeld see populism as unredeemable, their concluding considerations are not fundamentally incompatible with those of Gledhill, Goddard, Hinkson and Altman who focus on the historically informed complexity and contradictions between left and right, exclusivist or inclusionary populist narratives. The common ground between the two directions emerges from an anthropological concern for locally emplaced, less privileged citizens, whose experiences—so far—do not seem to indicate that populism can radically (and substantially) challenge existing social, economic, and gender disparities. Despite populism's anti-elitist intentions, the elites—regional, national, populist or antipopulist—do not appear to suffer significantly under populist regimes, and contribute very little, as Gledhill implies, to resolving the existing inequalities.

Is Populism Really Redeemable?

As we have seen so far, some of the contributors to this volume see populism as unredeemable, while others critically entertain the possibility that populism—especially

left-leaning populist initiatives—may bring about some transformative change. The latter position, which has an explicit Laclauian echo, has been developed more recently to a political proposition by Chantal Mouffe (2016a, 2016b, 2018). She puts forward an empowering vision for a reconstituted populism, infused with an inclusionary and progressive ideology that can serve as an antidote to conservative and explicitly racist populist narratives. Mouffe's vision is more pragmatic than utopian, and highlights the necessity for critical self-consciousness, which Jean Comaroff (2011: 101) sees as a necessary ingredient of effective and sustainable political mobilisation.

Is it possible to redeem populism by repackaging its appeal within a pragmatic and conscious anti-racist, anti-neoliberal strategy? Would such an honest and transparent experiment make the reductions and totalising dimensions of populism disappear? There are some foreseeable difficulties obstructing the realisation of such an empowering possibility. The first is inherent in the power (and authorship) of constructing such a unified popular vision. Who will control, for example, the culturally intimate-*cum*-embarrassing 'secrets'—see Herzfeld (this volume)—that define inclusion and exclusion? However progressive or anti-racist, a reconstituted populism will undoubtedly operate within the boundaries of a certain conception of the 'people' that will inevitably privilege some and exclude other communities. How such a progressive and conscious populism can battle the competitive antagonism—see Narotzky (this volume)—that burdens pluralistic democracy?

The opportunities engendered by envisioning the generation of a conscious, left wing populism are limitless, yet ironically limited by populism's paradoxical nature. We have already argued that populism stands ambivalent in its relationship with contemporary democratic systems: it engages with established politics from an exterior position, which is simultaneously integral to the propagation

and structure of democratic governance. We are thus compelled to argue that, as a phenomenon deeply implicated with power, populism cannot exist in a universe isolated from hegemonic influences, despite its attempts (or resolution) to battle the political establishment. Hence, every conscious-*cum*-progressive populist stance will, unavoidably, entail a certain degree of compromise: a strategic decision to engage in a critical dialectic with local meaning that is structured—to a greater or smaller degree—by the widespread tentacles of neoliberalism. In this respect, the shortcomings of developing a conscious left wing populism—conceived as a tactic of subversion—may very well outweigh its benefits. Populism always comes at a risk.

Conclusion

We have built our analysis on the preposition that populism is integral to contemporary democratic systems of state governance. Every politico-ideological position can potentially embrace a certain degree of populism, from which we cannot absolve even the most enlightened leaders (or organic intellectuals). For politicians hide within themselves a poplar in the making. Where there has been a wise Pericles, we can also find a populist Alcibiades. We would like to subvert our metaphor by underlining that populism can corrupt (or empower) Pericles himself! Here, Pericles stands for the epitome of the prudent democratic politician, a myth of Western imagination. What Western historical consciousness has chosen to forget is that Pericles' Athenian democracy—much as any contemporary empire—was premised on the disempowerment of others: slaves, women, but also less powerful allies. Alcibiades—representing the dark, treacherous face of populism—has received the blame for the imperfections of democracy—as this has been idealised and

appropriated in the West. The very distinction between Pericles and Alcibiades—the populist and non-populist leader, reduced in a black and white contrast—is in itself an ideological caricature.

Anthropology seems to be ready to confront the topic of populism—in all its contradictions—drawing from a long repository of analytical thinking regarding informal, non-hegemonic politics. Some particular insights seem to have long established anthropological roots and re-emerge: for example, the idea that the social *contexts* of populism can reveal more than its ideological *content*; or the realisation that the ethical condemnation of populism has pathologising connotations (see Laclau 2005; Worsley 1969). A focus on *context* and *local rationality* represents a long-established orientation in social anthropology, grounded on the commitment to defend the sense-making practices of local social actors. It can be traced back to classic contributions—such as Evans-Pritchard (1937) or Lévi-Strauss (1962)—but also more contemporary anthropological scholarship, for example that which analyses the situational logic of conspiracy theory (see Brown and Theodossopoulos 2000; Marcus 1999; Pelkmans and Machold 2011; Sanders and West 2003).

Yet, the contemporary re-emergence of national(ist) populisms is not a conspiracy, but a social reality with deep roots in established politics, but also in particular (culturally situated) logics of accountability. We may here constructively reverse the causality of Laclau's position: populism is not itself the logic of the political, but derives its logic from sets of pre-existing historical and political consciousness: in fact, it can be seen as a pastiche of part-political-logics, locally relevant, generalising, and set in opposition to particular establishments. That the authoritarian populism (from the far right) is exclusionary and narrowly dependent upon nationalism (see Gingrich and Banks 2006; Kalb and Halmai 2011) is an alarming condition that deserves urgent attention and critique, as much

as the ambiguous role of political leaders and their heavy or light reliance on populism. But the reverse proposition, that populism can be a vehicle of transformative change, suffers, in turn, from the reductionist limitations propagated by populist homogenisations (see Comaroff 2009, 2011).

We are left with Chantal Mouffe's (2018) optimistic vision: if we cannot fight populism—which, as we argued, is integral to the perpetuation of contemporary democratic systems—can we use it for rallying support for a left oriented, non-exclusionary project? For start, a conscious, progressive populist stance would need to acknowledge and confront its own implications with the dominant politico-economic order. The utopian vision of non-authoritarian populism—employed as a subversive tactic against neoliberalism—is empowering, yet deeply immersed in the rationalisations of the very establishment it tries to defy. This is, after all, the paradox of populism: it threatens to eat its own children, again and again. The inequalities that inspire its appeal are diffused, in time, through the structuring of new inequalities. Populism is cyclical and recurring, exterior but also central to the management of (so called) democratic power.

It is the paradoxical nature of populism—self-defeating, constraining, reductive, yet ephemerally oppositional—that has attracted our interest in populism in this volume, along with the realisation that the phenomenon deserves more analytic attention. This must divert, we suggest, from typologies or official party rhetoric, to embrace instead populism's dependence on historical and national imagination. The latter has something to tell about populism's reception: its local appeal in the periphery of power. Anthropologists, for sure, can make a contribution to this contextualising project by making visible the sense-making logics which emerge from local social disparities (see Kalb and Halmai 2011) or turning the lens of analysis

on the reception of populism in intimate cultural contexts (Herzfeld 1997, this volume), instead of the official populist party discourse. The continuous re-emergence of populism in the contemporary moment, demonstrates that the 'people' (however defined) are less concerned with the obvious contradictions of populism, but seriously troubled about the consolidation of economic and political power. We suggest that we trace the meaningfulness and appeal of populism in this direction.

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Notes

1. Both Norman Cohn (1970), for Europe, and Worsley (1957) for the colonial Pacific, examined the millennial cultic religious movements that were at the root of modern populist political movements of various ideological persuasions. Peter Worsley's (1969) seminal article for the study of contemporary populism clearly found much of its inspiration in his famous work on cargo cults. In *The Trumpet Shall Sound,* Worsley (1957) saw the cargo movements as a cultic and irrational forerunner to what he conceived as the more rational development of modern democratic politics in the Pacific cases—freed of the oppressive bonds of colonialism.

2. In numerous cultures, anthropologists would argue, the word denoting 'the people' is the same (or synonymous) with the nation, the ethnic group, or the condition of being human: the ethnonym is also the word for 'human', 'the person' and the moral community. For example, Amerindian ethnonyms such as Panará (Ewart 2013), Urarina (Walker 2013), Emberá (Theodossopoulos 2016) do not merely denote an ethnic group, but also the human being, person, autonomous individual (resonating with the Greek *anthropos*), and people (resonating with the Latin *populus*). This complexity, which remains largely uncharted so far, provides ample space for polysemy and semantic manipulation–including empty signifiers (Laclau 2005)—that unite the 'people' with the notions of humanity, the nation, and sovereignty (see Canovan 2005).

3. Ethnicity here is seen as an open category.

4. See Kapferer (1995) for an application of Mitchell's insights on the potency of categorical relations.

5. For another valuable recent contribution, see also Carrier and Kalb (2015).

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