

Chapter 14

The Rise of Right-Wing Populism in Europe: A Psychoanalytical Contribution



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Abstract This chapter aims to provide a psychoanalytically informed interpretation of the rise of right-wing populism in Europe. It argues that explanations for the growing support for right-wing populist political parties and groups in European countries which stress the role of economic, migratory, and political factors can be deepened by a reading which takes into account the role of affects in politics.

Introduction

The tide of right-wing populism in Europe has been steadily rising in the twenty-first century. In the last 2 years alone, we have witnessed election victories or significant increases in the share of votes by right-wing populist parties in several European countries. In the French presidential elections of May 2017, far-right presidential candidate Marine Le Pen, of the National Rally, got 34% of votes, the party's best electoral result ever. In September 2017, the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) won 12.6% of the vote and entered the Bundestag for the first time, with an anti-euro and anti-immigration platform. This election happened in a context already marked by anti-migrant demonstrations by far-right political movements, such as Pegida (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident). In October 2017, the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ), founded by a former SS officer in the 1950s, won 26% of the vote and joined the then governing coalition. Also in 2017, the far-right Volya Movement entered the Bulgarian parliament for the first time and, in the Netherlands, the anti-Islam Party for Freedom became the second-largest party in the House of Representatives. In March 2018, the anti-establishment Five Star Movement became Italy's largest party and formed a coalition government with the far-right League party. In April 2018, Prime Minister Victor Orbán, leader of the Hungarian right-wing populist Fidesz party, who has been in office since 2010, won his third consecutive term. In Poland, the right-wing

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populist party Law and Justice (PiS) has been in power since 2015. In Sweden, the far-right Sweden Democrats have steadily increased their share of the vote since 2010, gaining 17.6% in the 2018 elections, and becoming the third largest party in the country's parliament.

Several explanations have been put forward to account for this trend. First, the economic impacts of globalization and neoliberal policies, advanced by national governments and the European Union (EU), have generated a mass of discontented “left-behind”, which becomes easy target of right-wing populists. This economic malaise is compounded by the rise in immigration, which creates anxieties about the potential (further) loss of jobs and pressures on the welfare state; about threats to national security (when migrants are perceived as likely terrorists and criminals); and about the loss of national identity. This situation is made even worse by the state's inability to manage the economy and control national borders, due to the loss of sovereignty entailed in EU integration process and as a result of neoliberal globalization. Traditional political parties are perceived as unable or unwilling to change this state of affairs, leading to frustration and opening the way for populist parties.

This chapter aims to provide a psychoanalytically informed interpretation of the rise of right-wing populism in Europe. It argues that explanations for the growing support for right-wing populist political parties and groups in European countries which stress the role of economic, migratory, and political factors can be deepened by a reading which takes into account the role of affects in politics. This chapter will, first, review the three main accounts—economic, migratory, and political—of the surge in support for right-wing populist political parties and groups in Europe, discussing their shortcomings. It will, then, put forward the argument that it is necessary to take into account the role of affects in identification processes, including identification with right-wing populist ideologies, in particular a sense of loss (of national sovereignty, security, identity, and economic prosperity) which leads to resentment.

It's the Economy,¹ Stupid: The Role of Economic Factors in the Rise of Support for Right-Wing Populism

This type of explanation has been advanced to account for several unexpected phenomena, such as the election of Donald Trump in the US, the decision of the UK to exit the EU, and the rise in support for right-wing populist parties and groups across Europe. The current global trade and financial order, marked by neoliberal globalization, has led to the Global Financial Crisis of 2008 and the Eurozone crisis and has significantly impacted on the economic well-being of many societies.

¹The famous phrase “It's the economy, stupid” was created by Bill Clinton's 1992 presidential campaign strategist James Carville.

Globalization has contributed to unemployment due to the reallocation of industries from developed countries to places with cheaper labor costs. Neoliberal ideology of consumerism and competition and neoliberal economic policies of austerity, privatization, corporate trade, and financial deregulation, coupled with the weakening of labor unions, have led to the concentration of capital, rise in housing costs, cuts to welfare provisions, stagnation of wages, precarious jobs, and unemployment, all contributing to a growth in inequality, disempowerment, disenfranchisement, and dissatisfaction (Monbiot 2016). Such dissatisfaction is, then, mobilized by right-wing populist parties.

For example, in Germany, economic disparities between East and West have been invoked as a likely explanation for Euroscepticism, right-wing extremism, and anti-migrant sentiments, which are manifested more strongly in the country's poorer former East. In the UK, the BREXIT vote has been attributed to the poor economic conditions of some of country's regions. Left-wing commentators argued that many of those who voted Leave were "the 'left-behind' – often citizens of post-industrial towns across the Midlands and the North" (Russell 2016). They were "ordinary working class folks [...] simply fed up with the erosion of their living standards, the disintegration of their communities, and the lack of responsiveness of their political representatives and the unaccountable technocracy that has 'taken control' over their lives" (Roos 2016). The vote to leave the EU, thus, cannot be attributed to "stupidity, racism or lack of information" but to "a combination of hopelessness and isolation coupled with a collapse in material living conditions" (Russell 2016). Hence, Brexit was "first and foremost a political statement by the dispossessed and disempowered" (Roos 2016). Even though "feelings of powerlessness, discontent and alienation [...] had very little to do with Brussels", the EU referendum allowed those dissatisfactions to be voiced (Russell 2016).

Although Russell (2016) thinks that discontent in the context of BREXIT had little to do with the EU, neoliberalism as an economic theory and a set of policies have also influenced European Union economic thinking, even though Union representatives have presented the EU's social market economy as a resistance force against Anglo-American neoliberalism. German *ordo-liberalism* of Walter Eucken and Wilhelm Röpke has increasingly influenced EU's economic and monetary policies, gaining ground against alternative economic traditions from the 1980s onward, when neoliberal ideology began to spread across the globe (Dardot and Laval 2013). As recognized by Frits Bolkestein, former European Commissioner for Internal Market and Services, "the Economic and Monetary union [...] is one of the most important policy instruments for stabilising the vast free-market economy that Europe constitutes and, as such, is a typical product of *ordo-liberal* thinking" (in Dardot and Laval 2013: 217).

Naomi Klein explained Trump's election, Brexit, and rise of right-wing populism in Europe as reactions to the effects of "neoliberal policies of deregulation, privatisation, austerity and corporate trade", which have led to a decline in living standards, lost jobs, lost pensions, lost safety nets, and a "precarious present". "For

the people who saw security and status as their birthright – and that means white men most of all – these losses are unbearable. Donald Trump speaks directly to that pain. The Brexit campaign spoke to that pain. So do all of the rising far-right parties in Europe” (Klein 2016). Thus, neoliberal globalization, marked by “constant threats of relocation, redundancies, and, ultimately, loss of employment”, heightens “the fear of losing the conditions necessary for the reproduction of material life” (Lordon 2014: 35 and 36). This fear is then invoked and captured by right-wing populist parties which promise to placate it by transforming it into hatred, and directing it toward several targets: the EU, migrants and refugees, and against traditional national political parties. These targets of hatred and resentment are not mutually exclusive.

Thus, economic bureaucracies, “whether Washington, the North American free trade agreement, the World Trade Organisation or the EU”, have been in the line of fire of right-wing populist politicians. The EU has been lambasted for being a bureaucratic elitist institution, distant from the concerns of “the people”, robbing sovereignty, contributing to economic malaise, and being a catalyst for migration—either because of the freedom of movement or because of refugee quotas. Marine Le Pen’s 2017 party program blamed globalization, neoliberalism, the EU, and immigration for undermining the country’s national sovereignty, security, identity, and economy. Matteo Salvini, former Italian interior minister and leader of the far-right League party, claimed that the 2019 European parliamentary elections would be “a referendum between the Europe of the elites, banks, finance, mass migration and precariousness versus the Europe of peoples, work, tranquility, family and future” (Salvini in Heath et al. 2018).

This explanation, which stresses the economic impacts of neoliberal globalization, however, fails to explain why the “left-behind” are not the only ones supporting right-wing populist parties. In the UK, 39% of the top quarter of UK earners voted Leave (Curtice 2016). The Brexit campaign was led by wealthy politicians, and several rich counties also voted Leave (Milburn 2016), possibly moved by “imperial and colonial nostalgia” and fantasies about making Britain great again by setting up trade relationships with the Commonwealth, “our extended family in the world”, “our Kith & Kin”, according to Nigel Farage, former UKIP leader (Ashe 2016). In the US, 48% of the top third of US earners voted for Trump, whereas the majority of those in the bottom fifth of US earners (53%) voted for the Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton (Curtice 2016). In fact, we can identify a coalition between “winners” and “losers” of neoliberal globalization, united on an anti-immigration platform and sharing a sense of loss of national identity, security, and sovereignty. Therefore, the economics-based explanation must be complemented by other approaches.

They Steal Our Jobs, Rape Our Women, and Refuse to Integrate: The Role of Migration in the Rise of Support for Right-Wing Populism

When discussing the effects of globalization on individual and collective identities, Stuart Hall (2014) diagnosed three outcomes. First, cultural flows among nations and global consumerism can lead to cultural homogenization, creating global forms of identification and erasing national identities. Second, migratory flows can lead to the production of new hybrid identities, espoused by diasporic communities, who share and belong to different cultures and histories at the same time, widening the possibilities of identity. Third, migratory flows can also lead to the strengthening of identities. Dominant ethnic groups, feeling threatened by the presence of “others” in “their” territory, react defensively. Minority groups, in response to experiences of racism and exclusion, also strengthen their identities. In this last case, instead of creating homogenous or hybrid identities, globalization can lead to a polarization among groups who appeal to the “essence” of identities under threat by the presence of a different other.

The strengthening of national identities has clearly been the response given by right-wing populist parties in Europe to increasing migration flows resulting from globalization, the Syrian Civil War, and/or economic deprivation, political instability, and violence in the wider neighborhood. These parties tend to frame foreigners as threats to national security (for being violent sexual abusers, dangerous criminals, terrorists); to national welfare (for stealing jobs, putting pressure on the welfare state, being benefit scoundrels); and to national identity (for not integrating). The impacts of migration on the economy and national security are sources of controversy. The links between immigration and decline in economic well-being and between immigration and national (in)security are far from certain (see OECD 2014; Ousey and Kubrin 2018). These shaky grounds on which articulations about the threat posed by foreigners rest do not prevent right-wing political parties from inciting, invoking, and mobilizing such fears in their political discourses.

This leaves us with the relationship between immigration and (loss of) national identity. Why is the presence of difference considered so threatening to the nation? These are key issues which will be developed further in the following sections. At this moment, it is sufficient to say that the presence of difference can feel so threatening because modern nations are all cultural hybrids (Hall 2014). As imagined political communities (Anderson 2006) and products of specific historical contexts, nations must be politically and socially reproduced and performed through foreign and domestic policies “in which resistant elements to a secure identity on the ‘inside’ are linked through a discourse of ‘danger’ with threats identified and located on the ‘outside’” (Campbell 1998: 75). In addition, narratives about national unity and national homogeneity are only made possible by the forgetting of violent pasts and violent presents which suppress(ed) and exclude(d) (ethnic, racial, religious, linguistic) differences (Hall 2014).

The increasing visible presence of “others” due to globalization, the free movement of people, and the migration and refugee crisis expose the cracks, fractures, and inconsistencies of an already precarious project. This presence destabilizes certainties which were constructed and maintained through discursive practices always opened to contestations. As will be discussed below, destabilization of the nation as an object of identification elicits such strong emotional responses, which are successfully mobilized by right-wing populist parties, because the nation has had a central role in structuring subjectivities and socio-political realities. The nation provides meaning to our existence, connecting our lives to a national destiny which has preceded us and which will outlast us (Hall 2014) and functions as object of affective investment (Solomon 2015; Stavrakakis 2007).

They Do Not Represent Us: The Role of Traditional Political Parties in the Rise of Support for Right-Wing Populism

This situation of economic precarity and fears of foreigners’ threats to national security, welfare, and identity is compounded by the feeling that traditional political parties are unable or unwilling to address such anxieties and fears. Mainstream parties of both right and left of the political spectrum would be unable to provide meaningful solutions because state sovereignty has been eroded by neoliberal form of globalization and EU integration process. The state can no longer control the flow of capital, goods, services, and people; it can no longer control its borders. In addition, established parties would be unwilling to change this anxiety-inducing state of affairs because they have embraced neoliberalism not only as set of economic policies, but as a rationality, which concludes that globalization is irreversible and that there is no alternative. The differences between right and left have become minimal. These “post-democratic” political parties identify “democratic form with the ‘necessities’ of globalized capital” (Stavrakakis 2007: 264): “The absolute identification of politics with the management of capital is no longer the shameful secret hidden behind the ‘forms’ of democracy; it is the openly declared truth by which our governments acquire legitimacy” (Rancière in Stavrakakis 2007: 264).

According to Mouffe (2005), political mobilization requires the clear establishment of opposing poles with which people can identify. In order to act politically, we need to identify with a collective identity which provides meaning to our existence and functions and an anchor of affective investments. Therefore, politics needs to have a partisan character, clearly discerning between two poles of identification which offer real alternatives. It is in this context marked by a lack of political alternatives, by a “centrist consensus” (Mouffe 2017), that right-wing populist parties are able to capture the political imaginations and mobilize the affects of the population by offering a clear alternative; discernible poles of collective identity; an “us v. them” no longer based on the opposition between right and left, but based on “the people” and detached and distant elites who no longer represent us, and between

“the people” and immigrants (Mouffe 2005: 70). A political context marked by the hegemony of neoliberal globalization, immigration, and the sameness of traditional right and left-wing political parties constitutes fertile ground for fringe political parties who present themselves as the only real alternative to mobilize those fears of loss of economic prosperity, (national) sovereignty, identity, and security.

But why is the message of right-wing populists so appealing to some? What are they appealing to and why do their narratives of national loss resonate among certain segments of the population? In order to answer these questions, we need to discuss the affective dimension of identification processes, including identification with certain conceptions of the nation advanced by right-wing populist groups.

The Nation as a Privileged Object of Identification: The Role of Affects in the Rise of Support for Right-Wing Populism

The nation, as a specific object of identification, emerged at the end of the eighteenth century as a result of several historical processes, such as the emergence of print capitalism and the Enlightenment (Anderson 2006), the French and Industrial Revolution, the Revolutions of 1848, and the emergence of mass electorate and workers’ movements (Hobsbawm 1983), which destabilized the previous political and social orders and their traditional sources of legitimacy. This vacuum was occupied by the nation, which became a new source of legitimacy to states.

Most historical, sociological, and post-structuralist accounts of the nation (Anderson 2006; Hobsbawm 1983; Campbell 1998) stress its lack of essence and foundations; its contingent character; its historical, political, and social constructedness; and reproduction through linguistic and non-linguistic practices (including narratives about national histories, heroes and memories; public ceremonies, holidays and monuments; national anthems and flags; domestic and foreign policies) which allow the nation to come into being as an entity with supposedly ancient roots which survive into the present and (hopefully) will survive into the future. These symbolic and material practices which attempt to produce historical continuity between the past, the present, and the future contribute to the framing of the nation as possessing essential or natural attributes which survive through time. Through boundary-making practices (including foreign and migration policies), which delimit who is in and who is out, who belongs and who does not belong, the nation is produced and reproduced.

In spite of this constructed and performed character, the nation as an object of identification persists and commands deep affective attachments. As will become clear, “the durability and salience, the depth and longevity, of national identifications” (Stavrakakis 2007: 192) cannot be attributed solely to the historical, political, and social conditions which allowed nations to emerge, nor to the array of linguistic and material practices which produce and reproduce it, but also to their affective appeal.

According to psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, both the subject and the Symbolic order (the order of language and representation) are characterized by a lack (of essence) (Stavrakakis 1999). Meanings we attribute to ourselves and to our objects of identification (including the nation) are established by the relationship between signifiers. These signifiers form chains of signifier which also relate to other chains (Stavrakakis 1999: 57). This means that, in principle, an infinite number of meanings can be produced and that meaning (attributed to ourselves and to our objects of identification) is always unstable. However, meanings can be partially and temporarily fixated in nodal points (Laclau and Mouffe 2001: 112), which are privileged discursive terms which arrest the endless flow of signification by binding “together groups of words and concepts into meaningful statements and narratives” (Solomon 2015: 64).

The individual only becomes a subject when s/he enters the Symbolic order, which provides several resources with which the subject can identify. The subject hopes that those resources will fully represent him and provide him with a stable identity, but this is impossible, because these resources do not hold stable meanings. This frustration compels the subject to keep on identifying, in the hopes that full representation will finally be achieved. What the subject desires through these identification processes, however, is not only discursive coherence and closure, but to recapture what Lacan calls enjoyment, or “pre-symbolic *jouissance*”, a “state of bliss, unity and fullness”, which is posited as lost and sacrificed when the subject accedes to the Symbolic (Stavrakakis 1999: 48). Thus, objects of identification which circulate in the Symbolic order, including the nation, are invested with affects because they promise to recapture this lost enjoyment.

There are types of enjoyment, according to Lacan, two of which are relevant here: enjoyment as fantasy and enjoyment of the body (Stavrakakis 2007: 196). In fantasy, it is offered the possibility of recapturing lost enjoyment through identification with social-symbolic signifiers, such as the nation. All nationalist projects make reference to a mythical past in which things were better and which can be retrieved if we get rid of others who are framed as obstacles to this achievement. These others can vary according to historical, social, and political contexts, but they are crucial to maintain the appeal of the nation. They are crucial because the instability, inconsistency, and incoherence of discourses and the impossibility of attaining wholeness and completeness through identification with discourses are attributed to others, the thieves of our enjoyment, instead of being attributed to the lack in the subject and the lack in the Symbolic or, in other words, to the absence of essence, foundations, stability, consistence, and coherence of our individual and collective identities and of our social and political realities. Thus, fantasmatic frames or narratives mask the lack in the subject and the lack in the Symbolic by attributing the impossibility of enjoying a full identity to external (or internal) others who prevent us from doing so (be they the EU, Muslims, Jews, traditional political parties, migrants, or refugees).

In enjoyment as fantasy, Eros, the libidinal drive of love, and Death, the drive of destructiveness and aggressiveness, are two sides of the same coin (Stavrakakis 2007: 198). As Sigmund Freud explained in *Civilization and its Discontents*, in order to inhibit, weaken, and disarm the aggressive and destructive drives, which

threaten to disintegrate society, civilization employs several mechanisms, including directing the derivatives of the death drive outward, toward other objects (as in sadism) or the external world in general, as a kind of non-erotic aggressivity and destructiveness (as in enmity among nations, hatred and hostility towards foreigners, or other groups of people) (Freud 1962: 61, 65–67 and 70). Thus, “it is always possible to bind together a considerable number of people in love, so long as there are other people left over to receive the manifestation of their aggressiveness” (Freud 1962: 61).

As we have seen, signifiers never fully deliver on their promise of discursive coherence and of an encounter with enjoyment. What they deliver is a partial enjoyment of the body, momentary experiences in which the subject seems to achieve the desired full identification and enjoyment, such as in wars and national football teams’ victories (Stavrakakis 2007: 197). All national projects organize rituals—ceremonies, festivals—in which this momentary encounter with enjoyment is made possible. These rituals vary according to nations and historical moments, but they organize enjoyment as a knot between Eros and Death, or libido and aggression, in unique ways. There is, thus, a “very visceral dimension of identity. Nationalism works through people’s hearts, nerves and gut. It is an expression of culture through the body” (Jusdanis in Stavrakakis 2007: 200).

Therefore, the appeal of the nation comes from the promise to provide stable signification and representation; enjoyment as a sense of wholeness and completeness; and the momentary delivery of full identity and enjoyment in certain circumstances. What is at stake in identification processes, thus, is discursive coherence and stability *and* affects. In times of crisis, when the stability and fixity of our social constructions unravel, when certainties shatter and the lack in the Symbolic becomes visible, new identities can be articulated, such as the hybrid types discussed by Hall above. However, these moments of rupture can also lead to the strengthening of the identity under threat and resentment of the others deemed responsible for the unwelcomed instability. “Even relatively stable identity formations when encountering a dislocatory event, when entering a state of crisis or a ‘critical juncture’, often lose the appearance of stability and fullness. Under such conditions they can only attempt to retain their hegemonic status by blaming someone else” (Stavrakakis 2007: 195).

We can read the Eurozone crisis and the migration and refugee crisis as dislocatory events which rendered visible the contingent character of socio-political realities taken for granted (such as that EU integration inexorably brings about economic prosperity, peace, and stability, for example). These are moments in which new political possibilities and new identities can be articulated, but also moments in which the old ones dig in their heels and offer fantasmatic narratives which promise to restore a previous state of affairs which was lost, or could be lost, as a result of these dislocatory events, by taking back control (from the EU, from traditional political parties) and protecting our economy and our borders (from migrants and refugees).

Considering that the nation as an object of identification has had a central role in structuring subjectivities and socio-political realities and has been invested with visceral affects, these right-wing populist discourses resonate with certain segments

of society because they (1) place the nation under threat in privileged position, inciting and invoking, in a time of crises, fears of instability and uncertainty of subjectivities and socio-political realities; and (2) tap into, and promise to satisfy, deep-seated desires for stability and wholeness which have historically been articulated around the nation as a nodal point.

These discourses resonate more strongly with those segments of the population which are abler to identify with articulations of the nation as a homogenous and nativist entity: white men, or the “Endangered White Male”, in the words of Michael Moore (2016). After all, one can only fear and feel for the loss of the nation if one identifies with it and invests its affects in it. Thus, the rise of right-wing populist parties, Brexit, and the election of Trump cannot be simply explained by the (economic) discontent of “ordinary working class folks”, since support for right-wing populist parties, Brexit, and Trump is not restricted to these segments of society and since fears and resentments are articulated around (the possible loss of) the nation, located at the intersection between economic, political, and identity factors. “Working-class folks” who fear for the loss of the nation and support right-wing political parties and groups are mostly white and part of those resented for the demise of the nation are non-whites, who must be kept out for they do not belong to “the people”, to the territory, and to “us” and, therefore, are not entitled to the same protection. These non-whites can also be losers of globalization, can also be left-behind, but their predicament do not elicit much sympathy from the segment of white left-behinds who identify with homogenous versions of the nation mobilized by right-wing political parties.

It is important to clarify what is understood by racism in this context. “Racism is a global hierarchy of superiority and inferiority along the line of the human that have been politically, culturally and economically produced and reproduced for centuries by the institutions of the capitalist/patriarchal Western-centric/Christian-centric modern/colonial world-system” (Grosfoguel 2016: 10). Those placed “above the line of the human” are considered entitled to rights (including citizenship, jobs, and access to the welfare state) while those placed below the line of the human are not. In this definition, the marker of racism does not need to be only skin color, but also ethnicity, language, culture, and/or religion (Grosfoguel 2016). Thus, although “the others” present in right-wing populist discourses are varied (including people placed above the line of the human, such as EU and traditional political parties’ members) and are also dependent on historical, social, and political contexts, they include segments of the world population which historically have had their humanity questioned and, as such, barred from rights. That is why, contrary to what some left-wing commentators reviewed here argued, racism cannot be ruled out as a layer of explanation for support for right-wing populist parties. This is not to say that those whose desires are oriented toward the discourses of right-wing populists are intrinsically racist, because there are no intrinsic essences to the subject or Symbolic objects of identifications, as has been argued. However, through several historical processes, some bodies become saturated with affects. Fear, hatred, and resentment circulate and are distributed across several figures which come to embody the threat of loss (of conditions of material and symbolic reproduction) and which are aligned

together through a “metonymic slide” (Ahmed 2014: 44) between signifiers: the migrant, the refugee, the terrorist, the rapist, the invader, the violator. This circulation of affects produces the boundaries between “us” and “them”, and moves us away from those bodies which are bound together.

Thus, the explanation advanced here for the rise in support for right-wing populist parties and groups in Europe stresses the economic distress and precarity brought about by neoliberal globalization, which was worsened by neoliberal solutions to the Eurozone crisis; the historical appeal of the nation as an object of identification which has been promising stability and enjoyment and is now being framed as under threat by multiple crises by right-wing populist parties’ discourses; *and* the increasingly visible presence of others who have been historically racialized and are, thus, ideal for scapegoating. This scapegoating helps sustain the appeal of right-wing populist parties’ discourses because the lack in the subject and the lack in the Symbolic are masked by attributing inconsistencies and lack of enjoyment to historically racialized others.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter aimed to interpret the growing support for right-wing populist parties and groups in Europe taking into account not only “material” and “discursive” factors—economic precarity, the surge in the number of migrants and refugees, the sameness of traditional political parties, the structures of populist discourses—but also “affective” factors. It has argued that we cannot account for this growing support by only emphasizing the deleterious economic and political effects of neoliberal globalization and migration patterns, although these are certainly part of the interpretation, since these effects have generated affects (anxiety, fear, hatred, resentment) which are successfully mobilized by right-wing political parties. We must also take the strong attachments to the nation as an object of identification and the historical dehumanization of certain groups of people seriously if we are to understand why populist discourses resonate among some segments of the population and if we are to devise an effective and ethical counter strategy.

This effective and ethical counter strategy would have to involve political discourses which are appealing to large segments of the population *and* which are inclusionary and pluralist. In order to achieve that, we need to find ways to “expand the chain of significations associated with the people” (Stavrakakis 2017, p. 8), to “integrate heterogeneous identities and demands in a broader chain of equivalences” (Stavrakakis et al. 2017, p. 8), and to articulate “an expanding plurality of social demands” (Stavrakakis et al. 2017, p. 8). In concrete terms, the concept of “the people” would need to be widened to include traditional working classes, and precarious middle classes also affected by austerity, feminist, and anti-racist movements. Naturally, these do not constitute detailed roadmaps or strict guidelines on how to establish hegemony, since the “chain of equivalence through which the ‘people’ is going to be constituted will depend on the historical circumstances. Its

dynamics cannot be determined in isolation from all contextual reference” (Mouffe 2018: 43).

There is one thing we can be sure, though: this effective and ethical counter strategy should not present the political arena as a battle between “the Reasonable, the Moderate and the Good” versus “the Unreasonable, the Radical, and the Evil”, for it has been precisely this type of political discourse that has alienated many voters and opened the way for right-wing populist parties that claim to actually listen to the woes of the population. Instead, this progressive political discourse should attempt to articulate a response to these very real fears and anxieties which is attuned to different historical, geographical, and cultural contexts, inclusive, pluralist, and agonistic.

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