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

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ABSTRACT

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

KEYWORDS

Populism, feminism, ontology, antagonism

I.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

II.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

III.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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