FEMINISM AND POPULISM WITH NO GUARANTEE

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

KEYWORDS
Populism, feminism, care, militancy

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.   FEMINISATION OF POLITICS? CAREFUL WITH CARE POLITICS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.   WHO RADICALISES WHOM? POPULIST MILITANCY AND ITS AB-SENCE OF GUARANTEES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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