Editors' Introduction

There is no doubt that, for better or for worse, popular mobilisation always revels a significant, or even highly significant, transformative power. It can express itself as a sublime and magmatic power that, as historia docet*, does not necessarily bring chaos and destruction, even when it shakes the institutions to their foundations. It generates and nurtures the* crisis*; and, as French Philosopher Paul Ricoeur remarks, 'la crise de la démocratie est une crise double où se conjuguent un mouvement ascendant et un mouvement descendant, des menaces fécondes et des menaces ruineuses'[1]. In short, the crisis generates and nurtures new energies and ideas, a fusion of horizons, refoundation and new impulses, which all pervade, however, a time of uncertainties where that fecundity of crisis and that possibility of ruin and fall inhabit half walls. After all, as a* possibility*, popular mobilisation is in itself a cornerstone of democratic life. Ricœur again underlines that 'La démocratie est une* idée en devenir et en combat. C'est une histoire commencée que nous avons la tâche de continuer. La crise (...) est un moment dans une histoire dont il faut retrouver l'élan'[2]. It is the People who are primarily responsible for what happens in a democratic state. And when politics is corrupted or is diverted to authoritarian forms, power must return to the People* a fortiori *- certainly still and always in the register of a via longa of inventive mediations, capable of reinforcing the ideal of a good life with others in just institutions.*

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[1] Ricœur, P. (1947). La crise de la Démocratie et de la Conscience chrétienne. *Christianisme Social*, *55*(4), [300–311] 307.
[2] Ivi, 300.

*In this context, it seems perfectly possible to apply Simmel's idea of a dialectics between 'form' and 'life' (*Lebensanschauung. Vier metaphysische Kapitel, *1918), according to which every social dynamism is characterised by phases of liberation of innovative and regenerative forces that destroy old institutions and systems, and forces or movements of (re-)consolidation and (new) normalization; then, again, to experiment with new internal breaks, a new 'lava flow' and new normalization processes. Crises can certainly lead to the start of regressive processes and result in chaos and conflict. Indeed, popular mobilization can be so organized from within and nourished by responsible consciences, who can mirror the collective will promoting forms of critical exchange in public spaces as much as being emotionally or ideologically instrumentalized, or be oriented and (also) exploited by 'verbal instigators', who (as usual) do not target people's interests and people's emancipation but power* sic et simpliciter.

Discontent and popular mobilisation take hold when the gap between political action and concrete life and between rhetoric and reality exceed a certain threshold of acceptance or 'resistance' in relation to (pro-/anti-) 'tensional' forces in the field. It seems to be this same kind of gap that determines the flows and refluxes of populism or populisms.

Populism is a real trope *(Comaroff, 2011) and, at the same time, an empty or, at least, vague concept. Even if predominantly negative, the current uses and methods related to the term 'populism' are the most varied. The adjective can refer to feelings, ideas, attitudes, people, realities, visions, movements, projects, proposals, topics, assessments, beliefs, attitudes, behaviours, dispositions etc. In one way or another, the fact that today, as many scholars and observers reveal and confirm – we are witnessing a true 'return of populism', to a (re-)focus on populism and to a new problematisation of populism*

which reflects the character of evident crisis *of our democracies, as well as an extraordinary fertility, malleability and deep-rooted dimension of the populist discourse and phenomenon.*

But, what is the matrix of populism? What is populism? Should we talk about populism or populisms?

As Jean Comaroff perceptively observes, 'In our times, populism is generally less an identity claimed, than attached to one by others. While we might profess to be "of the people" or "for the people", most of us would think twice about dubbing ourselves "populist" as such, for even at its most benign, the word carries associations of crowd-pleasing and cheap emotionalism and, in its stronger sense, of fascist demagoguery'[3].

This special issue of Critical Hermeneutics*, consecrated to the question and definition or, better, re-definition of populism, resorts to diversified disciplinary competences for the study of a subject as huge and diverse, as difficult and complex, as is the case of populism. In this issue are included papers from the following authors: Vinicio Busacchi, Marco Canneddu, Giovanna Leone, Gonçalo Marcelo, Fabrizio Martire, Simonluca Pinna, Christian Ruggiero, Pietro Salis, Alison Scott-Baumann, Livia Serlupi Crescenzi, Luís António Umbelino.*

In his paper, 'Notes on Populism', Busacchi attempts to offer a general characterisation of problems involved in the definition, uses and "practices" of populism, highlighting how the study of this phenomenon requires both an interdisciplinary work and a differentiation between forms and ways of populism. Canneddu, Serlupi Crescenzi, Leone, Martire and Ruggiero's collective paper 'Populism and Communication' is sociological research which starts addressing the prob-

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[3] Camaroff, J. (2011). Populism and Late Liberalism: A Special Affinity? *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, *637*, [99 – 111] 100.

lem of a conceptual and historical-cultural definition of populism. They explore the case of populism in Italy, and focus on the specific dialectic between populist communicative rhetoric and new media. In 'Towards a Critical Hermeneutics of Populism' Marcelo rehearses an approach to the subject of populism by means of a critical hermeneutics, conscious of the challenges that stand for the justification of a "critical" approach and its hermeneutical qualification.

Pinna's paper, 'Issues in the Ontological Determination of Populism', which proposes the use of categories of hypothetical ontology in the study of populism, constitutes an analysis focused on key aspects of the phenomenon of populism, and "measures" in particular the breadth and "viral charge" inherent in the mobilisation of ideas and feelings "anti-elites" and "anti-establishment". With the analyses contained in his 'Comments on the Social: Digital Communication, Political Participation and Social Media', Salis offers a philosophical-analytical contribution with the important thematization of implications of the populist discourse at the level of linguistic constructs and communicative forms. Scott-Baumann's paper 'Ricoeur on Plotinus: Negation and Forms of Populism', dissects populism using categories of "negation" and "negativity" intrinsic to the human experience and reinterpreted according to an original interpretative line that re-actualises Ricoeur's re-reading of Plotinus. She explores characteristics of the contemporary political atmosphere (focusing in particular on the Brexit case), a complex atmosphere deeply connected with populist dynamics. Finally, in the paper 'To End All Good News: Emotive Opinionatores, Arrogant Experts, and Group Ideologues', Umbelino analyses a form of effective emancipatory thinking as the consequence of a critical, auto-reflective exercise, in virtue of which speakers present reasons, propose critiques on an argumentative base and modulate their position in a reflective way. He underlines how new media, with its new dynamism and communicative forms, is

refraining from this essential exercise under the influence of three major type-figures that symbolize our times – that is an aspect which requires an urgent and attentive examination.

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