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## Nationalpopulism, Right and Left: The Social-National Synthesis Today.

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*For most of the postwar period the idea of merging socialist (or popular) and nationalist elements was marginal in Europe. But in the last two decades we have been witnessing a new form of social-national synthesis: nationalpopulism. This article examines this resurgence by comparing right-wing nationalpopulism and left-wing nationalpopulism. In order to do so, it focuses on four European countries: France, Italy, Greece and Spain. While there are both policy and discursive similarities between these two forms of nationalpopulism, this article argues that they are fundamentally different and belong to antagonistic ideological factions. Keywords: populism, nationalism, Marine Le Pen, Matteo Salvini, Syriza, Podemos.*

### *Introduction*

'Populism' is undoubtedly one of today's most disputed political terms. The proliferation of literature on the topic has led to a semantic inflation that threatens the possibility of reaching an operative definition. Its overuse in the mass media, as well as the fact that it is generally employed in an illocutionary, rather than descriptive, way only adds to the problem. Moreover, the different forms of populism are often mistaken for one another, causing a problematic assumption of homogeneity.

This paper does not intend to contribute to the blossoming literature on generic populism. It will instead examine a variant of populism, nationalpopulism, in its two main forms, by focusing on the European context. Analyzing the differences between right-wing nationalpopulism (RWNP) and left-wing nationalpopulism (LWNP) requires a concrete framework, one that allows an understanding of these phenomena in depth instead of simply analyzing their surface features. In order to conduct such examination, this work will employ the theory of populism developed by the Essex School of Discourse Analysis (ESDA) in the last four decades.

Populism will thus be understood as "a way of constructing the political" (Laclau 2005), rather than as a political style (Moffitt 2016), a thin-centered ideology (Stanley 2008; Mudde 2014) or a political tactic (Weyland 2001). In order to examine the different faces of nationalpopulism, this work will thus go beyond ideational and functionalist approaches by engaging in a discourse analysis as understood by David Howarth (2013) and other members of the ESDA. Of course, the commitment to associate nationalism and left-wing, or social demands, is far from being a historical novelty. What is here referred to as the first social-national synthesis took place between the end of the nineteenth century and the second half of the twentieth century, when both left-wing and right-wing forces sought either to use the

power of nationalism for social purposes or to add social and popular elements to their nationalist projects (Sternhell 1994, 6). What we have been witnessing in the last two decades, in a context of neoliberal globalization, is the emergence of a second social-national synthesis in Europe, although this time in the form of an amalgamation of post-1945 nationalism with a non-revolutionary type of populism.

Nationalpopulist discourses will be considered as contemporary phenomena, rather than as the return of any concrete political tendency. Yet referring to past attempts to creating a social-national or popular-national synthesis can be valuable. This paper will regard them as proof of a recurrent practice within modern societies that now takes new historical forms. Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès or Enrico Corradini therefore play the same role here that Joseph de Maistre could have in an essay on fascism or François-Noël Babeuf in an account of communism, that is, not as part of the object of study but as historical precedents that can help us to understand it.

Both RWNP and LWNP are here considered forms of nationalism. It is certainly not the first time that nationalism emerges as a product of the hybridization between national consciousness and a concrete political tendency (Álvarez Junco 2017). After all, nationalism has been combined with ideals of liberty against absolute monarchs both in America and Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, such as the democratic struggles during the 1848 revolutions, with reactionary and imperialist goals between the nineteenth century and the fascist era, with socialism in the USSR under Stalin's regime, as well as in Cuba, Yugoslavia, and China, with anti-colonial movements in Asia and Africa, and with religious affiliations in countries like Iran and Israel. This is why Anthony D. Smith describes nationalism as a movement "with chameleon-like adaptability" (Smith 1998, 44).

This paper is divided in two sections following the section on methodological clarifications. The first explores RWNP by analyzing a series of contemporary political discourses. It will mainly focus on two European countries that have been witness to the rise of right-wing populist parties in the last decade: Italy and France. The second part examines LWNP by focusing on two European nations which are at the origin of the two most successful left-wing populist parties of the continent: Spain and Greece. This case selection allows for an exploration of the differences between the two forms of European nationalpopulism in heterogeneous contexts.

*Methodology: the Essex School of Discourse Analysis*

This article employs the theory of populism formulated by the Essex School of Discourse Analysis since the eighties as its framework. Its key constituents are Ernesto Laclau (the author of *On Populist Reason*), Chantal Mouffe (co-author of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*), David Howarth, Aletta J. Norval, Yannis Stavrakakis (editors of *Discourse Theory and Political Analysis: Identities, Hegemonies and Social Change*) and Jason Glynos (co-author of *Logics of Critical Explanation in Social and Political Theory*).

Their framework questions the division between linguistic and extralinguistic realities by formulating a notion of 'discourse' influenced both by post-structuralist authors such as Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, and by linguistic pragmatists such as Ludwig Wittgenstein and J. L. Austin (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 105-108). It starts from the premise that "every object is constituted as an object of discourse," which in no case implies questioning the existence of social or material reality (108-110). It is thus a rejection of epistemological formalism that emphasizes the importance of political and social aspects of

the production of knowledge.

Using this theoretical frame, Ernesto Laclau analyzed the way collective political identities are formed in his seminal work *On Populist Reason* (2005). He did so through an examination of populism, a way of constructing the political that he, as an Argentinean who witnessed the rise and fall of Peronism, knew well. According to Laclau, the unit of analysis when scrutinizing political groups should not be the class or the individual, but rather the different demands which, once articulated, compose a collective identity (Laclau 2005, IX). The process of articulation is defined as “any practice establishing a relationship among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice” (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 105). Laclau designates two types of demands: democratic and popular. Democratic demands are those which remain isolated, while popular demands are those which are part of a populist formation (Laclau 2005, 74).

The result of the articulatory practices is the emergence of a discursive formation (Laclau 2005, 87). Here, Laclau refers to the populist movement or party (but more broadly to any political identity) by using a linguistic metaphor, following David Howarth’s definition of discourses as “concrete systems of social relations and practices that are intrinsically political, as their formation is an act of radical institution which involves the construction of antagonisms and the drawing of political frontiers between insiders and outsiders” (Howarth 2000, 9). The content of any particular element (for example, a demand, a word, a stance...) depends on the discursive formation in which it is inscribed. In other words, the signifiers ‘our nation’ or ‘the people’ can only be understood as parts of the political structure they are part of. This approach avoids the misconception that right-wing and left-wing populist movements must be similar since their discourses sometimes semantically overlap.

The construction of equivalential links between the demands, essential for the cohesion of the movement, depends on the production of empty signifiers. This is a concept borrowed from Jacques Lacan’s work. Laclau (2005) defines the empty signifier as “a particularity embodying an unachievable fullness” (71). In this context, ‘signifier’ is understood in its widest sense. It can be a symbol, such as a word, a flag, an icon, or a leader, and in any case it will have to be the product of a “radical investment,” which means that there will be an important affective relation between ‘the people’ and that empty signifier (97).

The operation whereby a particularity takes an “incommensurable universal connotation” is what Laclau calls ‘hegemony’ (70), an important term with several meanings in the history of Marxist thought (Anderson 2017). Therefore, “in a hegemonic relation, one particular difference [for example, a national symbol] assumes the representation of a totality that exceeds it,” which leads us to the notion of synecdoche, a rhetorical device whereby the part of something represents its totality. According to Laclau (2005), the synecdoche “is not simply one more rhetorical device, simply to be taxonomically added to other figures such as metaphor and metonymy, but has a different ontological function” (72). In populist movements ‘the people’, although it logically cannot represent the totality of the population, presents itself as the *populus*, that is, as the entirety of the polity.

According to this approach, populism will thus be defined as a political movement that: 1) articulates heterogeneous unsatisfied demands, thereby creating an original discursive formation and a new ‘collective will’; 2) is based on the construction of equivalential links and dichotomic frontiers as well as on the universalistic pretension of representing the totality of the *populus*; and, 3) has an antagonistic and metapolitical approach, inasmuch as it seeks to

question and transform the political landscape, both in terms of who is the hegemon and how the political map looks like.

Thus, we shall define nationalpopulism as a type of populist movement in which the nation acts as the key empty signifier, and in which hegemony is achieved thanks to a nationalist stance which serves as a bonding agent for several, heterogeneous demands. Nationalpopulism stems from a fusion of popular and national elements and sees the ‘national people’ as the main political actor, a collective identity threatened by its generally foreign antagonists and linked thanks to national symbols and common historical traits.

Inasmuch as nationalpopulism promotes “a sentiment or consciousness of belonging to the nation” and it can be considered as “a social and political movement on behalf of the nation,” it can be defined as a form of nationalism according to Anthony D. Smith’s classical characterization (Smith 2001, 5). It also fits Alberto Martinelli’s definition of nationalism as an ideology that “fosters specific collective movements and policies promoting the sovereignty, unity, and autonomy of the people gathered in a single territory” (Martinelli 2018, 14).

#### *Right-wing Nationalpopulism: the Plebeian Nation*

This section seeks to dispel the myth that right-wing nationalism has always been either related to socially conservative stances, or simply indifferent to any kind of social policy. This perception is probably linked to the idea that nationalism is an ‘outward-looking’ ideology concerned with international affairs rather than with public policies, but also to a general lack of knowledge about the several historical attempts by right-wing nationalist movements to integrate social, economically illiberal concerns.

The most important examples of this social-national synthesis can be found in France, Germany, and Italy during the late nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1898 Maurice Barrès, a French novelist and politician, coined the term ‘national-socialism’ and called to fight against an alleged political alliance between the Jewish people, bankers, leftists, Germans, liberals, and cosmopolitans of any kind. Barrès was a fierce supporter of Boulangism, a movement with both nationalist, revolutionary, populist and Jacobin roots (Sternhell 1973, 1). A decade later, Oswald Spengler—one of the main exponents of the *Konservative Revolution*—published “Prussianism and Socialism,” in which he offered his idea of socialism as “a way of life” inseparable from authoritarianism, communitarianism, and nationalism (Spengler 1908, 32). Around the same time, one of the most influential thinkers of Nazism, although not a Nazi himself, Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, defended his idea of a “German socialism” based on social corporatism and revolutionary conservatism (O’Sullivan 1983, 144-147).

In terms of political praxis, Charles Maurras, the leader of radical right party Action Française, was one of the most ardent proponents of “embracing socialism after extricating it from its cosmopolitan and democratic elements” (Sternhell 1994, 119). In Germany, a worker-based branch of Nazism called Strasserism, along with the hybrid movement of the National-Bolsheviks created by the former socialist militant Ernst Niekisch were the most prominent expressions of the national-social blend during the interwar period.

But the climax of the social-national synthesis took place in Italy during and after the Great War (1914-1918). As Massulli (2014) explains, the Italian revolutionary syndicalists had an enormous influence in the advent of fascism. Both nationalists (such as Gabriele d’Annunzio and Enrico Corradini) and former socialists (such as Michele Bianchi and Benito Mussolini) understood the necessity of somehow associating both worldviews. The Italian

socialist Arturo Labriola argued in 1910 that there were two types of nationalism: the nationalism of the workers—popular and equalitarian—and the nationalism of the elites—dishonest and imperialist (Sternhell 1994, 250). In the aftermath of the war the *fasci di combattimento* and Associazione Nazionale Italiana, the embryos of the Partito Nazionale Fascista (1921), were the main proponents of this form of national socialism whereby the *ethnos* is a plebeian political subject opposed to unpatriotic elites.

Apart from Alceste de Ambris, the majority of Italian revolutionary syndicalists (Agostino Lanzillo, Angelo Olivetti, Sergio Panunzio, Alfredo Rocco among others) reached important positions within the fascist regime by promoting a plebeian, social and revolutionary variety of nationalism that had also succeeded on the other side of the Alps, although by taking a different form. The core idea running through this ideological articulation can be summed up by Ramiro Ledesma's famous statement (today surprisingly parroted by the Spanish far-right party Vox): "Only the rich can permit themselves the luxury of not having a homeland" (Jones 2019). There are thus two key elements: the articulation of the social and the national and the idea that the motherland is a protection against anti-social and alien disruptive forces.

This historical period, from the late nineteenth century to 1945, 'the first social-national synthesis' ended up calamitously with the defeat of the Axis in 1945. It is not until the last decade (with the exception of the surprisingly popular Movimento Sociale Italiano) that we can find a serious attempt to articulate social and nationalist stances from the right in Europe. Instead of a corporatist, revolutionary nationalist, or national-syndicalist force, it has emerged as right-wing national populism (RWNP).

Here again it is necessary to start in France. In 2012 the Front National (rebranded as Rassemblement National in 2018) became a party that rejected the left-right classification and promoted a distinction between 'the people' (sometimes referred to as "the forgotten" who "suffer in silence") and 'the elites' (both French, European and global). Both elements were part of Jean-Marie Le Pen's discourse as well, especially during his last years as president of the party when he flirted with populist strategies, but the difference is that in his case those were rhetorical devices that didn't represent the ethos of his Front National (Eltchaninoff 2017). In Marine Le Pen's genuine populist project, however, the commitment to build a dichotomic frontier between 'the people' and 'the elites,' and the preference for an ambiguous discourse that ventures into traditionally liberal and leftist semantic domains, is of paramount importance. This nationalpopulist stance, which includes many social elements, was mainly envisioned by Florian Philippot, her former right-hand man (Fernández-Vázquez 2019).

Marine Le Pen often engages in RWNP discourses, and she does so in two ways. First, she and her populist party seek to articulate a plurality of democratic demands that are social, territorial, and cultural, and which are then presented as national problems from which the 'French people' is suffering. Second, the now popular demands are often deemed to be solvable only by confronting an international, rather than national, antagonist. This international antagonist has many faces—immigrants, Muslims, 'global elites,' European bureaucrats and its French allies—but because populist discourses not only create equivalences between demands but also between their opponents (that is, 'the people' and the 'elite' are both the product of discursive bricolage), the antagonist appears as an alliance between different groups with shared interests. The idea at the heart of RWNP discourses is that the nation and its people, who are here one and the same, are oppressed by non-national

actors. Marine Le Pen provided good evidence of this when she accused the then French president François Hollande of being “the vice-chancellor of the province of France for Germany” and imposing austerity measures that only benefit Berlin (Bogani 2015).

Italy, probably the most important nation when it comes to social-national syntheses, has also witnessed the emergence of RWNP stances. In reality, the social-national position did not abruptly end in Italy in 1945, for it was to some extent defended by the neo-fascist Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI) until decades after. But Matteo Salvini’s Lega is far from being a fascist movement, unlike the MSI or CasaPound, which are contemporary genuine examples of such current (Gentile 2019). After all, it is clear that this former Padanian secessionist, who has shifted his party from regionalism to Italian nationalism (and from 4% to more than 34% of the vote), has espoused stances that are closer to Marine Le Pen than to Giorgio Almirante.

Although at the moment Salvini seems to have opted for an alliance with other right-wing forces (mainly Forza Italia and Fratelli d’Italia) due to the incentives derived from the architecture of the electoral system of his country, between June 2018 and September 2019 he was Minister of the Interior in a coalition government with the Movimento 5 Stelle. It was during that period that he adopted a RWNP discourse. In December 2018 he claimed that he preferred “a government trusted by the people rather than one trusted by the international markets” (Il Fato 2018). The problem of Europe, according to him, is that it is ruled “by the finance oligarchy and those who permit mass immigration” (L’US 2019). After the European Union rejected the 2018 Italian budget, which sought to introduce a universal basic income and lower the retirement age, the so-called “people’s budget,” he urged EU leaders to “respect the Italian people” (France24 2018). In October 2019, shortly after the end of the coalition government, Salvini said he represented “the people against the elite, the squares against the palaces” (*popolo contro elite, piazza contro Palazzo*) (ReggioSera, 2019).

Mirroring his ally Marine Le Pen, Salvini stated in 2018 that the power of banks, the EU, austerity, mass immigration and economic precariousness are part of the same ‘regime’: “the next elections [the European elections of 2019] are a referendum between the Europe of the elites, of banks, of precariousness, of immigration, of austerity and the Europe of the people and the workers” (Valenti 2018). Political elites, immigrants (and NGOs), banks, the Left, EU bureaucrats... all conspire against ‘the (national) people,’ victims who just want good jobs and a sovereign state that can protect them from the dangers of globalization. In a rally in Milan with Le Pen and other leaders of the Western European radical right, Salvini cried out against “this immigration which has submerged our nations, putting our people at risk” (CGTN 2019).

Those who serve foreign elites are thus ‘traitors against the motherland,’ which is exactly what Salvini accused Giuseppe Conte of being, because according to him he used Italian money to rescue German and French banks (Salvini 2019). It is important to highlight that the problem does not consist in using taxpayer’s money to rescue a bank, but to do so to rescue a non-Italian bank. It is interesting to note that this nationalist momentum has prepared the ground for the emergence of LWNP forces as well, such as Patria e Costituzione or VOX Italia (created by the self-declared Marxist thinker Diego Fusaro).

Salvini and Le Pen claim to confront both mass immigration, Islamism, and the economic and political elites. This is why the idea of RWNP as a discourse that focuses on the construction of vertical frontiers instead of horizontal, ‘people versus elites,’ held by

Hameleers (2018, 6) and by Gilles Gressani (2019, 77) is a misconception. If anything, it could be said that it promotes a diagonal frontier, including both 'the establishment' and non-nationals, who are somehow part of the same group of interest (this is why the conspiracy theory of *le grand remplacement*, formulated by Rénaud Camus, is so appealing for RWNP militants). The idea that there is an alliance between the economic and political elites and ethnic minorities might seem extravagant, but it is certainly not an innovative view in the history of the radical right (Hanebrink 2018; Baker 2006).

Therefore, the basic idea is that 'the people' has been left behind and its social and cultural demands are not satisfied by a political system that would rather serve the interests of immigrants, Muslims, and foreign elites. This inevitably reminds us of nationalist or far-right movements. Yet RWNP is different from these at least in two ways. First of all, it is not just a reactive and xenophobic movement, and contrary to other radical right forces, neither Rassemblement National nor La Lega are niche parties. As a populist movement, RWNP formulates "a certain historical horizon" (Laclau 2005, 116), that is, it presents a socio-political alternative and promises to bring a new state of things into existence. And secondly, it links popular discontent not only with an 'unpatriotic elite' (co-opted by foreign actors) but also with the need of reinforcing or at least defending the social assistance that was built during the *trente glorieuses*, thereby fueling the so-called Welfare chauvinism (Ennsner-Jedenastik 2017).

RWNP is certainly popular and plebeian but, so to speak, in a *völkisch* way. It offers a vision of its country as an underdog in the international arena while including social concerns, which inevitably reminds us of Enrico Corradini's idea of Italy being a "proletarian nation" both morally and materially (Corner 2012). It bases its vision on the idea that both international relations and the distribution of social resources are highly competitive, and that the nation and its people must be protected from such a hostile world. This had led politicians like Salvini or Le Pen to subscribe to realist positions, flirting both with China and Russia while at the same time acknowledging the economic importance of the EU (Lafont 2017).

Today's proponents of the right-wing social-national synthesis are inspired by economists such as Maurice Allais (a fierce critic of globalization and 'the free-trade ideology'), Bruno Lemaire and Louis Alliot (who consider that sovereignty and social expenditure are interconnected), and Bernard Monot (who praises state intervention and seeks to find a third way between liberalism and anticapitalism). In Italy, Alberto Bagnai (who defines himself as a Eurosceptic post-Keynesian left-wing populist despite being La Lega's main economist) claims that only the nation-state can guarantee social dignity to workers (Petti 2013). Bagnai declared himself nationalist, populist, and socialist (Bagnai, 2013). His colleague Claudio Borghi, who shares Bagnai's hard Euroscepticism, associates monetary sovereignty with social well-being (Carli 2018).

All of them are critics of the current economic state of affairs and are clearly concerned with social welfare. They oppose neoliberal arrangements and the 'end of politics', two key factors of the emergence of populist forces, as Chantal Mouffe noted (Mouffe 2004, 48). Yet their anti-globalization stance must be nuanced: as was the case with interwar fascists (Paxton, 2004, 10), their rhetoric against the markets, the finance and international treaties is always selective. RWNP forces do not pretend to replace the current economic system, but rather to reinforce the possibilities of their nations to compete in it. In a highly competitive world, only by protecting their economies from immigration and globalization, they think,



they can also protect 'their people'.

*Left-wing Nationalpopulism: the Nationalization of the People*

The idea of associating social and nationalist elements as a leftist strategy was much less popular than the opposite during the first social-national synthesis. It can be considered as a punctual and calculated strategy rather than as a genuine and enduring political articulation. For example, in the context of the rise of fascism in Germany the KPD understood during a brief period of time the utility of being at the forefront of the national opposition against the "imperialist Versailles Treaty" (Moreau, 2018, 161). Leon Trotsky, referring to the same country in 1930, encouraged the German proletariat to strategically "put itself at the head of the nation as its leader" (Beetham, 2019, 205).

Yet there are historical examples of left-wing social-national syntheses, especially at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a period marked by a profound crisis of Marxism and the resulting frustration of some socialist militants (Sternhell 1994, 15). The French philosopher Georges Sorel, author of *Réflexions sur la violence* (published in 1908), paved the way for the idea that the Left had to find new mobilizing myths instead of focusing on rationalist and economist discourses. The already mentioned Italian revolutionary syndicalists, deeply influenced by Sorel, saw in national consciousness and war mobilization the opportunity to appropriate powerful myths and symbols. "The motherland shouldn't be rejected, but seized" (*La patria non se contesta, ma se conquista*), were the famous words of Edmondo Rossoni, leader of the Unione Italiana del Lavoro in 1918, a sentence later repeated by a still socialist Benito Mussolini.

But the post-colonial world was and remains certainly a much more appropriate context for this type of social nationalism. In Latin America, Africa, and Asia, the national-building process took place at the same time as the anti-colonial struggle. It was also impacted by Marxism and by Soviet support, both before and after the Second World War (Young 2001, 161-167). Ernesto Laclau himself took an active part in a LWNP Argentinean party, the Partido Socialista de la Izquierda Nacional, during the sixties. Today, in the majority of Latin-American countries (Bolivia, Argentina and Venezuela are probably the best-known examples), it is possible to find left-wing political parties which advocate nationalist positions, both against their national adversaries and against Washington. The case of Europe is exactly the opposite, inasmuch as since the end of nineteenth century nationalism in this continent has conservative, authoritarian and xenophobic connotations (Hobsbawm 1990, 101-107).

This is why the rise of the Greek party Syriza at the beginning of this decade was such a surprising phenomenon. Syriza was created in 2004 as a coalition of different radical left groups (with Synaspismos, a Eurocommunist organization, as its major member), but around 2010 it shifted toward a populist strategy (Stavrakakis and Katsambekis 2014). The populist turn proved successful; Syriza climbed from 4% of the votes in 2009 to 16% in 2012 and 28% in 2015. Alexis Tsipras, the leader of the coalition since 2009, was inspired by the 2010-2012 anti-austerity movement (the so-called *Aganaktisménon- Politón*, 'movement of the outraged') and by the several work-based mobilizations of the period, which included several general strikes. He then realized that there was a possibility to articulate a plurality of demands that neither PASOK (the socialist party, in government between 2009 and 2011) nor, of course, the conservatives could satisfy. Syriza never became a nationalpopulist party, nor can it be compared with Salvini's Lega or Le Pen's Rassemblement National. However, it did engage in LWNP discourses, although only in certain circumstances. It is significant that both during

the first and the second Tsipras governments (2015-2019), Syriza's junior coalition partner was Independent Greeks, a Greek nationalist right-wing party.

This unnatural alliance took place in a context in which austerity and economic crisis were associated by many Greeks with foreign interference. After all, the European Union, led by Germany, was perceived as the political actor behind the public spending cuts and the several tax increases. A wave of Euroscepticism swept through the country, to the point that in January 2014 Nigel Farage became highly popular among many anti-austerity Greeks (Smith 2014). Still, today Greece maintains a less favorable view of the EU (Pew Research Center, 2018) and of Germany (Pew Research Center, 2019). The narrative supported both by the German government and by some German media only worsened the situation (Kutter 2014). Moreover, Greece was continuously discredited by the three main rating agencies (Moody's Investors Service, Standard & Poor's and Fitch Ratings), all of them American.

This was obviously a favorable environment for Greek ultranationalism. The neo-fascist party Golden Dawn won 7% of the votes in 2015 and became the country's third political force, whereas the Independent Greeks (Syriza's partners) won almost the 5%. During the strikes and the anti-austerity marches, both European and German flags were burned on several occasions. However, Tsipras was always careful not to fall into the trap of xenophobic discourses, and Syriza's relationship with nationalism from 2012 to 2015 is very different than that of its far-right partner. Analyzing it will provide us with valuable information to understand LWNP.

First of all, it is important to analyze the role of nationalism and of national consciousness in shaping the political identity formed from the links between the different social demands. Stavrakakis and Katsambekis (2014, 10) draw attention to how Tsipras and Syriza continuously employed the word 'people' in order to identify their supporters and create the idea of a homogenous and united group, ready to oppose 'the establishment.' Yet it is important to note that, at least since the January 2015 Greek legislative election, Tsipras started to refer to 'the people' as 'the Greek people,' 'our people,' and 'our country'. The nation, and not the leader or the signifier 'people,' became the empty signifier of Syriza's discursive formation. But here the nation is not an ethnic entity, but a popular one. Because both RWNP and LWNP discourses employ the signifier 'the people' we can be lead to confusion, but in Syriza's case it is clear that he refers to the people as *plebs* (as a subaltern, popular group) and not as *ethnos* (an ethnic or racial group). Therefore, instead of the nation being 'popularized,' the people, meaning here the economically subaltern, are 'nationalized.' And so here the nation and the *plebs* are one.

This ephemeral nationalist turn was probably inevitable, since the Greek government's main adversaries were at that moment international, or foreign, actors. A few days after Syriza's victory, Tsipras and other members of his government paid homage to the Greek communists who fought against the Nazis during the war. In a moment of increased tensions with Angela Merkel's government, Panos Skourletis, spokesman of Syriza, declared that the symbolic act "represents national resistance to occupation, but also the natural desire of Greeks for freedom, for liberty from German occupation" (Smith 2015). It is therefore hardly surprising that the Syntagma Square was filled with national flags during the June 25, 2015 referendum, when Greek voters rejected austerity proposals from the country's creditors.

Secondly, during this brief period from 2014-2015 the antagonist was no longer the national elite or establishment, but foreign powers. Certainly both PASOK and New

Democracy, the two main parties prior to Syriza's dramatic ascendancy, were denounced as the culprits of the malaise of the people, but the Greek elite were now presented as allies of European and German actors. Yanis Varoufakis, the Minister of Finance from January to July 2015, claimed in August of that same year that "the European leaders" act collusively with "Greek oligarchs" in order to allow them "to maintain their stranglehold on Greek society while punishing ordinary people" (Inman 2015). The tension between Varoufakis and the German government only increased when 2013 footage of him saying that Greece "should simply default on its debts and stick the finger to Germany" became viral (The Economist, 2015).

Syriza undoubtedly embraced a nationalist discourse that emphasized national-popular resistance against foreign, and powerful, enemies, with a focus on Germany and, to a lesser extent, the European Union. The movement had no problems with making problematic historical analogies. Is there really any difference with Salvini's or Le Pen's approach? In fact, and despite what some media commentators may think, there are at least three. First of all, Syriza's LWNP discourses were always internationalist, or at least regionalist. Tsipras and Varoufakis always underlined that their struggle was a European one, inasmuch as they genuinely intended to "free Europe" from austerity (Konstantinidis 2015). Secondly, Syriza, understanding the importance of the European project beyond its economic aspects, was always reluctant to fall into hard Euroscepticism. Its critique of the EU was always self-limited and hardly survived the year 2015. Finally, and this might be the key difference between European and Latin-American LWNP, Syriza's nationalist stance was only situational and, contrary to RWNP forces, it was never part of the party's discursive essence.

Instead of being the product of the union of different pre-existing left-wing parties, the Spanish party Podemos was created in 2014 as a self-conscious populist force opposed both to the socialists and to the far left. Pablo Iglesias' party abandoned to some extent its populist strategy during the year 2016, when the Spanish political system began to rearticulate and he decided to form an alliance with the far-left party Izquierda Unida, thereby changing its name to Unidas Podemos (United We Can). Prior to that, Podemos was a very particular example of populism, for it consciously operated by using Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's works as its strategic guideline (Errejón and Mouffe 2015, 7; Alcántara 2015), so much so that it could be described as a 'Laclauian party'. The main founders of Podemos, including Iglesias, also drew inspiration from several Latin-American nationalpopulist movements. This prepared the ground for a political force eager to articulate all kind of heterogeneous demands and very calculating when it came to language and discourse. Its capacity to transcend the discursive milieu from which it comes from (the Spanish Left) is probably only comparable to Marine Le Pen's.

Podemos' LWNP momentum overlapped with that of Syriza (2014-2015) with the creation of the party in January 2014, although as we shall see, some nationalpopulist elements persist today within the party and surface from time to time. Pablo Iglesias and Alexis Tsipras were close allies during this period. Iglesias travelled to Athens the day before the Greek legislative election and claimed that "the Greeks won't bow the knee before Germany, they don't want to go back to the past [a reference to the Nazi occupation of Greece], they know Tsipras is a lion (sic) that will defend its people despite everything" (Velasco 2015). A few months before, he stated that Greece deserved "to have a patriotic president who can protect the interests of the people" (Gil 2015). After Syriza's victory, he basically paraphrased Marine Le Pen's abovementioned remark on François Hollande being Merkel's vice chancellor by

saying he was happy that Greece “will have a Greek president and not a representative of Merkel” (Carvajal 2015).

Iglesias, always willing to flirt with positions unfamiliar to the Spanish left, went as far as to declare that he didn’t want Spain to be “the country that serves beers and *tapas* to rich people from northern Europe” and that “it is clear that Angela Merkel wants us to be a colony” (Berlunes 2014). This eagerness to engage in LWNP discourses cannot but seem strange in a European context and it is probably due to the enormous influence that some Latin-American political experiences exerted on Podemos.

But Brussels is not Washington, and Spain is not Argentina or Venezuela. Even if Spain is, along with Greece, the only European country in which people on the ideological left are more likely to give the EU negative marks (Pew Research Center 2018), Podemos hasn’t been able to successfully articulate a nationalpopulist discourse, among other things because, like Syriza, it has been reluctant to fall into Euroscepticism. Not to mention the fact that for historical reasons in Spain the national symbols are associated to the Right. This is actually far from being anomalous: it is also the case, for example, in countries such as Japan and England, whose national symbols have problematic connotations. In fact, the whole approach seemed somewhat artificial and, to some extent, the result of the lack of alternatives. For as Errejón himself declared: “there are only three great political aggregators in modernity: religion, class and nation” and only the third is available today (Neyra 2017).

Be that as it may, Podemos’ nationalpopulist discourse is a good example of the two traits that have been here identified as the core of LWNP—the merging of the *plebs* and the nation and the construction of a dichotomic frontier against foreign powers. The first is an attempt to ‘nationalize the people,’ which consists of associating popular demands with a defense of the nation. In February 2015, Iglesias said that “the fatherland is having a good public healthcare system, the fatherland is having the possibility of sending your son to a good school, the fatherland is having a good economy so you don’t have to emigrate” (Jiménez 2015). His then right-hand man, Iñigo Errejón, accused the Spanish socialists of being “false patriots” when they organized a rally with an enormous national flag: “you are traitors, because you gave Spain’s sovereignty to Merkel...if you really want to be patriots, that has nothing to do with flags, it has to do with defending the hospitals, the schools, the workers” (Aroca 2015). This very calculated nationalpopulist approach began to fade after 2016 (although Iñigo Errejón tried to refloat it recently with his new party, Más País), but LWNP stances are still present in Podemos, especially since it has now to face a far-right adversary, Vox.

The second key characteristic of LWNP discourse, the shift from a national to an international dichotomic frontier, was only possible during the height of the Greek government-debt crisis (2014-2016), when Syriza opposed Germany and the European Union even though Greece ultimately accepted their conditions. Thus, Podemos’ nationalist attitude (which went further than Syriza’s) necessarily overlapped with that of its Greek ally. After that brief moment of European division and apparent north/south confrontation, the ‘nationalpopulist moment’ was over for left-wing European parties. Their right-wing counterparts did not have to face that issue because the type of nationalpopulism that they formulated did not depend on economic crisis or regional clashes. European LWNP, on the other hand, remains a rare and occasional type of political stance. It was probably only possible in a very particular context in which a huge economic crisis coexisted with austerity

measures, economic international interference, and Angela Merkel playing the role of an arrogant northern ruler against southern subaltern countries.

In order to draw a parallel between today's national-social synthesis and the several experiments carried out by right-wing nationalist forces, we mentioned political figures such as Enrico Corradini and Charles Maurras. This section will end with the words of Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès, whose 1789 reflections on the people and the nation fit with such accuracy with this section that it is impossible not to quote him. The *abbé* unwittingly describes two staples of LWNP as it has been analyzed here: its consideration that only the *plebs* is part of the nation and its aspirations to represent the totality of it.

The nobility, however, is also a foreigner in our midst because of its civil and political prerogatives. (...) The Third Estate then contains everything that pertains to the nation while nobody outside the Third Estate can be considered as part of the nation. What is the Third Estate? Everything.

### Conclusions

RWNP can be defined as a sort of plebeian nationalism, while LWNP is a form of nationalization of the people. In the first, the nation is victimized, and the *ethnos* is popularized. In the second, there is an isomorphism between the *plebs* and the nation. Whereas RWNP is one of the contemporary forms that the radical right can take, European LWNP is a punctual strategy embraced by political forces that are part of the democratic socialist and post-communist sphere. Podemos and Syriza were eager to criticize the EU and the German government at a certain point, but they were reluctant to support Eurosceptic postulates. On the other hand, both Rassemblement National and La Lega have Euroscepticism as one of their main ideological traits.

In Europe, RWNP is less an anomaly than LWNP, a political stance more common in the third world, especially in Latin America, for historical reasons. While the synthesis between nationalism and popular or social positions has been historically successful in Europe when it was carried by right-wing movements, the opposite is generally not the case. However, the example of Greece and Spain during the Eurozone debt crisis shows that the possibility of articulating a LWNP discourse exists in our continent.

The points of departure of RWNP and LWNP are thus different, and so are their intentions and their ideological forebears. It is important, both for political scientists and for citizens, to be able to distinguish between these two tendencies. We are already witnessing the spread of the misleading idea that left-wing and right-wing populism are pretty similar phenomena. Insofar as nationalpopulist forces employ a similar vocabulary and propose similar policies, there will always be a risk of confusion. Only an in-depth discourse analysis can avoid it.

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