THE POPULIST CENTURY

PIERRE ROSANVALLON

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History, Theory, Critique

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INTRODUCTION: CONCEPTUALIZING POPULISM

Populism is revolutionizing twenty-first-century politics. But the disruption it brings has not yet been assessed with any degree of accuracy. The word may turn up everywhere, but no theory of the phenomenon has emerged. The term combines a look of intuitive self-evidence with a fuzzy form, as attested first and foremost by the semantic slipperiness manifested in its usage. For it is a decidedly malleable word, so erratic are its uses. The term is paradoxical, too: even though it is derived from the positive foundations of democratic life, it most often has a pejorative connotation. It is also a screen word, for it applies a single label to a whole set of contemporary political mutations whose complexity and deepest wellsprings need to be grasped. Is it appropriate, for instance, to use the same term to characterize Chávez's Venezuela, Orbán's Hungary, and Duterte's Philippines, not to mention a figure like Trump? Does it make sense to put the Spaniards of Podemos and the followers of Jean-Luc Mélenchon's movement, La France Insoumise (France Unbowed), in the same basket with the fervent supporters of Marine Le Pen, Matteo Salvini, or Nigel Farage? To understand something requires making distinctions; it is essential to resist simplifying amalgamations. Populism is a dubious notion, finally, because it often serves only to stigmatize adversaries, or to legitimize old claims by the powerful and the educated that they are superior to the "lower" classes, which are always deemed likely to mutate into plebeians governed by sinister passions. We cannot address the question of populism without keeping this observation in mind, as a caveat as well as a call for political lucidity and intellectual rigor in approaching the subject.

This necessary attention to the pitfalls that underlie the term "populism" must not lead us to stop using it, however, for two

reasons. First, because in its very confusion it has proved unavoidable. If it has stuck to everyone's lips and remains on everyone's pen, despite all the reservations just mentioned, it is also because the term has responded, imprecisely but insistently, to a felt need to use new language to characterize an unprecedented dimension of the political cycle that has opened up at the turn of the twenty-first century – and because no competing term has surfaced so far. The newly launched political cycle is described by some as a pressing social expectation that the democratic project will be revitalized as the path of a more active sovereignty on the part of the people is rediscovered; others see it, conversely, as bearing signs that announce a threatening destabilization of that same project of revitalization. But the second decisive fact is that the term has been adopted with pride by political leaders seeking to pillory those who use it for the purpose of denunciation.[1] We could make a long list of figures on the right and the far right who have sought to overturn the stigma, first by saying that the word didn't scare them, and then by espousing it, over time. There has been a parallel evolution on the left, as attested in France in exemplary fashion by Jean-Luc Mélenchon: "I have no desire at all to defend myself against the accusation of populism," he said as early as 2010. "It's the elites expressing their disgust. Out with them all! Me, a populist? Bring it on!"[2] The fact that a certain number of intellectuals have become advocates of a "left populism" has also helped considerably to give the term a desirable consistency and to make it common currency as a political designation. The positions and writings of Wendy Brown, Nancy Fraser, Ernesto Laclau, and Chantal Mouffe have weighed heavily in this direction, encouraging the retention of the word and validating the appropriateness of its use.

A reality to be theorized

The problem is that books devoted to populism, in their ever-increasing numbers, remain essentially focused on understanding the underpinnings of the populist vote in order to explain its spectacular advances throughout the world. Using the tools of electoral sociology and political science, these works characterize the populations involved, describing the values that motivate them, the way they relate to political life and institutions, and of course their living and working conditions, in various dimensions. Such investigations depict a social and cultural world that presents objective features common

to many countries: people living on the margins of large cities in zones affected by industrial decline who can be defined as among the "losers" in globalization, people with below-average incomes and little if any higher education. And these people are angry, as well: they are defined, more subjectively, by their resentment toward a system in which they see themselves as held in contempt and reduced to invisibility; they fear being robbed of their identities as their locales open up to the world and to immigration. By bringing together multiple data sets and proposing new ways of looking at the issue, some of the existing studies have offered a better understanding of the makeup of populist electorates. At the same time, however, they have effectively forestalled an overall grasp of the phenomenon. They tacitly suggest that populism is a mere symptom, an indicator pointing to other things that by implication should be the real focus of our attention: the decline of the "party" form, for example, or the gulf that has deepened between the political class and society at large, or the suppression of the gap between a right and a left equally incapable of facing up to the urgencies of the present. In these cases, what is being conceptualized is not the nature of populism but rather its causes. Works of this sort all end up proposing yet another analysis of political disenchantment and contemporary social fractures.

The frequent reduction of populisms to their status as protest movements, with a focus on the political style and type of discourse associated with such movements, is another way of failing to take their full measure.[3] If the dimension of protest is undeniable, it must nevertheless not be allowed to mask the fact that protest movements also constitute actual political statements that have their own coherence and positive force. The routine references in such movements to political figures of the past, in particular to far-right traditions, lead here again to reductionist characterizations. While populisms often do arise from within such traditions, the phenomenon has now taken on an additional dimension (even apart from the development of a populism that purports to be on the left).

It is important to stress, too, the limits of the various typologies of populism that have been proposed and promoted. Describing the multiplicity of variants (on both the right and the left, with their differing degrees of authoritarianism, differences in economic policy, and so on) does not help us reach a better understanding of what is essential, what constitutes the kernel of invariant elements, and on what basis we can differentiate among the variants. At most, a typology can assign each particular case to a specific category: it is then nothing more than a list without rhyme or reason. One

journal deemed it useful to distinguish among the thirty-six families of populism![4] Such an exercise is the exact opposite of a work of conceptualization; it is only a way of masking the inability to grasp the essence of the thing under study.

The problem, then, is that these populisms, celebrated by some and demonized by others, have remained characterized in vague and therefore ineffective ways. They have essentially been relegated to viscerally expressed aversions and rejections, or else to projects summed up in a few slogans (as for example in the case of citizen-initiated referendums in France). This makes it difficult both to analyze their rising potency and to develop a relevant critique. If one seeks to grasp populisms, taken together in their full dimensions, as constituting an original political culture that is actively redefining our political cartography, it becomes clear that they have not yet been analyzed in such terms. Even the leading actors in populist movements, a few notable publications or speeches notwithstanding (we shall look at these later on), have not really theorized what they were (or are) animating. In historical terms, this is an exceptional phenomenon. From the eighteenth to the twentieth century, the major ideologies of modernity were all associated with foundational works that tied critical analyses of the existing social and political world to visions of the future. The principles of free-market liberalism were articulated by Adam Smith and Jean-Baptiste Say, Benjamin Constant and John Stuart Mill; socialism was grounded in the texts of Pierre Leroux, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Jean Jaurès, and Karl Kautsky. The works of Étienne Cabet and Karl Marx played a decisive role in shaping the communist ideal. Anarchism, for its part, was identified with the contributions of Mikhail Bakunin and Peter Kropotkin. Conservatism and traditionalism found their champions in Edmund Burke and Louis de Bonald. The rules of representative government were elaborated with precision by the French and American founding fathers during the revolutions of the late eighteenth century. And many other names closer to our own day could be cited to highlight the process of revising and refining these pioneering works – a process implicit in the economic, social, and political evolutions of the world that have been under way for two centuries.

There is nothing of the sort for populism. It is linked to no work of comparable scope, no text commensurate with the centrality it has acquired.[5] Its ideology has been characterized as soft, or weak. These qualifiers are deceptive, as populism's capacity to mobilize supporters makes clear; and while the adjectives cited convey implicit value judgments, they are not helpful. The problem is precisely that

the ideology of populism has never been formalized and developed, for the simple reason that its propagandists have seen no need to do so: the voters they attract are more attuned to angry outbursts and vengeful demonizing than to theoretical argument.

The objective of this book, then, is to propose an initial sketch of the missing theory, with the ambition of doing so in terms that permit a radical confrontation – one that goes to the very heart of the matter – with the populist idea. As the starting point for developing an in-depth critique of the idea on the terrain of social and democratic theory, we have to recognize populism as the rising ideology of the twenty-first century. The pages that follow are designed to carry out this task in three phases. The first part describes the anatomy of populism, constituting it as an ideal type. The second part presents a history of populism that leads to an integration of that ideal type within a general typology of democratic forms. The third and final part is devoted to a critique of populism.

The anatomy of populism

This part is built around a presentation of the five elements that make up populist political culture: a conception of "the people," a theory of democracy, a mode of representation, a politics and a philosophy of economics, and a regime of passions and emotions. The conception of the people, based on the distinction between "them" and "us," is the element that has been most often analyzed. I shall enrich the usual description, however, first by shoring it up with an analysis of the tension between the people as a civic body and the people as a social body, and second by showing how the term "people" has acquired a renewed capacity to shape the social world in an age of individualism based on singularities. The populist theory of democracy is based, for its part, on three elements: a preference for direct democracy (illustrated by the glorification of the referendum process); a polarized and hyper-electoralist vision of the sovereignty of the people that rejects intermediary bodies and aims to domesticate non-elective institutions (such as constitutional courts and independent authorities); and an understanding of the general will as capable of expressing itself spontaneously. The populist conception of representation is in turn linked with the foregrounding of the figure of a "leader standing for the people," an individual who manifests a perceptible quality of embodiment, as a remedy for the existing state of unsatisfactory representation. National protectionism is another constitutive element

of the populist ideology, moreover, provided that it is understood as not limited to economic policy. National protectionism is in fact more deeply inscribed in a sovereignist vision of reconstructing the political will and ensuring the security of a population. The economic sphere is thus in this respect eminently political. Finally, the political culture of populism is explicitly attached to the mobilization of a set of emotions and passions whose importance is recognized and theorized here. I shall distinguish among emotions related to intellection (destined to make the world more readable through recourse to what are essentially conspiracy narratives), emotions related to action (rejectionism), and emotions related to status (the feeling of being abandoned, of being invisible). Populism has recognized the role of affects in politics and used them in pioneering ways, going well beyond the traditional recipes for seduction. Once the ideal type of populism has been fleshed out on the basis of these five elements, we shall examine the diversity of populisms, taking particular care to analyze the distinction between populisms on the left and those on the right.

The three histories of populism

Does populism have a history? While the answer to a question formulated in such general terms can only be in the affirmative, it must immediately be qualified, for that history can be conceptualized in three very different ways. First, one can simply consider the history of the word "populism": this is the simplest approach and the one most commonly encountered. I shall wait to present its essential elements in an annex to this book, for it contributes relatively little to an understanding of our present situation. The word has in fact been used in three different contexts that are entirely unrelated to one another and only weakly related to what populism has come to mean today.

The term first appeared in the 1870s in the context of Russian populism, a movement of intellectuals and young people from well-to-do and even aristocratic backgrounds who were critical of projects for Western-style modernization of the country and sought to "go down to the people," as they put it. They saw the traditions of agrarian communities and village assemblies as possible starting points for building a new society. The idea was that, in Russia, the peasantry would be the force for renewal, fulfilling the role the proletariat was expected to play in the West. This approach, which could

be called "top-down populism," never mobilized the popular masses themselves. Nevertheless, it left a significant legacy, for some of the great figures in Russian anarchism and Marxism took their first steps as militants in that movement.

A decade later, it was in America that a People's Party, whose supporters were commonly labeled populists, saw the light of day. This movement for the most part mobilized the world of small farmers on the Great Plains who were on the warpath against the big railroad companies and the big banks to which they had become indebted. The movement met with a certain degree of success in the early 1890s, but it never managed to reach a national audience, despite its resonant denunciation of corruption in politics and its call for a more direct democracy. (These themes were beginning to emerge everywhere in the country; they eventually gave rise to the Progressive Movement, which succeeded in developing a whole set of political reforms – the organization of primaries, the possibility of recalling elected officials, the recourse to referendums by popular initiative – that would be implemented in the Western states.) The People's Party was an authentic popular movement, but it remained confined to a geographically circumscribed agricultural world; it failed to extend its appeal to working-class voters. None of the American populists appears to have been aware, moreover, of the earlier use of the term in Russia.

The word made its third appearance in France in 1929, in an entirely different and completely unrelated context. The "Manifesto of the Populist Novel" published that year was a strictly literary event: in the tradition of the naturalist movement, the manifesto urged French novelists to focus more on depicting popular milieus. Forerunners such as Émile Zola and contemporaries such as Marcel Pagnol and Eugène Dabit were evoked in support of this literary populism. There were no interactions at all between this third "populist" movement and either of its predecessors, nor did any of the three prefigure contemporary uses of the term populism, contrary to what ill-informed references sometimes suggest.

A second type of history allows us to advance in a more suggestive manner in the comprehension of contemporary populism: this is the history of moments or regimes that, without having invoked the label, resonate with our concerns today and make it easier to understand the dynamics of the essential components of populism. I have focused on three of these. First, France's Second Empire, an exemplary illustration of the way in which the cult of universal suffrage and of referendums (called "plebiscites" at the time) could

be linked to the construction of an authoritarian, immediate, and polarized democracy, one that would be qualified as "illiberal" today. What is of interest in the context of the current study is that this regime theorized its project, spelling out the reasons why it viewed the democracy it was establishing as more authentic than the liberal parliamentary model. Next, the Latin American laboratory of the mid-twentieth century, illustrated initially by Colombia's Jorge Eliécer Gaitán and Argentina's Juan Perón: these regimes bring clearly to light the conditions for expressing and enacting embodied representation, as well as the mobilizing capacity of the opposition between an oligarchy and the people in societies that were not based on European-style class structures. Finally, going back to the prewar period 1890–1914, we find a good vantage point for observing the rise of populist themes at the point of the first globalization, most notably in France and in the United States: what took place during this period sheds light on the conditions under which political divisions beyond the traditional right/left opposition were redefined. And it also helps us see how the populist wave of the period was brought to a halt. In effect, we are invited to consider a future that did not materialize. While the present always remains to be written, and while it is important to be skeptical of analogies that downplay this fact, the three periods I have evoked nevertheless offer food for thought.

A comprehensive global history of populism defines a third approach, one that might be called inseparably social and conceptual. It seeks to deepen our understanding of the present by considering the past as a repertoire of aborted possibilities, a laboratory of experiments that invite us to reflect on incompletions, reversals, and gropings in the dark. Here we are dealing with a long history of the problematic character of democracy. It is not the history of an ideal model whose germination we would study, thinking that it might one day be fully and completely realized. There is nothing linear about the history of democracy: it is constituted rather by continuous intellectual conflicts over its definition as much as it is marked by intense social struggles around the establishment of certain of its principal institutions (yesterday's conquest of universal suffrage or today's recognition of minority rights come to mind). It is a history of unkept promises and mangled ideals in which we remain completely immersed, as is obvious from the intensity of the contemporary disenchantment with democracy and the difficulty of finding the conditions that would allow us to institute an authentic society of equals. This tumultuous history is inseparable from the structural

indeterminacy of adequate forms for democracies, given that the appropriate modalities for the exercise of collective sovereignty, the establishment of norms of justice that would allow the construction of a world of equals, and the very definition of "the people" all remain subject to controversy. At the same time, impatience on the part of some and fear on the part of others have led to a constant radicalization of the processes by which both the breaks with the past to be achieved and the gains to be preserved are perceived. In this context, I shall describe populism as a limit case of the democratic project, alongside two other limit cases: those of minimal democracies (democracies reduced to the rights of man and the election of leaders) and essentialist democracies (defined by the institution of a societal authority in charge of building public welfare). Each of the latter two forms, by virtue of its structure and its history, is threatened by a specific mode of degradation: a slide toward elective oligarchies in the case of minimal democracies and a totalitarian turn of power against society in the case of essentialist democracies. When the populist form of democracy that I have characterized as polarized is the basis for a regime, it runs the risk, for its part, of sliding toward *democratorship*[6] – that is, toward an authoritarian power that nevertheless retains a (variable) potential for being overturned.

On critiques of populism

The most common political critique of populism charges it with illiberalism, that is, with a tendency to make the ("societal") extension of individual rights secondary to the affirmation of collective sovereignty, and a simultaneous tendency to challenge the intermediary bodies accused of thwarting the action of the elected authorities. I myself spoke, some twenty years ago, of "illiberal democracy" with regard to the Second Empire,[7] and I have used the term more recently with respect to populist regimes. The term still seems appropriate to me in almost all cases in which it is used to characterize an observable tendency. But I no longer believe that it can serve as an axis around which to build an effective critique (that is, a critique that advances arguments capable of modifying an opposing opinion), for the simple reason that the leading voices of populism explicitly denounce liberal democracy for curtailing and hijacking authentic democracy. Vladimir Putin, a propagandist for a democracy labeled "sovereign," has asserted forcefully that liberalism has become "obsolete,"[8] while Viktor Orbán, for his part, has insisted that "a democracy is

not necessarily liberal."[9] Thus it is on the grounds of a democratic critique of populism that the new champions of this ideal need to be interrogated and contested.

Political life is a graveyard of critiques and warnings that have been powerless to change the course of events. I encountered this phenomenon while studying the history of the nineteenth century in France, when I saw, for example, the inability of the republican opposition to Napoleon III to get its arguments across to the French populace as a whole. The French rose up against a regime that they rightly denounced for quashing freedom, but at the same time they were incapable of seeing through the regime's claim that its recourse to plebiscites served to honor the sovereignty of the people more than its predecessors had.[10] In other words, their intelligence was not equal to their indignation. And this is the case today with those who settle for a liberal critique of populism. This book seeks to break the spell by proposing an in-depth critique of the democratic theory that structures the populist ideology.

This endeavor begins with a detailed analysis of the limits of referendums with respect to a project for achieving democracy. Next, it addresses the question of democratic polarization by emphasizing that a democracy that proposes to make a collectivity responsible for its own destiny cannot be based solely on the exercise of majoritarian electoral power. Since this latter is simply a conventional but notoriously imperfect manifestation of the general will, the general will has to borrow complementary expressions in order to give more consistent body to the democratic ideal. The notions of "power belonging to no one" and "power belonging to anyone at all," two other ways of grasping the democratic "we," are examined here, along with the institutional arrangements that may be attached to them, in order to stress the narrowing implied by an exclusively electoralist vision of power belonging to all. I shall also demonstrate in this context that institutions such as constitutional courts and independent authorities, generally viewed only through the prism of their liberal dimension, have a democratic character first and foremost. In effect, they constitute a guarantee for the people in contentious encounters with its representatives. By the same token, this approach is an invitation to conceptualize the relations between liberalism and democracy, that is, between freedom and sovereignty, in inclusive rather than exclusive terms. I shall also examine the popular conception of the notion of "the people" by advancing a sociological critique of the opposition between the 1 percent and the 99 percent. In this context, the notion of a "democratic society to

be constructed" is opposed to that of an imaginary "people as one body."

These assorted critiques of a theoretical nature will be supplemented by critiques focused on the *practices* of populist regimes, and in particular the conditions under which the polarization of institutions comes into play: modifications of the role and modes of organization of constitutional courts, and suppression or manipulation of independent authorities and especially of electoral oversight commissions, where they exist. To these elements I shall add data concerning policies toward the media, associations, and opposition parties. Taken together, all these elements give body to the qualifier "illiberalism," which takes on a meaning that we can then assess concretely (the relation between the practices and the justifications of France's Second Empire will be highlighted in this context). Here I shall pay specific attention to the legal arrangements adopted in order to secure the irreversibility of these regimes and their installation for the long run, most often through the removal of restrictions on term limits.

The alternative

Before it can be studied as a problem, populism has to be understood as a proposition developed in response to contemporary problems. This book takes populism seriously by analyzing and critiquing it as such a proposition. But a critique can only fulfill its role completely if it goes on to sketch out an alternative proposition.[11] The final pages of this study are devoted to such an effort. They present the major features of what could be a generalized and expansive sovereignty of the people, one that enriches democracy instead of simplifying or polarizing it. This approach is based on a definition of democracy as ongoing work to be undertaken in a process of continuous exploration, rather than as a model whose features could be faithfully reproduced without further conflict and debate over its adequate form.

— I —

ANATOMY

— 1 —

A CONCEPTION OF "THE PEOPLE": THE PEOPLE AS ONE BODY

One common feature of populist movements is that they establish the people as the central figure of democracy. Some will call this a tautology, given that the *demos* is sovereign by definition in a type of regime whose name itself refers to the demos. And every good democrat is necessarily a populist, in this very general sense. But the self-evident statement is as fuzzy in practical terms as it seems to be imperative conceptually. *Who is* in fact this governing people? The question never fails to come up. From the outset, it has been invoked in endless oscillation between a reference to *the people as a civic body*, a figure of political generality expressing unity, and reference to *the people as a social group*, a figure conflated de facto with a specific segment of the population. When the Americans began the preamble to their Constitution in 1787 with the words "We the People," they were using the term in the first sense. It was in that sense, too, that the French revolutionaries consistently linked references to the people with references to the nation (a term that referred explicitly, for its part, only to a historical and political notion). This people stemmed from a constitutional principle or from a political philosophy before it had any concrete existence (moreover, when it did come into being, it took the reduced form of a rarely unanimous electoral body). But in 1789, when one spoke about the people who had stormed the Bastille, the reference was also to a crowd that had a face – as did the crowd that gathered in 1791 on the Champ-de-Mars to celebrate the Federation, and the crowds that erected the barricades in 1830 or 1848. The people existed, in these cases, in the form of specific manifestations. The people to whom Jules Michelet or Victor Hugo referred had a perceptible consistency: they were *les petites gens*, the bottom layers of society (those featured by Hugo as

"the wretched" in his novel *Les Misérables*). In this case, one could speak of a "social people," the people as a specific social group. It was imperative to tell this people's story, to bring it to the fore, in order to constitute it and pay it homage through the representation of particular existences. A more sociological approach gradually took hold and defined the contours of this people. The social people then took on the name proletariat, working class, or "popular classes" (the plural taking into account the complexity of social structures). The language of class thus gave the term "people" a particular meaning. But this reduction in scope was corrected by a statistical fact, namely, the numerical preponderance of a world of workers that had its own pronounced identity – further complicated by the fact that Marxism saw the working class as the forerunner of a new universalism: the classless society.

Although these two peoples, the people as a social group and the people as a civic body, did not coincide, they were nevertheless inscribed in a common narrative and a common vision, that of achieving a democracy understood simultaneously as a governing regime and as a form of society. The prospect of such an achievement dimmed at the turn of the twenty-first century, in two ways. First, electoral bodies have suffered a certain atrophy: a growing rate of voter abstention expresses both the rejection of traditional parties and the feeling of being poorly represented. This atrophy can be seen in the decline in voter turnout, that is, in the democratic exercise of expressing one's opinion at the ballot box.[1] Next, in sociological terms, societies have been affected by increasing individualization as well as by the transformation of living and working conditions that has shaped unprecedented modalities of exploitation, relegation, and domination. These insufficiently studied upheavals have reinforced feelings of inadequate representation and invisibility for a growing part of the population in most countries. Under such conditions, "the people" has become "unlocatable."[2] It is in this context that the populist notion of the people has been forged, proposing a purportedly more appropriate evocation of the present and embedding itself within a perspective intended to mobilize a refounding of democracy.

From class to people

The populist project of refounding democracy by restoring the centrality of the idea of a people is based in the first place on the

abandonment of analyses of the social world in class terms. The arguments of two of the chief exponents of left populism, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, are very revealing on this point. Coming out of a Marxist tradition, these authors observe that ownership of the means of production, with the exploitative relations that ensue, is no longer the only or even the principal issue shaping the contemporary social divide. For the conflicts structuring public space have now spread into new fields: relations between men and women, territorial inequalities, questions of identity and discrimination, for example. But they have also spread into everything that is felt to be an infringement on personal dignity; such infringements are experienced as intolerable forms of distancing and domination (populist discourse reflects this by promising to restore pride even before the question of increased buying power arises). In this context, there is no longer a *single* class struggle that polarizes things all by itself, just as there is no longer a *single* social class that essentially bears the hope for humanity's emancipation (the working class, the proletariat). "The populist moment," Chantal Mouffe writes,

> is the expression of a set of heterogeneous demands, which cannot be formulated merely in terms of interests linked to specific social categories. Furthermore, in neoliberal capitalism new forms of subordination have emerged outside the productive process. They have given rise to demands that no longer correspond to social sectors defined in sociological terms and by their location in the social structure . . . This is why today the political frontier needs to be constructed in a "populist" transversal mode.[3]

As Mouffe sees it, this new frontier is the one that opposes "the people" to "the oligarchy." Ernesto Laclau deduces from this argument that

> populism is not an ideology but a mode of construction of the political, based on splitting society in two and calling for the mobilization of "those at the bottom" against the existing authorities. There is populism every time the social order is felt to be essentially unjust and when there is a call for the construction of a new subject of collective action – *the people* – capable of reconfiguring that order in its very foundations. Without the construction and totalization of a new global collective will, there is no populism.[4]

Laclau presupposes that all the demands and conflicts that traverse society can be ordered along the single axis of the opposition between

those who hold political, economic, social, or cultural power, taken as a bloc (Bourdieu calls this the dominant class), and the rest of society (the people).

Them and us

Laclau thus conceives populism as derived from a "horizontal logic of equivalence"[5] that amalgamates the entire set of social demands. This amalgamation is made possible by the recognition that a common enemy exists, tracing the line of separation between "them" and "us." The enemy can be characterized as a "caste," an "oligarchy," an "elite," or a generalized "system." The existence of this enemy is what draws an "interior borderline dividing the social realm into two separate and antagonistic camps" – a vision that is thus the polar opposite of a "liberal" understanding of conflicts and of social demands, which are viewed as always subject to possible compromise and arbitration. For Laclau, the populist project entails a radicalization of politics as a process of construction and activation of a friend/enemy relation. Hence his central concept of "antagonism," which allows him to characterize conflicts for which no rational and peaceful outcome is possible. Hence, too, his fascination – shared by Chantal Mouffe – with the work of Carl Schmitt, in particular Schmitt's political theory and his radical anti-liberalism. This fascination constitutes one of the intellectual links between right and left populism, moreover, as attested by the convergence between Laclau's analyses and those of thinkers such as Alain de Benoist.[6]

The designation of an "enemy of the people" is not based on a simple acknowledgment of opposing interests or of competition for power. It also has an instinctual dimension, based on a sense that the "enemy" sets itself apart, displays contempt, lacks compassion. Populist movements strongly emphasize the power of affects in political mobilization: they help promote the feeling that worlds foreign to one another are in confrontation and that the barriers between "them" and "us" are insurmountable. These movements invoke the lack of humanity on the part of a "caste," an "elite," or an "oligarchy" in order to justify and legitimize the hatred manifested toward these enemies, who are perceived as having seceded, morally and socially, from the common world. Hence the virulence of the diatribes against those who "stuff themselves" at the expense of the people, the stigmatization of the "financial wizards" who "pig out," "gorge themselves" with riches, and cut themselves off from their

fellow citizens in countless ways. The figures of the politician, the billionaire, and the technocrat are superimposed and denounced as similarly execrable.

The power of a word

The word "people" is thus particularly meaningful today because it gives voice to something that many citizens feel in a confused way, whereas the concepts of traditional sociology, the statistical vocabulary of socio-professional categories, or the criteria of administrative forms strike these citizens as belonging to dead languages, remote from their own lives and experience. The divide between the "top" and the "bottom" of society is thus also perceived in an existential mode. The elites are accused of living in a world that does not know what is happening at its gates. And "the people" is defined, in a mirror image, as the world of men and women who remain nameless in the eyes of the important figures, the elites. The social fracture is thus also identified with a "cognitive distance" – with the gap between the "statistical truths" that the governing authorities put forward in order to qualify the state of society, on the one hand, and the living conditions people actually experience, on the other. The ordinary individual in fact has nothing to do with the average person in today's society: he or she is always a particular individual.

The positive redeployment of the word "people" is inscribed in this context. Its new use no longer refers to a political abstraction or to a faceless crowd. In its very indeterminacy it seems open to the perceptible, concrete life of each person. It gives collective form to a society of individuals while welcoming singularities – all the more so in that its glorious history ennobles, in a way, the position of those who feel dominated, invisible, or locked into the specificity of their conditions. One can thus claim with pride that one is part of "the people," whereas one can feel vaguely ashamed to be defined by reductive criteria (being unemployed, living on the minimum wage, having a hard time making ends meet, lacking higher education, and so on). Membership in "the people" allows one to cry out in anger and to display noble tendencies at the same time.

The use of this advantageous and divisive identification allows for a return to rhetorical figures and expressions of passion that revive the old revolutionary aversion to the privileged figures considered alien to the nation, along with the type of demonization of foreigners that has often been observed in wartime. Moral disqualification

also plays an essential role in the way everyone deemed corrupt, in the various senses of the term, can be seen as forming a single bloc. Conversely, those counted among "the people" are seen as virtuous, sensitive to the suffering of others, hard-working and self-supporting. In France, Jean-Luc Mélenchon has explicitly appropriated this populist discourse; the parallel with Robespierre's is striking.[7] The parallel is also clear in the way political adversaries are characterized as foreign agents, described as agents of international capitalism, a globalized multiculturalism, or a technocratic Europe that flouts national sovereignties; the term "neoliberalism" sums up in a single word the political and social culture of the enemy "caste." More generally, the word "people" is two-faced, like Janus. It resounds with the idea of a certain moral grandeur even as it justifies murky hatreds.[8] It constructs the political field in such a way that the adversary must necessarily be an enemy of humanity. It serves as a label for discontent even as it indicates the pathway to a certain type of change.

From these various standpoints, populist movements seek to restore perceptible consistency to the invocation of a people as one body that has become unlocatable, a reference that was previously just a "floating signifier" or even an "empty signifier," to return to Ernesto Laclau's terminology. This way of "constructing a people"[9] obviously raises a number of questions; we shall return to these in part III of this book, where we shall explore the conditions for an appropriate critique of populism. But it is important to note that this approach has the advantage of reducing the split or at least the tension between the notion of the people as a civic body and that of the people as a social group. The two in fact coincide, in that they both relegate the governing authorities and the various types of elites or oligarchs to the same category: that of caste, for example. The revitalization of democracy and the improvement of living conditions thus depend, in the populist perspective, on the simultaneous rejection of that small, unified group of enemies of the people; social struggle and political confrontation are conflated.[10] This is what gives the movement its strength.

— 2 —

A THEORY OF DEMOCRACY: DIRECT, POLARIZED, IMMEDIATE

Populisms function from within the perspective of an effort to regenerate democracy. From that standpoint, they undertake to prosecute existing democracies as these are generally practiced and theorized – let us call them liberal representative democracies. They are liberal in the sense that they have set up procedures and institutions to ensure against the risk of tyranny on the part of majorities; guarantees protecting the integrity and autonomy of individual persons occupy a central place. In most countries, this entails constitutional arrangements that guarantee individual rights, either by framing legislative power to that end or by establishing independent institutions designed to exert control over executive power or even to exercise some of its prerogatives. These democracies are representative in that they are based on the idea that the power of the people will be limited, with some exceptions, to the process of selecting and confirming leaders through elections. The populist vision of democracy seeks to offer an alternative that challenges both the liberal and the representative conceptions as diminutions of the democratic ideal.

Leaders such as Viktor Orbán and Vladimir Putin have thus repeatedly presented themselves as champions of a break with liberal democracy, implying that an open conflict between two competing conceptions of the democratic project exists today. Among theorists of democracy, we find Chantal Mouffe calling on her readers "to understand that liberal democracy results from the articulation of two logics which are incompatible in the last instance";[1] she invites us to stop identifying democracy with the rule of law and the defense of human rights – as neoliberalism does, in her view – and to restore the principle of collective sovereignty to the foreground. Hence the

link between the aspiration to a populist radicalization of democracy and the intellectual stigmatization of a societal and "human-rights-ist" vision that is accused of privileging the cult of the individual and of minorities at the expense of the concern for affirming the sovereignty of the people. Hence, also, the positive theorization of the illiberal character of the populist project as the condition for a more authentic democracy (we shall return at length to this point in the concluding part of this book).

On this basis, the populist conception of democracy presents three characteristics. It seeks first of all to privilege *direct democracy*, calling in particular for the multiplication of referendums initiated by the people. Next, it defends the project of a *polarized democracy*, denouncing the non-democratic character of unelected authorities and of constitutional courts. Finally, it exalts – and this is the key point – the *immediate and spontaneous expression* of popular opinion.

The cult of referendums and the apologia for direct democracy

In France, it was in the mid-1980s, as the Front National was beginning to gain ground in the voting booths, that that right-wing party made the extension of referendum procedures one of its major campaign themes. Calling for a "true French revolution," Jean-Marie Le Pen spoke of the need to "enlarge democracy" in this manner, in order to "restore speech to the people."[2] He described referendums as "the most perfect expression of democracy." And he called at the same time for the introduction of a specific type of "veto-referendum" that would allow the people to "oppose the promulgation of laws adopted by the Parliament but of which the people disapproved."[3] A little later, the Front National program for the 1997 legislative elections became more precise, proposing to extend the use of referendums "to liberate the French people from the yoke of the political class": a "popularly initiated referendum" was supposed to allow citizens to decide for themselves on issues submitted for their consideration.[4]

The intellectual circles that accompanied the Front National's rise in strength during that period, concentrated in institutions such as the Club de l'Horloge (an elite right-wing think tank promoting nationalism) or GRECE (a militant right-wing "group of research and study for European civilization"), were simultaneously pursuing

this celebration of direct democracy by connecting it with the Swiss tradition, which they described as a model democracy rooted in history and careful not to allow itself to be denaturalized by foreign bodies. It was thanks to direct democracy, they argued, that Switzerland was able to protect itself from fiscal abuses and from massive immigration.[5] Direct appeals to the public were thus presented as the way to get rid of the old elites – politicians and oligarchs – while guarding against the danger of invasion by "unassimilable" immigrants; the traditional representative system was relegated to a sort of prehistory of democracy. All later populist movements have adopted this vision of direct democracy, which they see as an effective instrument to be used by a healthy and fully sovereign people for sidelining corrupt and incompetent elites. Moreover, referendums present a powerful performative specificity, since by speaking out – seizing the floor – in this way the people are thought to be expressing a directly active will, thus breaking with all the temporizing on the part of the politicians.

The way the 2005 referendum on the European Constitution was sidestepped three years later by the French Parliament's ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon made a deep impression in France. If one had to settle on the moment when the populist groundswell began to expand in the country, this would certainly be the symbolic date to choose. Ever since, populist figures have foregrounded the democratic character of referendums as opposed to the propensity of representative parliamentary systems to confiscate the sovereignty of the people. Eleven years after the French signed the Treaty of Lisbon, the affirmation of the popular preference for Brexit was similarly contrasted with the contrary aspirations of the majority of members of the British Parliament. And throughout Europe one could see, in populist milieus, a revival of interest in the Swiss procedures for popular initiatives and voting, thanks to which Christophe Blocher's UDC (the Democratic Union of the Center, or Swiss People's Party) was repeatedly able to dictate the agenda for the country's debates. Indeed, populist regimes all over the world have been resorting to referendums in order to solidify their legitimacy and often to increase the prerogatives of the executive branch. In such cases, referendums frequently look very much like plebiscites. But this issue has scarcely been examined in populist circles, whether on the right or on the left, so firmly has the democratic perfection of the referendum procedure come to seem self-evident.

Democracy polarized

"Government by judges" is an expression that has often been used in France to stigmatize what has been perceived as a threat: the increasing authority of a judiciary that has become more and more independent in many democracies. Populists denounce this independence in particular when it is expressed through the development of jurisprudence that amplifies a law in the process of interpreting it. Marine Le Pen has hammered away at this point in a typical refrain: "Judges are there to apply the law, not to invent it, not to thwart the will of the people, not to replace legislators. A public office is not supposed to authorize its holder to usurp power."[6] Some have not even hesitated to use the newly coined term "juridictatorship" to characterize the independence of the magistracy and the extension of the authority of France's Constitutional Council,[7] qualifying the rule of law as "the central error" of contemporary democracies. The opposition between law and democracy is not a new one. It was the focus of many arguments during the American and French Revolutions, leading the writers of the French Constitution, in 1790, to adopt the principle of electing judges. (Called into question later on, this principle remained a republican demand throughout the nineteenth century.) For their part, many American states also instituted mechanisms for electing judges; these systems are still in place.[8] But the law/democracy opposition has been radicalized in the populist vision, which deems that the magistracy can claim only a narrow functional legitimacy, and that the democratic status of this legitimacy is secondary to that of the elected officials who have been anointed by popular vote. In this case, we can speak of a *polarized* vision of legitimacy and of democratic institutions, in which voting is seen as the unique means of democratic expression. (This vision leads in turn to the view that democracy itself is a procedural matter, lacking any substantive dimension; the term might characterize, for example, the quality of an institution and its operations.)

This way of grasping democracy has been translated more broadly in populist regimes by the imposition of constraints on – or even the suppression of – independent authorities, the most striking manifestation of which has been the reduced jurisdiction of constitutional courts. At the very heart of the European Union, the adoption in 2011 of the new Hungarian Constitution caused a stir, so severely had the powers of the country's Constitutional Court been reduced by a revision pursued and intellectually justified by supporters of

Viktor Orbán. Following a different procedure, the independence of a comparable institution was seriously curtailed in Poland as well. Although these countries received vigorous critiques from the authorities in Brussels, they were not persuaded to revise their approach. On the contrary, they have defended themselves as being ardent servants of the sovereignty of the people; in their eyes, the broad mandates granted to their constitutional courts during the postcommunist transition period are no longer justified in a stabilized democracy in which the people have become truly sovereign. Similar processes have been followed in Bolivia and Venezuela, and also in Turkey and Russia (let us note that in Russia the notion of "sovereign democracy" has been foregrounded to characterize this mechanism of polarization[9]).

Immediate expression by the people

Finally, an implicit vision of the self-evidence of the general will is embedded in the populist perspective, once victory over the enemies of the people has been won. This is in keeping with the political philosophy of Carl Schmitt,[10] for whom the celebration of popular acclamation as the perfected form of democracy went hand in hand with a critique of the illusions associated with the pluralism of the liberal parliamentary approach. For Schmitt, the people that was constituted in the fight against its enemies was necessarily homogeneous and unanimous. Without borrowing his ethnic conception of homogeneity, his "populist readers" – Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau among them – have retained his idea of unanimity as the regulatory horizon of democratic expression, with all that this implies in terms of rejecting theories of argumentation and deliberation.[11] In this framework, political participation does not define an active citizenry based on the formulation of personal opinions and confrontation between opposing viewpoints; it refers rather to the phenomenon of proving oneself as a member of a community.[12] It is a form of Rousseauism grafted onto an a priori assumption of the virtues and potentialities of popular spontaneity, of the good sense of the masses. "All individuals are subject to error and seduction, but not the people, which possesses to an eminent degree . . . consciousness of its own good and the measure of its independence. Because of this its judgment is pure, its will is strong, and none can corrupt or even threaten it."[13] This vision would seem to have been borrowed directly from the passages in

Rousseau's *Social Contract* deeming that the general will could not err.

An immediate democracy of this sort thus does not require the structuring of political organizations that operate on the basis of an internal democracy; it calls rather for acts of adherence to already-constituted political propositions. An internal democracy would in fact imply the existence of tendencies, debates over strategy, competition among individuals: this is how parties are typically structured. Conversely, a political movement in the image of "the people as one body," of which it seeks to be both the midwife and the revealer, can only form a coherent and cemented ensemble. This is why populist movements are in phase with the new world of social networks in which a category of *followers* has arisen; the term characterizes a type of bond among individuals and implies a pole from which initiatives emanate.

The critique of the media that is at the heart of populist rhetoric must be understood and measured by the yardstick of this principle of immediacy. The insults of a Trump addressed to journalists, the vituperations of an Orbán against the henchmen of George Soros, or the calls of a Mélenchon to a "legitimate and healthy hatred of the media" do not stem from simple fits of pique. While they may well translate exasperation and rancor in the face of contrary forces, they share more deeply in a theory of immediate democracy that deems it structurally illegitimate for intermediary bodies – of which the press constitutes a major instance – to presume to play an active role in animating public life and in constituting public opinion. For them, the media are impediments to the expression of the general will rather than necessary contributors to its formation. Viewed through a prism presupposing democratic spontaneity, the media can be regarded as functionally illegitimate and morally illegitimate as well, given their presumed dependency on private interests and the power of money.

— 3 —

A MODE OF REPRESENTATION: A LEADER EMBODYING THE PEOPLE

Populism exalts a people as one body, a people bound together by its rejection of elites and oligarchies. This people also vilifies a political caste that it accuses of defending its own interests and of having lost any representative character. Hence the rejection of the political party structure, which is associated with rote speechifying and governance arrangements dissociated from reality; the party structure is also condemned for being paralyzed by incessant struggles for influence among rival groups. Hence, too, the preference for a different type of political organization, the "movement." In addition to their original claim that they bring new blood into public life, populist movements are thus structurally distinguished from parties. Whereas parties were ideally conceived as the orchestrated expression of specific groups, whether these were defined socially, territorially, or ideologically, movements claim to want to bring all of society together.[1] It was easy enough to see parties as representative of society because they emanated from well-defined existing realities (workers, farmers, craftsmen, businessmen, members of religious communities, and so on). Populist movements appear in a different light. First of all, they are constituted in more negative terms, through an accumulation of rejections and condemnations. At the same time, the people for whom they purport to speak has an increasingly nebulous character. The decline of political parties is linked in part to that reality, moreover. Not only are the parties victims of their rootedness in the past and their own ossification, but they no longer have a firm foothold in a society that has radically changed, a society in which social conditions are increasingly fragmented.[2] In this context, a favorable echo of the populist message has emerged, for its globalization has led to the sense that commonalities could be produced

within such fragmentation. But the denunciatory discourse of populism does not suffice to compensate for the deficit in representation that characterizes contemporary democracies. Hence the key role played by populist leaders as they strive to flesh out a coherent message.

The Latin American precedent

Since the mid-twentieth century, Latin American populism has illustrated in exemplary fashion this constitutive dimension of today's populisms. The phenomenon is not surprising, for populism has emerged in less-industrialized countries that were structured not so much around a class system as around landownership and oligarchic forms of domination. The opposition between the people and the elites was thus the most telling one for a great many citizens. It was in this context that the theme of a leader embodying the people appeared. "I am not a man, I am a people": these words, insistently repeated in the 1930s and 1940s by Colombian leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, set the tone for later populisms throughout the continent.[3] Gaitán's profile is worth lingering over, so well does it express the ambiguities of that nascent populism; Gaitán was as vehemently opposed to capitalism as he was attracted to the European fascisms that were then on the rise. Studying in Rome in 1926–7, he wrote a thesis under the direction of Enrico Ferri, a celebrated criminologist who had shifted from socialism to fascism. Having become Ferri's protégé, Gaitán attended several of Mussolini's meetings and later avowed that he had been impressed by that leader's ability to dominate his audience and energize a crowd. He even carefully studied Il Duce's gestures and the way he modulated his tone of voice to hold his audience's attention – techniques that Gaitán went on to reproduce in his political action in Colombia. "The people's candidate" in presidential elections, both an anti-capitalist and an adversary of the traditional oligarchy, Gaitán was assassinated in 1948. (We shall return to his writings later on.) Since then, his name has come to symbolize the Latin American spirit of populism, in its language as well as in its anti-oligarchic stance, with all the attendant ambiguities. Gaitán was admired by both Fidel Castro and Juan Perón; the latter also sought to become the Leader Embodying the People and spoke of "depersonalization" to characterize the plans that the revolution had embedded in him;[4] implying that his individuality was being absorbed by that of the Argentineans.

Hugo Chávez, referring explicitly to Gaitán, hammered in the formula during the 2012 presidential campaign for the presidency in Venezuela. "When I see you," he regularly said to the crowds gathered in meeting halls,

> when you see me, I feel it, something tells me: "Chávez, you are no longer Chávez, you are a people." In effect I am no longer myself, I am a people and I follow you, that is how I experience it, I have embodied myself in you. I have said it before and I say it again: we are millions of Chávezes; you too, a Venezuelan woman, you are Chávez; you too, a Venezuelan soldier, you are Chávez; you too, a fisherman, a farmer, a businessman, you are Chávez. Because Chávez is no longer myself. Chávez is a whole people![5]

Thus was reborn the old idea of *mirror representation*.[6] In his first speech after his inauguration as president of the Republic in 1999, he went so far as to tell his audience: "Today, I am turning myself into your instrument. As for me, I scarcely exist, and I shall carry out the mandate you have entrusted to me. Get ready to govern!"[7]

The leader as an organ of the people's body

Until fairly recently, the examples of populism from Latin America still had an "exotic" aspect. But the increasing strength of populisms clearly shows that appreciation of the leader as "embodying the people" belongs to a vision of political representation that characterizes populisms in general. During the 1995 French presidential campaign, the Front National put the slogan "Le Pen, le peuple" on its posters. The matter was theorized later on by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, who had been recognized as the intellectual organs of left-wing populist tendencies. Laclau stressed that, "as a condition of its emergence, populism requires verticality of a new type. The people, as a collective actor, has to shape itself around a certain identity. But that identity is not automatic: it must be constructed."[8] This means, for Laclau, that alongside the "horizontal expressions of democratic equivalencies" there has to be a "vertical articulation around a hegemonic signifier that, in most cases, is the name of a leader."[9] Mouffe has the same view: "To turn heterogeneous demands into a collective will it's necessary to have a figure who can represent that unity, and I don't think there can be a populist movement without leadership, that's for sure."[10]

Formulated by writers on the left, these assertions provoked a certain discomfort. But they were vigorously defended by their authors, who contrasted the type of leadership they were calling for with "the very authoritarian relation" that characterized, as they saw it, the relationships between a people and its leader in right-wing forms of populism. But that is a weak argument, based simply on a priori circumstances. Their thoughts about the specificity of the leader embodying the people are more interesting. For Laclau and Mouffe and others, this is a leader who exists as such only if he effectively embodies the lives and demands of those he represents: in short, only if he manifests a real power of embodiment. In that case, he can be said to be *ideally* a depersonalized leader, a pure representative, a figure totally absorbed in his role, thus far removed from the expression of a personality cult and from the relation of domination that such a cult implies.[11] I emphasize "ideally" here: from this standpoint the leader can be viewed as a pure organ of the people.[12] He is not only the chosen one or the delegate, that is, the representative in the procedural sense of the term: it is he who *renders the people present* in the figurative sense; it is he who gives the people a form and a face. If increased personalization of political life is a universal phenomenon tied to the preeminence acquired by the executive authority (whereas the legislative authority is always vested in a plural body), there is a properly populist specificity in the figure of the leader as organ.

In this regard, the straightforward declarations of a Jean-Luc Mélenchon are significant: "I am of the people. That is all I want to be, and I feel only scorn for those who would like to be something more."[13] The same Mélenchon exclaimed, while visiting the Forum in Rome in 2017: "Caesar was close to the people. The patricians, the enemies of the people, were the ones who assassinated him. It is interesting to see Caesar as a figure of the people."[14] Here Mélenchon is observing that politics implies more than ever the need to "construct a collective affect" even while deeming it necessary at the same time to "deconstruct it in order to anchor rational choices." This is a Mélenchon finding the personalization of power sincerely "intolerable" and simultaneously seeking to keep on plowing the "tribunist furrow," a Mélenchon at once hesitant and determined to resume the garb of leader embodying a people with which he had entered politics. Questioned about how he thought he could enlist the support of ordinary people, he answered: "[As] myself. You can identify with me . . . The people I meet in the street, on the bus, in the metro, feel instinctively the one who is 'with us.'"[15] This way of

conceiving representation via embodiment is found throughout the populist galaxy. Even Donald Trump did not hesitate to say, during his acceptance speech at the 2016 Republican Convention: "I am your voice."[16] Laying claim to such an identification is a program in itself. Beyond the formulation of proposals for reform, the defining feature of populist policy is thus that it is grounded in embodied speech that has what might be called an existential dimension, speech that is addressed to the emotions as much as to reason. We shall come back to this crucial point.

— 4 —

A POLITICS AND A PHILOSOPHY OF ECONOMICS: NATIONAL PROTECTIONISM

The history of modern economies is embedded in the long-term evolution and expansion of exchanges at both the intranational and international levels. The increasing specialization of productive activities and the development of economies of scale have thus tended to deterritorialize economies and to create a world market. But the benefits anticipated from this movement toward free exchange have been subject to constant interrogation. In the early nineteenth century, the optimism of an Adam Smith or a David Ricardo was already being denounced on the grounds that the underlying vision of the wealth of nations was an abstraction. In France, Germany, and the United States, the calls for adopting systematic protectionism were thus heeded by governments for social and political reasons as well as economic ones. "Where industry is concerned, we are conservatives, protectors," according to François Guizot, the leading figure in French political liberalism of the period.[1] He was concerned that free exchange would lead, as he put it, to "introducing a disturbance into the established order," and for that reason he and his friends defended "national work" against "cosmopolitan competition." In Germany, in 1841, the economist Friedrich List published *Das nationale System der politischen Oekonomie*, which was to prove profoundly influential for the future of his native land. List proposed the creation of a customs association (*Zollverein*) to encourage the political unification of the country through the establishment of a protected economic zone. His aim was in no way doctrinal: for him, protectionism was a circumstantial instrument for the "industrial education of the country."[2] The same thing held true in late nineteenth-century America, which limited foreign imports in order to ensure the rise of its own manufacturing industry.

For two centuries now, protective measures and preoccupations of this nature have been the basis for a sort of alternation between waves of protectionism and free exchange on the level of nations. They are still the focus of debates, as attested by the controversies in 2019 over trade agreements between Europe with Canada and with the Southern Common Market (Mercosur), as well as by recurring questions about what policies to adopt in the face of the trade imbalance with China. But in all these cases, today as in the past, the question of the appropriate degree of protectionism has most often been approached from a pragmatic standpoint; the only variations lie in the felt urgency of the question or in the nature of the problems to be taken into account (the issue of the environmental cost of global free exchange, for example, has taken on unprecedented importance). The defense of protectionism that lies at the heart of the economic vision of numerous populist movements is of a different order, and it is much broader in scope. It refers both to a conception of sovereignty and to a conception of political will, to a philosophy of equality and to a vision of security.

The return of political will

From the protectionist perspective, the reign of free exchange and the globalization that comes with it are not evaluated solely from the standpoint of the economic and social balance sheet that can be drawn up, either globally or on specific points. They are denounced, first of all, as being vectors of the destruction of the political will. They are accompanied by a transfer of the governing authority to anonymous mechanisms, which precludes the possibility that peoples can have sovereignty over their own destinies. They sketch out a world presumed to be governed by "objective" rules, a world that rejects as incoherent the very idea of an alternative to the existing order.[3] This dispossession is aggravated by the rise in power of independent authorities that develop wherever the reign of free trade and globalization has taken hold. Where European populisms are concerned, the European Union appears as the symbol and laboratory of this perverse confiscation of popular power by expert reasoning and the invisible hand of the market. From the populist standpoint, the EU illustrates in exemplary fashion the installation of a "government by numbers" that is superseding the exercise of political will.[4]

This critique underlay the success of the 2016 vote for Brexit in Great Britain: Boris Johnson and Nigel Farage had presented

themselves as champions of the "can do" approach that would restore to the British people an active and beneficial sovereignty over their own destiny. If Johnson and Farage also set themselves up as champions of a certain liberalism in external trade, that liberalism remained fully inscribed within a nationalist vision of the economy. On the same basis, in France, Marine Le Pen persisted in denouncing the anonymous power of the "divine market," depicting the European organization – accused of being the "avant-garde of globalism" – as the exemplar of a "horizon of renunciation."[5] Around the same time, the author of Jean-Luc Mélenchon's economic program published a work with the evocative title *Nous, on peut!* (We Can Do It!),with an even more explicit subtitle: "Why and how a country can always do what it wants in the face of markets, banks, crises …"; the subtitle of its second edition (2012) presented the work as an "anti-crisis manual for the use of citizens."[6] This argument in favor of national protectionism was thus clearly intended to be embedded within a program aimed at refounding democracy, going far beyond an approach that would address the issue simply in terms of economic policy. For this reason, the argument is one of the keystones of the populist vision of the political will.

This political and democratic understanding of protectionism is also directly tied, in populist discourse, to an analysis of immigration. The development of an immigration policy is described as a process imposed on the country by the dominant classes in their quest for cheap labor, without explicit validation by any democratic decision.[7] Thus, for populists, immigration entails an unacceptable bypassing of the popular will; it is the product of a capitalist strategy that has led to a downgrading and a weakening of the autochthonous popular classes. Extended to renewed control of migratory flows, the protectionist imperative is thus also viewed as contributing to a reinforcement of popular sovereignty. Here again, the political notion of sovereignty is wholly inseparable from the way economic and social questions are approached in the populist vision.

A conception of justice and equality

There are two ways to comprehend justice and equality. One is to conceive of them in terms of an understanding of relative positions between individuals, that is, to start from the different categories of inequalities that characterize individuals, whether in terms of income, patrimony, or opportunities. In this case, the goal is to

distinguish potentially justifiable differences from those that it would be appropriate to reduce by means of policies governing taxation, redistribution, or enrichment of the human capital of individuals. This is the most common way of grasping the democratic imperative of equality. Another way, just as important but perhaps less often taken into account, is to consider equality as a quality of the relation between individuals (equality between a man and a woman is thus defined by the fact of living as equals, and not only in terms of distribution), and as a quality of a human community (the fact that everyone is recognized in it, that there exists a form of harmony among its members, that these members form an active polity).[8] These two dimensions of equality are inseparable: no community of citizens is possible if the conditions of life are such that citizens evolve in totally separate worlds. But they are linked at the same time to specific types of institutions and politics that give them consistency.

The populist approach to this imperative of equality is characterized by two major features. First, it is polarized around the gap between the 1 percent and the 99 percent in terms of distributive equality, and by the same token it tends to relegate to second place all other manifestations of inequality within the world of the 99 percent (even though that world is far from homogeneous), and it simultaneously presupposes the unity of the universe of the 1 percent. Next, this approach strongly emphasizes the properly civic or societal dimension of equality, a dimension often neglected in the dominant approaches to the question. But the populist perspective does this in a quite particular way: it advances the notions of identity and homogeneity as components of a "good society" forming a democratic nation. And this is how the populist vision of equality relates to the national protectionist conception of the economy. The protectionist idea in fact presupposes that there is a well-constituted entity to be defended, an entity clearly distinguished from what is external to it. The notion of equality is thus conflated in this case with that of inclusion in a homogeneous whole. Understood in this sense, the fact of belonging to the nation institutes a form of negative equality, the form that establishes a group defined as a community distanced from other communities. This applies to foreigners in a legally self-evident way, but also, by extension, to all categories of undesirables or enemies, who end up being assimilated to foreigners. The feeling of equality is nourished in this case by a constant need to reinvigorate that distance. This contributes to relativizing the "internal" inequalities and considering them essentially as derivatives of globalism, including the expanded domain of the market, the increased mobility

of individuals, the exacerbation of competition, and the liberal espousal of the differences that stem from these phenomena.

We must also recall that the development of many populist movements – and this is particularly apparent in Europe – has often been linked to the assertion of regional separatisms: regions refusing to be part of a fiscal and redistributive community that would include populations deemed no longer to be part of a common world, owing to their behavior as entities that "profit" from the welfare state. The Lega (League) in Italy[9] and the Vlaams Belang (Flemish Interest) in Belgium[10] are exemplary archetypes.[11] One of the strengths of a movement like Matteo Salvini's League lies in its ability to transcend the regionalist sentiment by "nationalizing" it, transferring the rejection of the South in Italy onto a critique of European institutions. The adversary is no longer "Roma Ladrona" (Rome the Thief), but the Brussels bureaucracy, drunk on regulations, an insidious machine for dispossessing peoples of their sovereignty. This is why the anti-European dimension is now one of the essential markers of populism on the continent. It gives a more modern and more readily acceptable tonality to a nationalism that is in fact highly traditional.

Protectionism as an instrument of security

Control of a border, especially by building walls or fences, is a major way of asserting sovereignty over a territory. It also participates directly in a politics of security, mirroring the ancient ramparts that used to surround cities. There is a continuum between this physical protectionism and a politics of internal security. Preventing foreigners and undesirables from crossing the borders also belongs to an expanded vision of security that includes keeping populations deemed dangerous for the maintenance of national cohesion at a distance. The notion of cultural insecurity extends this approach by encouraging the rejection of ideologies judged threatening to the identity of a people. (Muslim populations combine the two variables.) Independence thus also means defending identity and homogeneity, in all possible ways. The various facets of national protectionism constitute a major axis of populist political culture.

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A REGIME OF PASSIONS AND EMOTIONS

Passions have always been suspected of being threatening forces, apt to distort judgment, disturb behavior, disrupt interpersonal relations, or transform a group of individually rational humans into an uncontrollable or even criminal crowd. A vast literature has been devoted to the subject, as we know, from the works of the great classical philosophers to those of contemporary social psychologists. But, recently, things have changed. In language, first of all: the term "passion," which once seemed inseparable from the evocation of a certain excess, has gradually given way to the more neutral, if ever so slightly precious, term "affect," or even the more intimate term "emotion." Next, in the intellectual realm: the question of emotions has been objectified, viewed as just one variable among others in human action. In the social sciences, and most notably in political science, it has become possible to speak of an "affective turn" or an "emotional turn."[1]

The factors underlying the "return of the emotions"

Nietzsche was one of the first to propose unsettling the distinction between the felt and the intelligible, rejecting the customary dualism. "Beneath every thought an affect is hidden," he asserted lapidarily.[2] The traditional opposition between passion and reason, or between passions and interests,[3] has now become highly modulated. In the domain of the social sciences, Norbert Elias has sketched out the terms of a unified sociological and psychological approach, thus including both emotions and objective reasoning in the order of social phenomena.[4] He argues that "*in the human context the*

concept of nature has to be redefined,"[5] stressing that the emotions also result from learning and accumulated experience grafted onto inherent dispositions. Cognitive science has now confirmed these intuitions.[6] "In cognitive science," as Stanislas Dehaene notes, "we no longer differentiate between cognition and emotion. We think that the emotions are specific calculations that signal dangers or opportunities useful to the organism and that mobilize the entire body."[7] Historians, for their part, have long insisted on the role of emotions and passions as drivers in history. More recently, they have also stressed the "sensible reason" that underlies them. In certain revolutionary episodes, rioters protesting a lack of food have often been propelled by their own experience of hunger, whereas the governing authorities saw nothing pertinent in their statistics.[8] This reconsideration of the place and nature of emotions in judgment and action has also surfaced in behavioral economics. Thus Daniel Kahneman, a Nobel laureate in economics, has summarized his work by emphasizing that humans have two ways of analyzing reality and reacting, each with its own specificity and utility. On one side, there is the approach produced by "System 1," a very rapid thought process based on impressions and intuitions that lead to a global and instinctive synthesis of accumulated data and evaluations. On the other side, there is the approach that comes from "System 2," a slower process that methodically analyzes data and weighs arguments.[9]

The "rehabilitation" of emotions also corresponds directly to the fact that it is taking place in a context where social phenomena have become more complex and diffracted. In the earlier age of well-defined classes and social conditions, reality was apprehended via general categories and statistics, structured ideologies that organized visions of the future. This is no longer the case in a world in which the idea of progress has faded and uncertainty reigns, a world in which personal factors and situational variables are primordial in characterizations of individual lives. Attention to singularity has thus become essential. Professor Philippe Braud, who has played a pioneering role in France in bringing awareness of emotions into the analysis of political behaviors, has strongly emphasized this point.[10] Among French political leaders, Jean-Luc Mélenchon is one of the few who have carefully analyzed this phenomenon, proposing to give full scope to emotions in political expression. "In politics," he has insisted, "affects have come back. For years, we spoke of 'them,' 'the people,' 'the working class,' 'the party,' 'the masses.' Now, we are more likely to say 'I.' I think I have had some small part in this

development."[11] It is in this context that we must situate the analysis of populist emotions and passions.

These emotions differ in nature, and each type has specific political consequences. We can distinguish between *status-related emotions* (feelings of being abandoned, held in contempt, devalued), *intellect-related emotions* (the need to restore the readability of the world by turning, for example, to conspiracy theories or to "fake news"), and *action-related emotions* (for example, feelings of disengagement or alienation). The intelligence of populist movements lies in the fact that they have grasped, either intuitively or explicitly, the role played by these different types of emotions. The work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe places considerable stress on the point. Laclau emphasizes the importance of what he calls "empty signifiers," that is, fuzzy images that have a powerful mobilizing capacity: references to "the 1 percent," "castes," or "the Brussels technocrats" provoke spontaneous reactions. For him, such empty signifiers play an essential role in the establishment of "populist thought." Mouffe also invites attention to "common affects," seeing these as at the heart of the construction of forms of identification that express with feeling the distinction between "us" and "them." "The left," she argues, "is too rationalist to understand this; for leftists, the correct arguments and data suffice. Yet affects are what drive people to act."[12] Citing Freud, she promotes the idea that the masses derive their cohesion from the power of eros.[13] In Spain, the militants of the Podemos party speak of the decisive role that ought to be attributed to "affective involvement."[14] Here we have something highly original in populist movements that should not be understood in entirely negative ways.

Status-related emotions

Emotions related to status express the anger felt at being unrecognized, abandoned, or disdained, the feeling that one counts for nothing in the eyes of the powerful. They translate what could be characterized as *democratic resentment*, a tacit denunciation of what is perceived as a distortion of the project of building a society in which everyone receives equal consideration, a harmful swerve attributed to blindness and insensitivity on the part of the elites, especially the governing authorities. The political milieu has tried to respond to these feelings by developing a more familiar sort of relationship with voters, prioritizing gestures of proximity intended to reduce a distance that has been perceived as indifference.[15] But

even when these gestures are not reduced to mere mechanisms, they do not get at the heart of the problem. There is in fact a properly cognitive dimension shaping this resentment. This emotion is fed by the gap that exists between reality understood globally, in terms of statistics, and situations as they are perceived by individuals. These situations can be strongly differentiated among people at the same income level, for example, if we take into account specific variables such as inherited wealth, distance from one's workplace, or family structure.[16] The "governing logic" is often criticized as technocratic, owing to this gap. However, analyzed in these terms, there is nothing intangible about it. Indeed, it would be quite possible to imagine social policies more attentive to singularities: this is even one of the major stakes in efforts to provide a renewed foundation for the welfare state. Such attention to singularity must also be taken into account, moreover, in the way the story of a society is told.[17] Here, the democratic emotion is a signal to which attention must be paid. It can be handled in a positive way when it is adequately understood.

Status-based resentment can also proceed in different ways, by referring to distinct accounting registers. If we take the example of legislation reducing highway speed limits, political decision-makers will cite the overall number of lives saved, while drivers will take into account the change in their daily travel time (in their reckoning, "statistical death" numbers remain abstractions). This inescapable dissymmetry needs to be explicit in the democratic debate, even though there may be no obvious way to address it.

Intellect-related emotions

If populist movements grant only a relatively subordinate place to status-related emotions, for want of having clearly perceived how these emotions are shaped, they rely quite heavily, by contrast, on intellect-based emotions, and these easily serve as relays, transmitting the conspiracy theories that nourish emotions of this second type. Conspiracy theories can be understood as demons of opacity; as Benjamin Constant put it, "objects loom larger in the dark. In the shadows, everything appears hostile and grotesque."[18] This problem has only increased in a world in which information and disinformation, revelations and the ensuing scandals, pop up without respite, constantly renewing public mistrust of those in power – all the more so because the old a priori confidence in institutions has foundered.

The old acceptance of authority has morphed into a priori suspicion, with the decline of various types of "invisible institutions."[19]

The feeling of opacity and public impotence experienced by large numbers of citizens is, by the same token, often inscribed in compensatory attempts at rationalization by way of the imagination. Conspiracy theories in fact correspond to an effort to restore coherence to a world experienced as indecipherable and threatening.[20] These theories purport to demonstrate that behind the apparent opacity and complexity of the real political or economic world is hidden a perfectly simple and rational order of power. They give meaning to events that leave individuals with the sense of being toyed with, reduced to the state of manipulated pawns or unarmed bystanders. They reorder the chaos of the world and propose a way to reappropriate the course of events by denouncing its hidden masters. In this way, illegibility is attributed to an organized enterprise of dissimulation at the service of a project of domination and/or exploitation of ordinary people, an enterprise generally understood to be worldwide – this would account for its capacity to influence – and represented as an authentic explanatory engine of history. Behind the smoke screen produced by legal institutions are said to be hidden a small number of powers (labeled the Trilateral Commission, the CIA, the Illuminati, the Elders of Zion, and so on) or multiform monsters (such as neoliberalism) that pull all the strings. It suffices for a few cases of actual manipulations to be revealed for every situation to be interpreted in this light. Thus, from the perspective of the theories to which populist movements readily subscribe, citizens need to become aware of these vast manipulations hatched by masked elites and stop being duped by the democratic façade presented by modern politics.[21] In this sense, we can speak of the *cognitive and political function* of conspiracy theories: they serve to reverse a diffuse feeling of dispossession and to assign an origin to humanity's distress. This function is paralleled, moreover, by a *psychological function*: together, they make it possible to find simple answers to the problems every individual encounters. As Tocqueville had already noted, along these lines, "an idea that is false, but clear and precise, will always have more power in the world than a true, but complicated, idea."[22]

Conspiracy theories rebounded in full force at the turn of the twenty-first century. The elements of analysis we have just examined make this phenomenon easy enough to comprehend: wars, financial crises, and terrorist outbursts have shaped a less predictable and more threatening world. History has become harder to decipher than when the East–West opposition ordered the planet and imposed its

law. In addition, increasing globalization has produced a faceless form of unification, with the crowning of the anonymous force of markets and the rise in power of all kinds of unelected authorities. All these developments have made events less legible, responsibilities less clearly attributable, the true sites of power harder to discern. By the same token, the possibilities of action have simultaneously appeared to be reduced, increasing a diffuse feeling of losing one's grip. It is no wonder that the old magical visions and conspiracy theories are on the rise.

The increased availability of an uninterrupted mass of information, especially via the Internet, has for its part reinforced the credibility of conspiracy theories by allowing opposing interpretive pathways to emerge. A certain informational chaos in fact permits objective and verifiable data to coexist with mere opinions and rumors, and to be addressed on the same basis.[23] "Conspiracy theories are for losers," according to some.[24] They are in fact often relayed by subordinate or less well-educated social groups whose members turn to them as a way of getting their bearings in the world. These groups are particularly well represented in populist movements, which serve their own interests by welcoming such voters and even turning them into active propagators of conspiracy theories.

Action-related emotions

"¡Que se vayan todos!" (Out with them all!) – the rallying cry of Latino-American populisms in the electoral campaign of the 2000s that brought into power figures such as Néstor Kirchner (Argentina), Hugo Chávez (Venezuela), and Evo Morales (Bolivia) – is now echoed around the world. Beppo Grillo of the Five Star Movement in Italy and Pablo Iglesias of Podemos in Spain have adopted it, as has Marine Le Pen in France, while Jean-Luc Mélenchon has borrowed it as the title of one of his programmatic works.[25] The populist movements, to be sure, have their plans for gaining more control of the economy, reinforcing democracy, and bringing about greater social justice. But the key element in their political program lies ultimately in the invitation to drive out the governments in place. Their principal recourse is distrust. Here we can speak of *negative politics*. This politics borrows some of its elements from the counter-democratic ideal of vigilance and surveillance on the part of the authorities, but it radicalizes the idea and presents it in absolute terms in the form of a comprehensive and non-negotiable rejection. If

politics consists in providing a language for what people are experiencing, it is important to note that populism speaks powerfully only in the language of rejection. In so doing, it enfolds the people in a negative sovereignty that can scold in the streets or at the ballot box without constituting a force capable of reinventing the world.[26] This is a sovereignty that could be called "de-instituting," one that tends to reduce the people mechanically to a community of frustration and rejection.

A *morality of disgust* is grafted onto this negative politics.[27] It exempts critiques from any requirement of precision and renders argumentation useless. With this morality, anger connects violence with vagueness, radicality with impotence. There is no more room for deliberation, no space for arguments based on the idea that an actual "community of minds" can exist.[28] Democracy is threatened when such a possibility is not allowed a universal hearing. There remains only a repetitive and ongoing accusation, in the expectation of a final catharsis. The gulf widens even farther as the very notion of truth vanishes simultaneously in a world in which, in consequence, fake news prospers.

Is there a populist personality?

In a well-known study, Theodor Adorno spoke of the "authoritarian personality"[29] to label the set of character traits that had made possible the mass adherence to fascism in Germany in the 1930s. The interest of his study lay in the fact that he had studied the conditions under which individuals could shift toward fascism when they had not been previously inclined toward that ideology. In terms of method, one could raise a similar question about populism today, by studying how individuals get beyond the stigma that is still often associated with the term fascism, in an attempt to understand more broadly the nature of the psychological dispositions and mechanisms that underlie the capacity of populist ideas to attract supporters. Such an endeavor must not be confused with traditional investigations in electoral sociology that study the cultural, economic, social, or territorial variables characterizing voters in populist parties. These variables turn out to have a static character: they describe an existing phenomenon, whereas there is also a dynamic that needs to be grasped.

As of now, there have been no in-depth investigations that would allow us to document the matter of the populist personality. But

one can reasonably put forth the hypothesis that the decisive factor lies in the register of passions and emotions. Anger and fear clearly constitute the affective and psychological driving forces at work in those who adhere to populism. And populism seems capable of providing resentment with weapons, offering the possibility of vengeance. To adopt populist ideas is also to identify oneself with an empowering community of resisters opposing the dominant ideology, and by the same token it means allowing oneself to take a certain distance from reality as it is most often presented. The propensity to rally around "polemical truths" constitutes, for that reason, one of the key constitutive elements of what could be defined as the populist personality. It is based on the tendency toward systematic suspicion of the consensual views that are accused of being pure fabrications on the part of the dominant ideology; conversely, it induces a strong capacity for negative assembly on the part of those who see themselves as denouncers of the lies told and the manipulations carried out by the powerful. The wretched of the earth take on the appearance of martyrs to truth, with the dimension of sectarian faith that this presupposes. In an age in which the liberating promises of progress have foundered, it is on this new ground that present-day courage and faith in a better future are rooted in the populist universe. By the same token, politics takes on a religious character, with a capacity to rewrite the world stemming from this way of asserting faith-based truths.

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THE UNITY AND DIVERSITY OF POPULISMS

The ideal type of populism is a model whose components, when reproduced in reality, differ in configuration and weight according to the particular situation. The variables of historical context, geographical position, and institutional landscape, along with the place occupied by religion and/or the profiles of the political personalities involved – to mention just a few criteria – thus allow us to depict original physiognomies that may justify speaking of populisms in the plural. As we have already seen, it is risky to use these criteria to derive purely descriptive typologies, for these tend to obscure the nature of the object "populism." If there is indeed a typology worth constructing, it is rather that of the democratic forms among which populism in the broadest sense must be classified. The second and third parts of this book are devoted to that project. But there are three distinctions that can usefully be explored in advance, for a better grasp of the object we are studying. First, the contemporary potency of a populist "atmosphere," above and beyond the specific populisms that we can identify; next, the difference between populist movements and populist regimes; and finally, the crucial question of whether there is a "left" populism that can be clearly distinguished from a right-wing form.

Diffuse populism

Beyond populism characterized as a doctrine, it is striking to note that a populist "atmosphere" prevails in the world today; it is perceptible first of all in a widespread approach to politics based on "rejectionism." Elections are increasingly won by negative coalitions that

bring to power improbable personalities whose principal qualities are their political virginity and their rise from nowhere. From a broader perspective, disenchantment with democracy contributes to a greater personalization of politics: an immediate physical presence seems more attractive than a far-off plan, especially when too many words have been demeaned by lies and betrayals. The old parties of ideas thus fade in the face of new political movements formed in the wake of a personality whose rise they accompany. In this regard, the French case of Emmanuel Macron's La République en Marche (Onward!) is exemplary. Even though the corpus of ideas around which this movement has been structured is explicitly liberal (in the free-market sense) or social-liberal, its organization is marked by a typically populist top-down structure. On this point, Jean-Luc Mélenchon himself has emphasized the parallelism with his own movement, La France Insoumise.[1]

Some of the major populist themes, such as the call for developing referendums, are observable everywhere; similarly, the national protectionist philosophy increasingly penetrates societies in which motivations for solidarity have broken down. More broadly still, the various populist passions are pervading minds in the increasingly fragile democracies of the twenty-first century. In the age of social networks, the tendency toward enclosure within inward-focused communities of shared beliefs is one of the most striking manifestations of this process. It is as if peoples were tired of searching for the truth and were seeking to avoid facing the complexity of the real world: hence, for example, the omnipresent tendency to simplify the analysis of society by reducing it to a single opposition between the powerful and the powerless, the rich and the poor. One source of evidence for this trend lies in the media's focus on the issue of vast fortunes when addressing questions of inequality and fiscal justice. The widespread inclination to treat referendums as sacrosanct is also significant in this regard.

The "yellow vest" movement in France and the sympathetic echo it found in public opinion can be linked to this diffuse populism. In the first place, it attested to the present-day capacity of the word "people" to mean something in particular and to unify situations that were juxtaposed but highly differentiated. It was by no means a class movement in the sociological sense of the word. It brought together independent professionals, small business owners, wage-earners with insecure salaries, and a very diverse world of persons who were having trouble making ends meet and felt suffocated under the weight of obligatory expenses, for the most part individuals who had never

before been militant activists. The movement grew out of an accumulation of situations experienced as unjust and intolerable; it expressed difficulties that had not been taken into account in the management of social issues through the ordinary channels of collective conventions and public instruments of the welfare state. (This explains the discomfort of unions with respect to the movement, and likewise the fact that management was not a target for the demonstrators.) The yellow vest movement thus attested to the unprecedented terms in which social issues were now being raised, well beyond a single-minded focus on salaries. It also expressed the contemporary democratic disenchantment as something apart from the traditional left/right opposition. And it did this by inscribing itself spontaneously within the diffuse political culture of populism.

A visceral repudiation of the elite and the oligarchy, along with the associated rejectionist culture, was thus at the heart of the movement (the political class, established as the scapegoat and assimilated to the wealthy, was the target of especially violent attacks). The prevailing vision of a society split in two (even for persons whose income clearly situated them in the middle classes), along with the priority given to demands for citizen-initiated referendums, were similarly symptomatic of a populist approach to democratic renewal. But at the same time the yellow vest demonstrators obstinately refused to adopt a structure or allow leaders who could be considered "representatives" to emerge, figures who could have expressed themselves as such and who could have assumed a mandate over time that would have led them to negotiate with the public authorities. The demonstrators did not want to see a "leader embodying the people" emerge from their midst. The yellow vests thus illustrated an absolutist vision of populism characterized by rejection and spontaneity, a vision that locked them into a purely negative politics.[2] But they were also embedded within another tendency of the contemporary world, that of a utopian affirmation of the power of horizontality conveyed by social networks. By giving the impression that it was possible to get rid of all the usual modes of vertical aggregation of opinions (via the media, political parties, labor unions, associations, the intellectuals, and so on), social networks in effect made themselves, in a different way, the champions of anti-politics. The paradoxical "horizontal populism" of the yellow vests has thus been among the phenomena revealing the power and the contradictions of the diffuse populism that is coursing through the contemporary world.

This diffuse populism is thus in many different ways the sign that minds are available, open to the major themes that constitute populist

political culture. But if this availability is linked to a silent attraction, it also results from the intellectual weakness of the critiques that have been addressed to populism, and from the absence of a sufficiently attractive political alternative to its promises. Populism may be worrying, but it has no positive adversary. This is why it continues to inhabit minds and work on them.

Regimes and movements

Up to now we have been considering the ideal type of populism, along with its possible configurations of a doctrinal nature; in other words, we have essentially been looking at populist movements. But how are we to characterize the populisms that have won power and have thereby become regimes? Their common features stem from their continued inscription in the type of political culture we have been examining. These populisms are animated by the same conceptions of society, democracy, and leadership, with the institutional and constitutional consequences that ensue, and that illustrate the "truth" of populism in a particular way. But one can also discern differences – sometimes very telling distinctions – among them. This is the case in the sphere of social policy. Thus the populisms of Latin America have often been populisms of the left, in the sense that they have been characterized by redistributive actions in favor of the underprivileged classes. This has been the pattern especially in countries with available sources of income: oil in Venezuela, agricultural exports in Argentina, mines in Bolivia. This situational variable has been determining for certain populist regimes. But experience has also shown that populist regimes can have a composite character, most notably by being neoliberal in economic matters (and thus not national-protectionist). This was the case in the 1990s in Peru with Alberto Fujimori, in Brazil with Fernando Collor de Mello, and in Argentina with Carlos Menem. The same thing holds true in contemporary Europe, in Hungary and Poland, even if in these cases the credits coming like manna from Brussels and the ease of access to the large European market play a decisive role in framing the economic policy of these countries.

Populist regimes depend on the same type of electorate as populist movements. Their most reliable support comes from rural areas, small towns, or industrial zones in decline: these are the losers of globalization, places where voters see themselves as having no future and feel forgotten by the traditional parties; this is also the world of

the less educated, of persons who have had difficulty finding a place for themselves in a society transformed by the digital revolution. But these are not the only factors behind populist regimes. If Narendra Modi in India, Vladimir Putin in Russia, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Turkey, Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, and Donald Trump in the United States have achieved power, it is also because they have known how to graft populist rhetoric onto passions capable of extending their audience to other fringes of society. This has been achieved most notably through the exaltation of nationalist impulses even to the point of warlike expression: Modi and Putin are prime examples of this virulent nationalistic populism. The exacerbation of anti-foreigner sentiments and the affirmation of racist attitudes play a role too, as is evident with Trump and Modi alike. In addition, the expression of an intransigent moral conservatism is found in almost all of these regimes; Brazil's case is, regrettably, exemplary.

The regimes that can be called populist are thus driven by forces that surpass, or at least exacerbate, the five structuring elements of the political culture of populism. By the same token, their relation to democracy varies considerably. If they all present themselves as heralds of an immediate and polarized democracy, they can oscillate between a tenuous maintenance of the state of law (owing to constitutional constraints that remain active) and a straightforward democratorship. For all these reasons, one can say that the spectrum of populist regimes is much broader than that of populist movements. There are more and more hybrid forms. In the 1920s, Hermann Heller introduced the term "hybrid regimes" to characterize the authoritarian liberalisms of the era. Since then, regimes of this type have proliferated, producing what now looks like an expanding populist galaxy.

"Left" and "right" populisms

Is there a left-wing populism that can be distinguished from a right-wing version? Concerning regimes, the answer is undeniably affirmative (setting aside for the moment the question of how long such regimes last). We have already seen some Latin American examples. But is there a properly doctrinal difference? The question arises because the position attributed to the notion of "people" in the populist reconstruction of politics has the immediate consequence of secularizing, or even effacing, the previously recognized centrality of the divide between left and right. In Spain, Podemos spoke at the

outset of a "party based on a hegemony and not on an ideology," indicating that the "people's turning point" it was enacting formed a new line that repositioned political confrontation. The movement's directors justified themselves in contradistinction to militants of the traditional parties on the left, claiming that henceforth "the system [was] no longer afraid of the left, it [was] afraid of the people."[3] In France, Jean-Luc Mélenchon has followed a similar trajectory. As early as the fall of 2012, he indicated that his goal was to "bring about a people's front." "My challenge," he specified later, after he had given up his initial project of creating a Left Front, "is not to bring together the left, a highly muddled label; it is to federate the people."[4] During the 2017 presidential campaign, his posters featured the slogan "La force du peuple" (The People's Force).[5] Marine Le Pen manifested the same ambition on the right, using similar language. More broadly speaking, we are seeing a way of redefining the political map that is common to populisms all over the globe.

To answer the question of a possible distinction between left and right populisms, we must first recall that populisms have a history, from two perspectives. First, they fall within the general history of the democratic experiment, with the hopes that have undergirded it and the ensuing disenchantments. It is from this perspective that I set out to grasp them, and I shall return to this approach at length in part II of this work, seeking to characterize what is at stake with greater precision. But populisms are also embedded within the evolution of the individuals and the organizations that lay claim to them overtly or that evince an attachment to them. From this standpoint, populisms are always grafted onto preexisting political cultures.

And it is a fact that, in Europe, the majority of the populist movements in the twenty-first century have initially been *derivations* of preexisting movements situated on the far right. This is most notably the case in Italy, but it is also true of France, where the history of the Front National is exemplary. When it was founded in 1972, the Front brought together a set of very small groups self-identified as belonging to the "nationalist right." These included members of neo-fascist and neo-Nazi formations from the 1930s, defenders of Marshal Pétain, former members of the OAS, and members of the committees supporting Jean-Louis Tixier-Vignancour's presidential campaign in 1965.[6] Others situated in this orbit intellectually and culturally included heirs of Charles Maurras, traditionalist Christians close to Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, fanatic negationists, as well as doctrinaire members of GRECE. All these groups formed a nebulous composite, but their members all shared

the same hatred of Gaullism, a visceral anti-Semitism, deeply rooted xenophobic sentiments, and the same horror of racial mixing. And they all understood themselves to be defenders of a West that was being attacked in its profound identity, as they saw it, beyond the communist threat, by modernist and liberal values as much as by the dangers of migration. But the nascent Front National carried no more political weight than what was offered by the accumulated voices of these small groups. In the 1973 legislative elections, its candidates thus won only 1.32 percent of the vote, and Jean-Marie Le Pen had to content himself with 0.74 percent during the first round of the 1974 presidential election. It was a party that, at the time, could be thought to represent the past.

The bitterness and nostalgia that anchored the far right lasted a long time. Jean-Marie Le Pen's repeated outbursts on the "details" of the Second World War or the humanity of the German occupiers, along with a taste for formulations with double meanings that allowed him to express his anti-Semitism, attest indirectly to the persistence of the past. The foreign organizations with which Le Pen was linked are similarly revealing (we need only consider his proximity to the Italian Social Movement, to Enoch Powell's movement in Britain, and to the Austrian neo-Nazis). However, from within the very heart of this continuity, the Front National succeeded in increasing its electoral strength in the aftermath of the "Trente Glorieuses" (the thirty-year period of postwar economic resurgence) and in the context of a sharp rise in unemployment. Energized by Le Pen's slogans – "Frenchmen first," "Put national preference to work," "Two million unemployed are two million too many immigrants" – and by his foregrounding of the issue of national security, his audience increased dramatically in the 1980s. The party garnered 11.2 percent of the vote in the June 1984 European elections, and its leader rose to 14.4 percent in the first round of the 1988 presidential election. Henceforth solidly established in the French political landscape, the Front National reached even higher numbers and won elected positions at all levels of France's political and territorial organization (the party's score culminated in 24 percent in the European elections of June 2014).

Beyond the properly economic and social factors that underlay this progression, the Front National's rise in power was also nourished by the disenchantment with democracy that began to grow in the late 1980s. By presenting itself as the champion of the denunciation of the "band of four"[7] and "the Establishment," the Front reaped dividends from its stigmatization of the elites and its denunciation of "the system"; the allegory of the broom making a clean sweep appeared

on its posters starting in the early 1990s.[8] As their numbers multiplied fifteen- or twenty-fold over time, the party's voters gradually took on a new profile. Well beyond the original tiny reactionary circles or the socio-professional milieus sensitive to the Poujadist accents of a Jean-Marie Le Pen (who had been elected deputy to the National Assembly in 1956 and 1968, having run on the lists of Poujade's followers), the Front National gradually won the support of many other categories of French voters; its penetration into the working-class world was particularly spectacular. While fewer than 3 percent of workers had voted for Le Pen in 1974, the proportion rose to 30 percent twenty years later, and 50 percent in 2012! The figures reveal an impressive rise in suburban zones, and also, across class lines, among less educated voters in general.

Later, in 2011, in the tumultuous moment when the baton was passed to Marine Le Pen, voices around her were beginning to speak of the need to "de-demonize" the Front National as the condition for further progress. "Killing the father" in fact led to a break with the language haunted by the history of the 1930s and the Second World War, and by the memory of the open wounds of the Algerian War. This de-demonization most notably dispensed with the open or implicit anti-Semitism that had oozed from the mouth of the former leader. But at the same time the Front National revealed what it had essentially become: a political party embodying *national populism* and *national protectionism*.

This national populist and protectionist culture was at odds with Jean-Marie Le Pen's initial economic vision. The party's economic programs in the 1980s actually remained openly liberal in inspiration. The Front National endlessly denounced the excesses of government intervention – the heavy taxation of small and medium-size businesses, for instance – while declaring that the "desire for profits" and the "desire for property" were the inescapable driving forces of the economy.[9] It went on to stigmatize the central authorities' failures to act, along with the profits of financial capitalism; economic and social questions occupied a much larger place in its program. Marine Le Pen's "new" Front National could thus present itself as more to the left than a managerial Socialist Party. And in the 2009 European elections, the Front National distributed a provocative tract in the economically disadvantaged North region bearing the slogan "Jaurès would have voted with the Front National," citing the socialist leader Jean Jaurès himself: "For those who have nothing, the Fatherland is the only possession."[10] This was a way to emphasize that the Front National positioned itself above the right/

left divide. In her 2012 programmatic book *Pour que vive la France*, Marine Le Pen did not hesitate to cite Karl Marx and the "Manifeste des économistes atterrés"![11]

Marine Le Pen had aligned her party with republican history, moreover, by eliminating the lingering Maurrasian and counter-revolutionary residue that often studded her father's discourse. Whereas Jean-Marie, in his description of the French legacy, granted only a subordinate place to the two centuries of the Republic as compared to the "4,000 years of European culture," the "twenty centuries of Christianity," and the "forty kings,"[12] Marine made the traditional republican vocabulary her own, showing that she too knew how to manipulate it, especially in her references to secularism, so as to connect the question of immigration to that of the place of Islam in the country. And she went on to do something absolutely unthinkable for her father: she claimed certain elements of the Gaullist legacy.[13] Far from her father's vituperative denunciations of a democracy that had run out of steam, she glorified democracy as "our ultimate common good," denounced the "real confiscation of public speech by a caste," and presented herself as the spokesperson for the forgotten, the invisible, and the anonymous.

These ruptures cannot readily be characterized as updates; they simply relativized the innate specificities of the Front National's French history so as to embed it within a "populist being" that echoes earlier pages of the French history books.[14] The shift was made official in 2018 with the adoption of the new name for the party, the Rassemblement National (National Rally). This evolution has not led to a schism within the party, even if there are still some small intellectual circles for which populism constitutes only a "moment" of transition toward a more radical horizon of "national revolution."[15] This is the case with the Jobbik movement in Hungary, along with Orbán's Fidesz (Hungarian Civic Alliance), the Austrian FPÖ (Freedom Party), which is prospering in the shadow of Sebastian Kurz's ÖVP (Austrian People's Party); similarly, in Italy, the Fratelli d'Italia (Brothers of Italy) have taken up the torch (and the emblem) of the neo-fascist MSI (Italian Social Movement), while quasi-military neo-fascist action groups such as CasaPound have been developing apart from the Lega (League).

At the other end of the political spectrum, the France Insoumise movement succeeded the Left Front party that had fallen classically within the configuration of parties on the left and the far left. In this second case, the populism embodied by Jean-Luc Mélenchon has been grafted onto an essentially Marxist culture: this populism

has also partly distanced itself from a legacy henceforth deemed too narrow and ill adapted. By asserting for example that his goal was now to federate the people and no longer to unify the left, Mélenchon managed to provide language for an evolution that was also a break with the past. In terms of respective histories, there is an abyss between the movements on the right and those on the left. The continuing weight of their legacies thus invites us to distinguish clearly between left-wing populism and that of the right and the far right. This opposition is most visibly marked at the level of individuals, whether militants or leaders of the parties involved. For these men and women, the legacies are inscribed in their personal histories, as it were. This is obvious for someone belonging to a lineage that bears the patronymic Le Pen. But it is also true for those who are perceptibly connected by links of friendship and proximity to a shared militant past on the left or the far left. It is thus psychologically impossible to formulate the recognition of a convergence at the top. But this is not so much the case at the level of the electorates.[16] And we are forced to note, at the same time, that the respective political cultures as they are expressed *today* have many parallel features. This is the case if we take into account the five characteristics distinguished at the outset. Beyond the convergences in their conceptions of society and democracy, we find that left and right populisms share the same anger, are united in their rejections, and manifest a common culture of mistrust and suspicion.

Other perceptible developments are also worth noting. For a long time, for example, the question of identity traced a clear line of demarcation between right and left, as a constitutive element of the legacies on which populisms were grafted. The question remains, but it has been displaced toward the interior of what had once formed *the* left; populisms "on the left" have readily stressed the cultural capital of their country's traditions. Far from seeking to wipe the slate clean, they have glorified the past while simultaneously keeping their distance from forms of multiculturalism they have deemed too blatant (in the French case, the question of secularism has played a decisive role in the reclassification of positions). The differences have been flattened under the aegis of a shared communion in a certain interpretation of the republican idea. The issues characterized as "social," for their part, no longer traced an intangible dividing line, for two reasons. On the right, because reforms such as those of the right to abortion or marriage for all no longer aroused as much passion, having in reality gradually found public acceptance. On the

left, because voices were calling more and more forcefully for an end to privileging the "societal" over the "social."

The vigorous reinterpretation of the idea of nation in a patrimony of the left has favored, on that side, the formation of a transversal sovereignist culture, reducing in yet another way the depth of the gulf between the legacies. In France, red flags have become less common, and the French tricolor emblem is now almost as present in demonstrations by La France Insoumise, for example, as in those of the Rassemblement National. On this point, the role of transmitter has been played by Jean-Pierre Chevènement's Mouvement des Citoyens (Citizens' Movement), which has appeared little by little as a major ideological and political locus of exchange, with some of its adherents lining up under Marine Le Pen or Nicolas Dupont-Aignan, others taking up the banner of Jean-Luc Mélenchon.[17] This sovereignism finds in its vigorous critique of European politics and institutions a form of nourishment that brings people together in yet another way.

Additional elements form part of a foundation common to the various populisms. On the European continent, we find a shared hatred for the EU institutions in Brussels, which symbolize for populists the reign of a democracy confiscated by judges and experts, along with the erasure of politics facing the power of markets. While secessionist perspectives and projects for abandoning the euro are no longer overtly espoused in the wake of the problematic Brexit, with public opinion appearing reluctant to endorse these splits, the invitation to refound a simple Europe of nations expresses a fundamental objective for populists. A proclaimed proximity to Putin's Russia is also a visible marker of the proximity among the various strands of populism.

One major gulf between these strands remains, however: the question of immigrants and refugees. This issue traces a clear line of demarcation even today between populisms on the right or the far right and those on the left. Among the former, rejecting "caste" goes hand in hand with denouncing the threat that immigrants would pose to the identity of the people; the latter, by contrast, assert a humanist standpoint of welcome. The political future of the populist phenomenon is to a large extent linked to the conditions under which this distinction may be maintained or, on the contrary, weakened. Several elements have indicated that an evolution toward the second tendency might be within the realm of possibility. The positions adopted by the former leaders of Die Linke (The Left) in Germany have had a highly disruptive effect on this point, as illustrated in exemplary fashion by the stance of the Aufstehen (Stand

Up) movement launched in 2018 by Sahra Wagenknecht, a former party leader.[18] The reformulation of the immigration question is what has made this evolution thinkable and possible. While the humanist perspective argues in favor of retaining the issue as a distinguishing feature, the insertion of the question into a framework that is critical of neoliberalism suggests other perspectives: a common condemnation of a capitalism looking for cheap labor may well make for a meeting of the minds. If one can say, with Jacques Nikonoff, the former president of ATTAC,[19] that "bringing an end to economic immigration is a political position and not a racist action," or that "everyone should be master in his own house" and that "the looting of living forces in poor countries is a new form of neocolonialism,"[20] the dike may be starting to crumble. The way this sort of reformulation of the question evolves will undoubtedly play a decisive role in the convergence of types of populism that are still clearly differentiated today.

If the question of immigration is destined to remain at the heart of the political agenda everywhere in the current period of exacerbated nationalism, the capacity of a populism on the left to win out over a populism on the right may prove to be limited. If the latter expresses the populist vision of politics and society in a way that is felt by the electorate to be more radical, it will inevitably enjoy a comparative advantage. And the fact is that the theorists and the principal voices of left-wing populism have not yet indicated how they envision the inversion of this dynamics once anti-capitalism, anti-liberalism, and the call for a more direct democracy are no longer distinguishing characteristics of the left. On this point, the evolution of the Italian and French situations will constitute a highly consequential indicator for the future.

— II —

HISTORY

— 1 —

HISTORY OF POPULIST MOMENTS I: CAESARISM AND ILLIBERAL DEMOCRACY IN FRANCE

While we can view Bonapartism as a political and administrative model identified with the institutions set up by Napoleon Bonaparte, we can define modern Caesarism as a conception of authoritarian democracy linked in exemplary fashion to the rhetoric and practice of Napoleon's nephew Louis Napoleon, who became Napoleon III.[1] If the latter won the votes of the French, it was above all because he presented himself as the champion and servant of a people-king. "I view the people as the [land]owner and the governments, whatever they may be, as [tenant] farmers," he said in one of his early declarations.[2] He made such declarations repeatedly, and he borrowed liberally from the 1793 Constitution in the various reform proposals he published in the 1830s. During his campaign for the presidency of the Republic in 1848, he and his partisans invoked "the holy people."

On the basis of this example, the approach to the sovereignty of the people characteristic of Caesarism can be situated within a triple framework: a conception according to which the people expresses itself through the privileged procedure of a plebiscite, a philosophy of representation according to which the people are embodied in a leader, and a rejection of any intermediary bodies that might impede direct connection between the people and power. While the people's power to legitimize and sanction is consecrated through freely organized elections, public liberties (freedom of the press, freedom to organize along partisan lines, and so on) are not recognized, on the pretext that they would encroach on the free and immediate expression of the general will. The people, for its part, is envisioned solely in the singular, as a totality that cannot be disassembled.

The theory of the plebiscite

The notion of a plebiscite-based democracy was presented in the spring of 1848 by one of Louis Napoleon's supporters as an alternative to the classic forms of representative government. Bonapartist publications had made denunciation of the parliamentary system one of their major themes, offering the earliest expression of the main elements of the anti-parliamentary rhetoric that reached its culmination at the end of the century. Endless pages excoriated the "verbiage and lies" of the elected deputies, who were depicted as "pigs at the trough" stealing their salaries and leading France to its ruin.[3] In their vocabulary and tone, these texts already resonated with nationalist accents that would later be promoted aggressively by Georges Boulanger.

Deeming the presence of any interface inevitably distorting, Louis Napoleon's partisans emphasized the virtues of direct face-to-face contact between the people and power, asserting in sum that there should be, "between the people and its sovereign, no intermediary who arrogates the right to replace the one and the other."[4] The principle of appealing to the people thus logically structured the entire Caesarian vision of political institutions. Speaking of the spirit of the 1852 Constitution, Louis Napoleon, who was simply the new president of the Republic at the time, observed that "the leader whom you have elected is responsible to you: he always has the right to call on your sovereign judgment, so that, in solemn circumstances, you can keep him [in office] or withdraw your trust in him."[5] On two occasions, in December 1851 and in January 1852, he thus sought, and won, the direct assent of the people to his project of reestablishing democracy on a new foundation

The example of Switzerland was frequently invoked on this point in Bonapartist milieus. Louis Napoleon had set the tone as early as 1833 in his *Considérations politiques et militaires sur la Suisse* (Political and Military Considerations on Switzerland), a work in which he made a point of recalling that Napoleon Bonaparte had appointed himself protector and guardian of the former assemblies of inhabitants, the *Landsgemeinde*, where these existed in the cantons that were subject to French authority. Backed by the Swiss example, the Bonapartist doctrine of the plebiscite could claim respectability and, better yet, present itself as future-oriented, in opposition to a parliamentary system that it denounced as reflecting an archaic doctrine of representation.

One man embodying the people and the people as one body

The Bonapartist plebiscite was more than a technique for consulting the people. It was part of an overall political vision and a long-term effort to reinterpret the history of democracy. Most notably, it restored meaning and power to an imperative of responsibility, while positing a principle of embodiment as the answer to the problems of representation. With his proclamation of December 2, 1851, Louis Napoleon had already made it clear that installing a "responsible leader" was the key to his constitutional project; in his eyes, the principle of responsibility took on meaning and form only in the framework of an increased personalization of power.

"The emperor is not a man, he is a people."[6] This extraordinary formula proffered by one of the chief theorists of the Second Empire sums up the Bonapartist principle of political embodiment. In an even more condensed fashion, one of Louis Napoleon's partisans spoke of the emperor, "elected by French democracy," as a "man embodying the people" (*homme-peuple*).[7] From that point on, there was no distance to eradicate, no rupture to fear, between the representative and the represented; the latter were perfectly absorbed into the figure of the former. Napoleon III was simply taking up the schema staged by his uncle, but by theorizing it he gave it maximum scope. Starting with his *Rêveries politiques* (1832) and his *Idées napoléoniennes* (1839), the future emperor kept on reiterating that it was imperative to have a leader who would embody the popular will; he argued that the sovereignty of the people could be fully accomplished only if it were actually given bodily form in a man who was both strong and wholly responsible. In sum, he declared, "aristocracy does not need a leader, while the nature of democracy is to be personified in a man."[8] He continued to express this idea in many forms, even putting it at the core of the monumental history of Julius Caesar he had decided to write: "Confident and passionate democracy," he emphasized, "always believes its interests to be better represented by a single man than by a political body."[9]

This conception of representation via embodiment was anchored in a *politics of proximity* of which Napoleon III was a pioneer, a politics illustrated in his case by the extensive travels throughout the French provinces he undertook in order to meet their inhabitants directly.[10] He visited workshops and factories, toured farmlands, inspected nurseries and hospitals, and explored the poorest neighborhoods. He received delegations, including prominent local figures,

of course, but also workers and peasants. He attended balls and banquets in which large crowds gathered (nearly ten thousand strong on some occasions). At the beginning of the First Empire, someone in his uncle's entourage had anticipated almost prophetically the unprecedented uses to which political travel could be put in modern societies:

> The head of a great State has only one way to become acquainted with the people he governs: that is, by traveling. Voyages alone put the prince and the people in direct communication with each other. It has been said and believed that the people could make its rights known to the prince only through representatives. When the prince travels, the people takes care of its business itself. Under a prince who travels, there is more true and good democracy than in all the republics in the world.[11]

Travels around the country were thus understood as a form of direct political communication and a democratic staging of sovereignty, corresponding to the age of representation via embodiment. In more recent times, in a telling phrase, a jurist characterized them as something like "continuous plebiscites."[12]

This was a way of emphasizing that such travels were components of a type of direct democracy. But it was also a way of suggesting another of their material characteristics: they reduced the people's participation to a form of festive adherence in which it manifested itself only in the form of a unanimous mass. The advent of the man embodying the people was thus extended, with such travels, into the celebration of the people as one body. Bonapartism reconnected in this manner with earlier unanimist visions in French politics.

The tension between unanimity as a principle of legitimation and plurality as a technique for decision-making is at the heart of the difficulty inherent in democracy. But it takes on more acute significance when plurality is also perceived as the trace of a philosophically unacceptable division, when political parties are grasped solely as vectors of threatening factions. For when this occurs it becomes necessary to reaffirm even more forcefully the philosophically essential character of the bond between legitimacy and unanimity. By superimposing the sociological imperatives of representation via embodiment on the consequences of French monism, Bonapartism built its entire vision of politics around a presupposition of social unanimity. It wanted to acknowledge only *the* country or *the* people, always in the singular, as if the French could not exist in their social and political differences. Whereas liberals thought that the goal of representation

was to reflect diversity and *then* to build a form of cohesiveness through the mechanisms of parliamentary deliberation, Bonapartists wanted that cohesiveness to express, immediately, a unity that was presupposed. Revolutionary political culture had oscillated between the two poles, in its day; Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès had positioned himself as an intransigent defender of a monist vision of the political while theorizing a pluralist conception of representatives as organs of the general will. The apostles of Caesarism, for their part, took a decisive stance, radicalizing the notion of the people as one body.

Plebiscites played a determining role in this monist version of the political arena. A plebiscite was understood as a ritual of unanimity. In this way it reconnected, almost, with the revolutionary ceremonies of fraternization or oath-taking. When he announced the 1870 plebiscite, Napoleon III thus recalled something as a fact he considered essential: "You were nearly unanimous, eighteen years ago, in conferring the most extensive powers on me; be just as numerous today in adhering to the transformation of the imperial regime."[13] This vision was all the more readily accepted at the time, since the pluralist conception of suffrage had not yet penetrated society very deeply. In 1852, nearly a third of French villages granted the totality of their votes to the candidates chosen by the prefect.[14] In a confusion that was not perceived by the players at the time, plebiscites thus superimposed the elements of a "modern" democratic culture on the residue of an "archaic" social culture of community.

Democratic polarization

Napoleon III was a fervent partisan of opening up the economy – his reign was to be marked by the signing of a free trade agreement with Great Britain – but he was in no way a partisan of laissez-faire economics. "A government is not a *necessary ulcer*," he insisted; "it is rather the beneficial driver of every social organism."[15] However, this "Jacobin" dimension of his view of public action was accompanied by the recognition that civil society required autonomy. The Second Empire thus encouraged the development of cooperatives and mutual aid societies, which flourished dramatically in the 1860s. Napoleon III also crafted the first decentralization laws, in 1866 and 1867.[16] Most importantly, in 1864 he ended the ban on unionization, by abolishing the crime of coalition that had been one of the pillars of the revolutionary conception of the economy and society. Émile Ollivier, the one who was to propose this historic law

to the Legislative Body, asserted that Isaac Le Chapelier's famous law suppressing all citizens' associations constituted "the fundamental error of the French Revolution."[17] But this positive and "liberal" conception of civil society went hand in hand, for Louis Napoleon, with a no less remarkable democratic illiberalism. Napoleon III can thus be viewed as the first theorist, and simultaneously the first practitioner, of this hitherto unknown form of illiberalism. The way he dealt with the questions surrounding political parties and freedom of the press demonstrated this in exemplary fashion: he justified suppressing the former and establishing guardianship over the latter by evoking a certain vision of democracy and the sovereignty of the people. The arguments he used merit close examination.

On the Caesarian critique of parties

> There are no powers but those constituted by the will of the people, expressed by its representatives; there are no authorities but those delegated by the people; there can be no action but that of its representatives vested in public positions. It is to preserve this principle in its full purity that the Constitution eliminated all corporations and now recognizes only the social body and individuals.[18]

These terms, in which Le Chapelier had presented the decree abolishing citizens' associations in 1791, reproduced almost word for word those Napoleon III had used a few months earlier to call for putting corporations and associations of individuals outside the law. "Our government is representative: it is composed of men whom the people has chosen," as an Assembly member summed up the point later. "But what are popular societies? An association of men who have chosen each other themselves."[19]

The Bonapartists followed Le Chapelier in his criticism of political parties, whereas they had strongly denounced his arguments concerning the economic and social spheres. On this point, the break they introduced with the customs and institutions of the Second Republic and those of parliamentary monarchy was quite pronounced. If the monist basis of French political culture led in principle to banishing intermediary bodies in the political order, in practice things had actually been much more flexible. During the Revolution, circumstances deemed exceptional had initially led to the acceptance in reality of what had been rejected in theory.[20] At the end of the Restoration, and again under the July Monarchy, the

creation of electoral committees intended to organize and support partisan candidacies had been similarly tolerated.[21] These committees also flourished in 1848 without challenges to their legitimacy and without any impediments to their actions.[22] The Second Empire took pains, on the contrary, to ensure a very strict practical application of the monist imperative.

A typical attitude toward electoral committees was expressed by France's Minister of the Interior in 1852 (Charles Auguste, duc de Morny): such committees "would have the disadvantage of creating premature bonds, acquired rights that would only hinder the populations and deny them any freedom."[23] Beyond immediately political aims, the very existence of any intermediate organ that might shape a vote was targeted; any structure of this type was suspected of introducing bias into the expression of the general will. The presupposition was that the people should manifest itself in its native, spontaneous strength; its being took its authentic form only in the immediate projection of individuals into the collective body. A memorandum issued in 1857 repeated the prohibition forcefully: "You will not tolerate the organization of electoral committees. All these artificial means of propaganda have no result other than substituting the influence of a few leaders for the impartial good sense of the masses."[24] The regime's hostility to voting by selecting candidates from a list on a ballot originated in the same reasoning. With balloting according to lists, as it had played out in the earlier years of the Second Republic, "private" structures had had to be set up, based on concertation among a few individuals, to develop candidacies. The return to voting on a single name was now presented by the regime as guaranteeing a freer expression of universal suffrage, since there would be no private interfaces involved in organizing elections. This vigilant prohibition provided the framework for the legal charges brought against a group of journalists and prominent figures who had met in 1863 to try to coordinate the republican reaction to the legislative elections by organizing opposition candidacies. The trial had enormous repercussions. In the face of the republican lawyers who accused the Empire of infringing on universal suffrage, the general prosecutor denounced what he called an "outside administration" positioned alongside the official public authorities and spoke of "corruption of universal suffrage."[25] Electoral committees, the prosecutor asserted, were ultimately at the service of the "private interests of their members." In addition, as he saw it, such committees presupposed an implicit hierarchy between the "principals" and the "small men" whom the former were expected, in practical terms,

to guide and enlighten. That approach would reduce electoral participation to choosing among names selected in advance by a few individuals, with citizens being no more than voting machines in the hands of those "principals."[26]

While denunciation of trampled freedoms brought the entire opposition solidly together, the imperial arguments had undeniable weight as well in the realm of public opinion. Many workers were particularly sensitive to these arguments; for example, they deplored the fact that the republican electoral committee set up for the 1863 elections was essentially composed of lawyers, journalists, and former Parliament members who had appointed themselves as the entity in charge of nominating candidates.[27] What process for designating candidates, then, would deserve to be called "democratic"? The Empire had its answer: official candidacy. Openly chosen by the public authorities, the official candidate was not the man of a particular party but the representative of the regime as such – a regime presumed to have been put in place democratically. The authorities could thus proceed unproblematically and with complete legitimacy to name a candidate. Moreover, the voters were invited, in this case, not to distinguish a person but rather to support a politics (or, on the contrary, to reject it). In this way, elections could be viewed as depersonalized and by the same token wholly political, with no "external parasitism." But, in such a framework, how could an opposition candidate be chosen democratically? The republicans were aware of this difficulty, so much so that one of their leaders, Louis-Antoine Garnier-Pagès, had suggested setting up a very complicated procedure: the voters of each district would elect delegates who would then form a central committee charged with naming candidates.[28] The suggestion was rejected because it was legally and practically difficult to implement, but also because a large majority of the republican leaders were concerned about having candidates imposed on them that they would not have chosen themselves. Marie François Sadi Carnot thus recognized that many republican spokespersons wanted such a committee "to be formed in a rather dictatorial fashion." After the disturbance created by the naming of republican candidates in 1863, the famous "Manifesto of the Sixty," which launched the idea of specific candidacies from the working class, was thus drafted in reaction to what had been experienced as a kind of takeover of the democratic process by prominent individuals.[29]

The problematic risk of a takeover that would end up in a form of privatization and confiscation of "democratic energy" had led,

during the French Revolution, in a somewhat utopian fashion, to a radical *personalization* of elections, situating them in a space of choice that could be viewed as absolutely non-political, since the criteria for selection were supposed to be applied solely to the intellectual and moral qualities of the individual candidates. The Second Empire made the opposite choice, opting for *total politicization* of elections, which meant a total merger of the state with political society. The polarizing of the political realm that resulted from this fusion implied that there could exist no sort of public space between the state and the private sphere. By the same token, this led to an unprecedented dissociation between liberalism and democracy. As long as there is a public political space distinct from the state, the freedoms rightly qualified as "public" (the right to form associations, to meet, to create political parties, and so on) in fact share in the workings of democracy. Thus there is no democracy without freedom of association, without the existence of freely formed parties, and so on. When the political realm is polarized, it is an entirely different story: this results in a sort of immediate and overarching constitution of the political, which no longer needs any intermediary support to be expressed.

A "democratic" vision for limiting freedom of the press

"In the aftermath of a revolution," Louis Napoleon declared in 1852, "the first guarantee for a people does not consist in an immoderate use of the rostrum or the press; it lies in the right to choose the government it finds suitable."[30] This was a way of stressing the fact that, in his eyes, the democratic imperative took precedence over the liberal imperative. While he deemed that the classic individual freedoms had to be recognized, he viewed public freedoms, such as freedom of the press, as secondary concerns. The decree of February 17, 1852, which granted the government discretionary authority over the press, thus remained in force during nearly the entire duration of his reign. The arguments advanced to justify this state of affairs are all the more interesting to analyze in that they were theorized and set forth in public. Facing their detractors, who took *public* freedom of the press to be inseparable from *individual* freedom of expression, the regime's defenders objected that there was, to the contrary, an essential distinction to be made. They saw newspapers as authentic powers, but private, self-proclaimed powers that nevertheless sought to play a public role. One theorist for the regime, Émile Ollivier,

declared that "a newspaper is a true State power, exercised without delegation by anyone and without responsibility."[31] Another, Adolphe Granier de Cassagnac, insisted that,

> contrary to all the regular powers, of which the smallest is rooted in and delegated by constitutional law, the press is a spontaneous, willful power, stemming only from itself, its own interests, whims, or ambitions. The number of public powers is limited, the number of newspapers is not; the attributions of public powers are defined, those of the press have neither rules nor measure.[32]

In a particularly striking formulation, the same author declared that the press was practically "the rival of the public authorities," while it tolerated no constraints of legitimacy or representativity.[33] If the press were not contained, he said bluntly, it would be "a complete and flagrant usurpation of the public powers."[34] "Without having the right to vote," he argued,

> it seeks to direct elections; without having the right to appear in the ranks of the deliberating bodies, it seeks to influence their deliberations; without having the right to sit on the sovereign's councils, it seeks to provoke or prevent governmental actions; without having been delegated by any department or district or commune or hamlet, it seeks to govern the nation; in a word, it seeks to substitute its action for the action of all the established legal authorities, without being actually invested with any right properly speaking.[35]

From this perspective, newspapers were viewed as "hundreds of little States in the middle of the State," as private institutions that played a political role. They were a political power in private hands: as Cassagnac summed it up, journalists intervened in public life with their conscience or their personal interests as their sole mandate. Elected by no one, they nevertheless embodied real social power.[36]

Were newspapers private institutions? The Bonapartists were implacable in their denunciations of periodicals as anti-democratic capitalist structures. Cassagnac provided a definition that certain modern enemies of the media would not disavow: "A society of capitalists [that] surrounds itself with a certain number of talented writers."[37] In other words, a newspaper can be viewed as an aristocratic power in a democratic world. A pamphlet written by someone close to the regime was tellingly titled *L'aristocratie des journaux et le suffrage universel* (The Aristocracy of Newspapers and Universal Suffrage).[38] The Bonapartists held that control of the press was fully

justified: "Newspapers, which represent and can only represent nothing but individual interests, must be subordinated to the general interest."[39] Given that electing journalists was inconceivable, surveillance over them was called for. They should also be opposed by the discourse of the elected authorities, who were presumed to express the general will adequately, since they had been chosen by that will. It is thus not surprising that the regime briefly considered producing an inexpensive newspaper that could give full sway to "public" discourse. In the Caesarian vision of the political realm, then, the whole idea of the public was at stake. The public was never understood as a working space of interaction and reflection between groups and individuals; it was understood only in the rigid forms of institutions legitimized by elections.

There was no place for political freedom or public freedom in this framework. "Political freedom," as Émile Ollivier put it bluntly, "the freedom that consists in creating newspapers, clubs, elections, if it is not the simple guarantee of an existing social liberty, is nothing more than a dangerous privilege, a mechanism for disruption and exploitation at the service of politicians from above and from below who can become deputies or create newspapers."[40] It is in this sense that the illiberalism of the Second Empire was constituted by policies that were openly theorized and proclaimed.

— 2 —

HISTORY OF POPULIST MOMENTS II: THE YEARS 1890–1914

The period between 1890 and 1914 marked a double turning point. In the political sphere, it was the moment of the first crisis in the democratic model, a crisis particularly apparent in the United States and in France, where universal (male) suffrage had been in place the longest (whereas in Germany it had not been instituted until 1871, and in England, while the third Reform Bill had expanded the right to vote in 1884, suffrage was not made universal until 1918). In the economic sphere, the period was characterized by the shock of the "first globalization,"[1] which released a wave of xenophobia and a demand for protectionist policies that disrupted the existing partisan divides and redefined the stakes that had structured political cultures.

Critiques of political parties and denunciations of corruption marked the United States in the 1890s. During this period, democracy appeared to be flagging; it seemed to have betrayed the promise of its origins. The parties were accused of having confiscated the sovereignty of the people and of having become machines for handing out benefits; their leaders were presumed to be corrupt. The creation of the People's Party in 1892, often referred to by its members as the Populist Party, was fostered by this disenchantment with democracy (see the annex, p. 164). In a federal nation endowed with a relatively weak central government, these phenomena were experienced first and foremost at the municipal level. This was where the excesses of the spoils system were felt most strongly; this was also where the stranglehold of the parties on political matters was most visible. Most cities at the time were managed surreptitiously by someone known as "the boss," the head of the political machine of the party in power. The mayor elected to office was most often under the boss's thumb. It was the boss who oversaw recruitment, created or abolished jobs,

and controlled decision-making. The system nourished wholesale corruption. The misgovernment of cities, exaggerating the features of late nineteenth-century American democracy, thus symbolized the breakdown: this was a democracy completely detached from the spirit and practices of its origins.

A journalism of denunciation emerged and prospered in this context. Around the turn of the century, publications such as *Cosmopolitan*, *McClure's Magazine*, and *Everybody's Magazine* became highly successful as they multiplied scandalous revelations and pilloried the "new czars" who had appropriated public goods for themselves. The journalists involved were called muckrakers. But these writers were not interested merely in creating a sensation, in selling more magazines by laying out the small and large misdeeds of a corrupt political class. They were also preachers: seeking to renew democracy and free it from its flaws, they called for its conversion. One such journalist, Lincoln Steffens, published a highly influential book in this vein, *The Shame of the Cities* (1904); in his articles, too, he used a vocabulary saturated with Protestant morality, rife with terms such as shame, sin, guilt, salvation, damnation, pride, and soul.[2] For these journalists, the press had an authentically regenerative role to play, inseparably political and spiritual. The editor of *Cosmopolitan* expressed the magazine's goal in 1906 in a striking formula: "Turn the waters of a pure public spirit into the corrupt pools of private interests and wash the offensive accumulations away."[3]

In more directly political terms, disgust with the prevailing corruption was expressed by the Progressive Movement, which developed proposals for cleaning up political life and strengthening democratic institutions. Although it was not organized as a party and did not hold meetings, this movement nevertheless played a much more important and far-reaching role than the small People's Party, which had primarily mobilized the rural world of the Great Plains and the South a few years earlier. The Progressive Movement was the driving force behind the renovation of democratic institutions in the US, in the Western states in particular: its adherents instituted primary races, introduced citizen-initiated referendums, and created mechanisms for recalling elected officials. Theodore Roosevelt's election to the presidency in 1904 reflected the strength of these ideas,[4] and the modifications spurred locally by the Progressives spread throughout the entire American political system. Thus we might say that populism was extinguished by its own success, so widely was it absorbed and normalized. The very language used by the two major parties was

modified, coming to celebrate the "common man" and the "middle classes." Populism later resurfaced in inflammatory contexts, for instance in the racist discourse of George Wallace, a former governor of Alabama who made a strong showing in the 1964 Democratic primaries and won a record 13.5 percent of the votes when he ran as an independent in the 1968 presidential race.

In France, it was the Boulangist episode[5] that marked a break and betrayed the scope of the disenchantment affecting part of the country. While Georges Boulanger's surge of influence did not last long, the attitudes he expressed persisted and set the tone for the 1890s, blurring the distinction between left and right and sketching out the features of an unprecedented style of political protest culture. As in the United States, denouncing corruption played a central role. The Panama affair,[6] which revealed the susceptibility of deputies to the solicitations of industrial and financial milieus, was the detonator that unleashed a powerful wave of anti-parliamentarianism.[7] Popular singers, caricature artists, and pamphleteers went all out to enrage the public against the "Bourbon Follies," the "puppets of parliament," or the "Palais Bourbeux" (Muddy Palace), a Parliament depicted as a "menagerie" or a theater of "democratic comedy."

The Panama scandal produced a windfall for a whole array of illustrated satirical journals, almost totally devoted to virulent denunciations of French political institutions. Week after week, deputies – members of Parliament – were depicted as shameful figures embodying cynicism and spinelessness, mediocrity and corruption. Tellingly, these representatives of the people were almost never characterized by their political affiliations in these publications. The figure of the deputy constituted a *social type*, always depicted by dint of a few caricatural features, as in the already-familiar stereotypical representations of capitalists or Jews in a certain press (often the same organs, moreover), for example *L'Assiette au beurre* (The Butter Plate). A proliferation of new titles of a similar nature, meeting with similar success, marked a turning point. This literature of disgust and derision indicated that a significant portion of the population had stopped believing in the ideal of an active and positive sovereignty on the part of the people. The political scene was thus dominated by a political culture of mistrust, as attested by omnipresent references to "a clean sweep": the image expresses the way many citizens conceived of political action as occurring under the sole banner of a *negative democracy*, saturated with a combination of resentment and impotence.

During this period in France, the rejection of politicians was also linked to the expression of a fierce anti-intellectualism. In someone like Maurice Barrès, anti-intellectualism was a kind of pendant to anti-Semitism: the pairing was the cement undergirding Barrèsian nationalism, which would be called "populist" today. Barrès contrasted "the instinct of the humble" – those he saw as ordinary people in touch with reality – with the rationalist and individualist poison of intellectuals mired in abstraction. He constantly displayed his contempt for academics and for "students in berets"; by contrast, he celebrated the good sense of the masses, possessors of "French truth," masses guided by an instinctive sense of the general will who preferred the efficacy of action to futile speechifying.[8]

The 1890s were also marked in the economic and social spheres by the start of a period of intense globalization.[9] This was the period during which the modern empires – most notably the French and British versions – were constituted. Economic historians have focused intently on the empire-building phenomenon, whether to analyze it, with Lenin, as the ultimate stage of capitalism, or to defend it as an indispensable vector of growth and of social tranquility at home.[10] But globalization in this period played an even larger role: it provoked disruptions on a scale comparable to that of the contemporary "second globalization," which has been restructuring economies and societies for some thirty years now. The opening up of economies at the turn of the twentieth century corresponded to a spectacular boom. In some countries, including France, foreign trade made up nearly 20 percent of the gross national product of the period. The monetary stability linked to the adoption of the gold standard and the reduction in transportation costs owing to technological progress made important contributions to this expansion. Another result was an unprecedented convergence in the prices of agricultural goods and basic industrial materials: the notion of "worldwide exchange" was beginning to solidify. In financial terms, the internationalization of capital was almost as significant as it is today. In the French case, it is estimated that between a quarter and a third of overall national wealth was invested abroad; the percentage was even higher for Great Britain.[11] A third indicator of globalization, beyond the development of international trade and the flow of capital, is found in migration patterns. Here, the figures are even more impressive, since it is estimated, for example, that fifty-five million Europeans moved to the New World during this period, while massive population movements took place in Europe itself. These shifts remained unequalled until our own day.

These concomitant economic and social contexts engendered profound tensions and ruptures in the European and American societies of the time, bringing to the surface new fears and new expectations that had a powerful influence on conceptions of democracy and society. On one side, there were demands for a more direct democracy; on the other, there was the rising power of a demand for protectionism tinged with strong xenophobic overtones as the condition for greater social justice.

The panacea of referendums

The fall of the Second Empire was not regretted by many: in France, a republic seemed to be the historical norm for a regime of emancipation. However, those who were nostalgic for the reign of Napoleon III drew the sympathy of part of the public by constituting themselves as a "parliamentary group appealing to the people." Their preferred theme was consistent with the aspirations of the day, those to which General Boulanger gave a first mass expression. If Boulanger initially appeared as the expression of "a great collective disgust," in Jules Ferry's terms, it was also around him that the idea of referendums had begun to be considered as the solution to the flaws and failures of the representative system. "In a democracy," Boulanger said in June 1888 in a speech outlining his program, "institutions need to come as close as possible to direct government. It is right and proper," he concluded," to question the people directly every time serious conflicts of opinion arise that it alone can resolve. That is why I think it is indispensable to introduce *jus ad referendum* into our Constitution."[12] The word and the idea were launched. If the Bonapartist milieus continued for a time to speak of "appeals to the people," they went on to formulate proposals for a *referendum republic*; for them, the election of the president of the Republic by universal suffrage was connected with the adoption of procedures for popular consultation in the legislative and communal orders alike. French socialists, for their part, advanced the idea of *direct legislation by the people*, evoking at a century's remove the Constitution of 1793. The heirs of Louis Auguste Blanqui's vision, clustered around Édouard Vaillant, called for replacing the parliamentary regime by direct legislation and direct government of the people by the people. The nascent nationalist milieu, with Maurice Barrès as its central intellectual figure, was also open to this perspective, drawn by its visceral hatred for a parliamentary regime that it viewed as no longer

viable.[13] This approach to creating a new order was reinforced, in Barrès's case, by his hatred of intellectuals and moralizers, whose reasoning he liked to contrast with "the instinct of the humble": in his eyes, only the common people expressed the voice of the nation with authenticity and thus should be addressed directly.

This powerful idea succeeded in channeling the energies of various sectors of public opinion in France, disrupting the earlier partisan divides. The same thing happened in Germany, where the emerging Social Democratic Party made the project of direct legislation one of its key issues; indeed, one of its members was the author of a book that became a standard reference on the subject for the left throughout Europe.[14] The fact that the question was also on the agenda in Great Britain has received less attention. In the 1890s, among socialists but also in conservative milieus, the issue was discussed sympathetically. The theme played an especially important role in the 1895 elections. The prominent and widely respected constitutionalist Albert Venn Dicey was one of the most eloquent partisans of referendums, which he conceived as "the People's Veto."[15] The radical socialists of *The Clarion* also became very active propagandists for referendums.[16] The conservatives supported the idea as well, for a time, manifesting their confidence in the prudential virtues of the people (along the same lines as their elders in 1867 when the second Reform Bill was adopted). With Arthur Balfour and Lord Salisbury, they took this tack in the hope of avoiding a thorough reform of the House of Lords, which was a central political topic at the time. With the referendum procedure, they claimed, it would be up to the people to decide between the two Houses in case of conflict, without any need to reduce the size of either chamber.[17] So it was not simply nostalgia for 1793 that put the issue of referendums on the agenda in Europe at the end of the nineteenth century.

In the United States, too, as we have already seen, the sense that democracy was being confiscated had also brought the question of referendums to the fore in the country's debates, starting in the mid-1890s: the issue was often linked to the project of setting up a mechanism for a popular vote in order to launch the procedure. During the same period, critiques of the political parties had led to the development of a primary election system designed to extend the sovereignty of the populace by giving it the right to choose candidates. It is significant, moreover, that works focused on the Swiss experience proliferated in North America as well as in Europe. On both continents, there was a pronounced sense that political institutions had to be regenerated if they were to conform to their

original missions. It was in this spirit that accents that would be called populist today were making themselves heard at the turn of the twentieth century.

The rise of national protectionism

In a parallel development in the economic and social spheres, this period was marked by the rise in power of the theme of national protectionism, as a direct reaction to the effects of the first globalization. But economic policy was not the only issue targeted in this framework; the adoption of protectionist measures had been something of a commonplace, moreover, throughout the nineteenth century. What was at stake more broadly was a redefinition of the basis for the social bond. The case of France is exemplary. Underlying the demand for protectionism was the idea of rootedness in a national identity that would overcome the differences and divisions that ran through French society. This idea structured a veritable political ideology by suggesting that the opposition between labor and capital should be replaced by collective solidarity in the face of the threat from abroad. Democratic equality was thus reformulated as membership in a community of protection and isolationism.

The formation of that protectionist culture contributed powerfully to the restructuring of the French ideological landscape at the end of the nineteenth century. National protectionism was presented by some as an alternative to socialism. The evolution of someone like Maurice Barrès attests particularly well to this shift: Barrès was the first to use the term "nationalism," in 1892, to designate a type of *internal politics*. His vision was thus far removed from that of historians such as Jules Michelet or Ernest Renan. For Barrès, the nationalist perspective was the one that fully achieved the ideal of "worker protectionism" (the expression *protectionnisme ouvrier* was widely used at the time); as he saw it, traditional socialism had failed to achieve that goal. National protectionism promised an immediately obvious efficacy.[18] By instituting a system for treating foreigners and nationals unequally, Barrès gave a directly perceptible negative meaning to the achievement of a certain idea of equality. The definition of equality formulated by socialism was more demanding, to be sure, but also more problematic, since its advent was deferred to the aftermath of a hypothetical revolution.

Around this "1890s moment," various types of political and intellectual arrangements were made in the context of groupings

constituted by the three terms nationalism, socialism, and protectionism, with protectionism unquestionably at the heart of the reconfigured representations of solidarity that it spawned. The national protectionism of the republicans in the administration was the dominant modality. But other more radical configurations were also derived from these rearrangements. We have just seen the "reinvention" of nationalism promoted by Barrès. But there were even more extreme variants. In the late nineteenth-century Blanquist milieus, often characterized as neo-Hebertist, national protectionism took on "social-chauvinist" accents that were violently xenophobic and anti-Semitic. This passage from revolutionary radicalism to ultranationalism was one of the most striking examples of ideological and political recategorization during this period. It was thus in the circles of former Blanquists that the Ligue pour la Défense du Travail national (League for the Defense of National Labor) was created, and the broadsheet *L'Idée nationale* (The National Idea) was published. "France for the French," "France overrun by foreigners," and "national socialism" were prevailing motifs. Socialism still held on: amid all the xenophobia, one could declare oneself a partisan of "the most absolute social equality."[19] How could ardent admirers of Louise Michel have evolved toward these exalted positions, after passing through the airlock of participation in Boulangism? The phenomenon can be explained only if we interpret it as a sort of *perverted restructuring* of an ideal, rather than as a clean break. Unable to believe that their insurrectional and revolutionary projects could be brought to fruition, these men retracted their radicalization and reformulated their demand for equality.[20]

These realignments found direct expression in public opinion and in the activities of social movements. Beyond the progress of the protectionist idea where foreign trade was concerned, during this period, we can also see an increase in the potency of the calls for protecting the national labor force against the immigrants present on French territory. The idea of taxing the use of foreign labor was echoed favorably in the Chamber of Deputies, and many new laws were proposed to this end. The term "worker protectionism," mentioned earlier, took hold in this context, broadening the earlier meaning pertaining specifically to customs barriers.[21]

Maurice Barrès established himself as a champion of this approach during the 1893 electoral campaign when he published the incendiary pamphlet *Contre les étrangers* (Against Foreigners). A veritable political manifesto, this text more or less synthesized the major themes of the xenophobic protectionism of the day: it advocated a special tax

on employers who used foreign labor, the expulsion of foreigners who relied on public assistance, and systematic national preference in hiring. But it is also worth emphasizing that Barrès linked this vision directly to a philosophy of solidarity and equality. For him, reference to the fatherland completely redefined the question of civil society. It was through an internal reversal of the socialism of his youth that he had become one of the apologists of the prevailing form of nationalism. This is particularly telling evidence that the protectionist idea had spread beyond the field of economic policy and taken on an all-encompassing social and political meaning. The proliferating demonstrations against foreign workers in the 1890s, extending in some instances to murder, attest tragically to the penetration of this vision in popular milieus.

Without being as expansively elaborated, this type of xenophobic protectionism asserted itself just as strongly in the United States. Its effects were particularly pronounced in California, where actions against immigrant workers from China occurred repeatedly; all the while, nativist hostility continued to weigh on the more recent waves of immigration.[22] Anti-Chinese and anti-Japanese campaigns began to flourish in California in the late 1870s.[23] A vote held in the state during that period on whether to allow Chinese immigration had crushing results: there were 161,405 opposing voices and only 638 in favor.[24] During those years, the members of the Workingmen's Party or the Knights of Labor did not hesitate to attack Asian workers physically; the charter of the Workingmen's Party even stipulated that the party would not "volunteer to repress or arrest or prosecute the hungry and impatient, who manifest their hatred of the Chinaman."[25] In 1882, the country as a whole adopted laws designed to allow immigrants to be selected on the basis of ethnicity. These laws inaugurated a lengthy cycle of both quantitative and qualitative restrictions.

Populism aborted

The various components of a populist political culture were thus present at the turn of the twentieth century (with the notable exception of reference to a charismatic leader).[26] To be sure, this culture was manifested in very different ways from country to country; France was the most strongly marked, the United States to a lesser degree. No populist regime actually saw the light of day, however, and no movement of that nature came even close to winning

power. Why so? It is essential to address these questions if we are to identify what distinguishes our contemporary populist moment from the previous ones. The answers, like the manifestations themselves, vary by country.

In the United States, virulent criticism of the political parties was initially characterized by what it failed to address: the overall constitutional architecture of the country was not called into question. The critique was channeled, in a way, by the adoption of some of the essential propositions of the Progressive Movement. Thus, at the turn of the century, in more than a third of the states, primarily in the West and Midwest, procedures for referendums and popular initiatives were put in place, along with procedures for recalling elected officials at various administrative levels (ranging from judges and sheriffs to governors).[27] The system of electoral primaries was adopted at the same time by a large number of states.[28] These measures largely eradicated the political roots of populism in the United States, even if, at a more general level, "Washington" remained stigmatized as the source of everything that was wrong in the country. The political culture of mistrust was effectively contained by being reoriented. In the face of the rising potency of a national protectionism tinged with xenophobia, the American response was even harsher. In addition to restrictive immigration policies, the demand for protection rebounded toward a consolidation of the racial boundaries between Blacks and Whites. For many, protection of whiteness became the priority, as attested by the segregationist policies established in the Southern states during this period. American populism thus found an outlet in racism.

In Germany and in England, populist accents were less pronounced. Protectionist ideas, strongly associated with a higher cost of living, did not penetrate very deeply in England, despite the energetic campaign in their favor led by Joseph Chamberlain.[29] The Labour Party argued vigorously against the protectionist mantra, and it did not stop at vaunting the benefits of an open economy. Real protection, as party leader Ramsay Macdonald insisted, lay in labor laws and public control of economic activity.[30] For their part, left-wing British economists (those known as the "new liberals," along with followers of John Maynard Keynes) challenged the imperialist vision that went along with the protectionist tendency in England. They argued for redistribution of income and for social reforms while denouncing the illusion of imperial protectionism.[31] In Germany, industrial successes based on exports meant that the world of labor remained relatively impervious to protectionist appeals.[32]

Socialist militants of both countries were attracted, however, by the idea of direct democracy.[33] The socialist theorist and advocate for direct democracy Moritz Carl Rittinghausen was a primary reference in Germany, and in Great Britain numerous writers denounced the "misrepresentation" in Parliament and the confiscation of the people's sovereignty. But this temptation was countered by the Social Democratic Party in Germany and the Labour Party in Britain with highly developed arguments.[34] Although critical of the representative and parliamentary system in its current manifestations, both parties stressed the functional importance of representative procedures. But beyond their intellectually robust analyses, it was the very existence of mass parties, endowed with a powerful capacity to represent wage-earners effectively, that had changed the way the situation was grasped in these two countries (whereas, today, it is the stagnation of the parties that feeds and justifies populist sentiments). Moreover, the strong parliamentary representation of these parties and the strength of their union allies had made it possible to achieve significant social reforms.

French socialists were far less influential than their neighbors. But they judged, similarly, that beyond institutional arrangements, it was the reality of political power relations that counted.[35] In France and Germany alike, moreover, the revolutionary perspective offered a coherent alternative to a negative populism that essentially amounted to mistrust and resentment. During the same period, despite its relatively modest size, the reforms carried out by what has been called the "Radical Republic" gave citizens the image of a politics capable of responding to the urgent issues of the day. The introduction of proportional representation, the establishment of the first elements of a welfare state, the development of trade unionism, and the institution of labor laws all helped dispel the specter of powerlessness that had been one of the principal elements feeding the populist appeal at the dawn of the twentieth century.

The First World War was to shake things up, multiplying the anxieties and expectations that had begun to be addressed. The years between the wars would be marked by revolutionary radicalism as well as by the increasing strength of fascist and Nazi ideologies, thus going well beyond what had been the horizon of earlier populist complaints.

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HISTORY OF POPULIST MOMENTS III: THE LATIN AMERICAN LABORATORY

In the twentieth century, the term "populism" made its definitive entrance into everyday political language to characterize Latin American movements and regimes. Not very long ago, the word referred to Venezuela under Hugo Chávez, to Ecuador under Rafael Correa, or to Bolivia under Evo Morales. All three leaders were continuing a history that had been marked in the mid-twentieth century by foundational figures such as Jorge Eliécer Gaitán in Colombia and Juan Perón in Argentina. They had been labeled "populists" because what they embodied did not fall under any of the usual political categories of the era, whether it was a matter of distinguishing between right and left or between capitalism and socialism. Their detractors had used that floating signifier to express their discomfort in the face of what seemed to them to be a strange alliance between the affirmation of democratic ideals and totalitarian accents; they were expressing their astonishment, too, at unprecedented new styles of electoral campaigning and governmental discourse.

These regimes and ideologies, which were often described at the time as "hybrid" or "bastardized," cannot be understood without reference to the conditions under which they emerged, that is, economic, political, and social realities very different from those that had accompanied the advent of modernity in Europe and in North America. A brief reminder of these conditions will help explain what gave rise to the specific features of these populisms.

The first defining characteristic of economic development in Latin America was its reliance on agriculture. From the late nineteenth century on, these countries exported wheat, sugar, bananas, or meat throughout the world on a massive scale. More than anywhere

else, property ownership was concentrated in the hands of a few: the descendants of the postcolonial elites seized control of most of the land on a continent that had been sparsely populated before the colonizers arrived. In Argentina, for example, 1 percent of the landowners monopolized 70 percent of the land area in 1930. Alongside this small property-owning oligarchy that essentially controlled the country's economy, industrial capitalism – linked for the most part to foreign investment – remained underdeveloped.

The associated societies remained similarly underdeveloped in political terms. The founding fathers of the regimes that had grown out of the independence movements of the early nineteenth century sought to build their institutions according to European or American models, as a way of asserting themselves as "modern"; however, political life remained engulfed in social relations of deference and dependence that were based on a system of large landholdings. Universal suffrage was recognized theoretically, but in practice it was often restricted in multiple ways, by arrangements regulating voter registration or by pressures affecting the expression of a public vote. Thus, while the trappings of democracy were found everywhere, they were embedded within powerful oligarchic networks that shared or competed for power. Moreover, military dictatorships or the advent of *caudillos* regularly punctuated the history of these countries, whether by offering people a demagogic outlet for their impatience or by maintaining the existing social order when it seemed about to collapse. In most cases, the established political parties expressed nothing more than differences in interests or sensibilities within the small world of postcolonial elites; the opposition between the Liberal and Conservative parties in Colombia was symptomatic in this regard. All these elements, combined with weak industrial development, meant that the continent did not experience the rise in strength of socialist and then communist parties that had revolutionized political life in Europe. The Latin American societies of the period remained divided between subjugated masses and powerful oligarchies.[1] These were not class-based societies in the Marxist sense.[2]

The various populisms arose in this context at a time when demands for social recognition and political integration were becoming more urgent and the effects of corruption were becoming more flagrant. In each case, populism corresponded to a situation of social and political as well as moral crisis. But none of them managed to found a regime capable of lasting except in periods of economic prosperity. The case of Perónism in Argentina is exemplary. When Juan Perón was

elected to the presidency in 1946, the country was in the middle of an economic boom, repeating the prosperous years of the early part of the century that had made it the sixth-ranked economic power in the world. The demand for agricultural products was considerable, in a world disrupted by war. Argentina was thus able to double its public expenditures between 1946 and 1948, while salaries reached new heights. Perón could finance his ambitious program of social reforms without difficulty. Half a century later, the governments of Chávez, Kirchner, Morales, and Correa could also rely on a boom in the prices of soybeans, gas, or oil to honor – at least for a time – their promises to the electorate. In this respect they were the heirs of mid-century Argentina as well as of Gaitán's Colombia.

Gaitán: a foundational figure

Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, whom we have already encountered, shattered the political landscape in Colombia. A member of the left wing of the Liberal Party, he rose to prominence in the late 1920s by offering his support to the workers who had been brutally repressed for protesting the working conditions in the United Fruit banana plantations. After a highly successful political career – he was elected mayor of Bogotá and vice president of the Assembly – he became the champion of an alternative to the traditional head-to-head competition between liberals and conservatives that structured life in the country. As the leader of his own movement, he laid the foundations for an unprecedented type of political culture that turned out to attract the masses. He was assassinated in the spring of 1948, a few days before a presidential vote which everyone had expected him to win overwhelmingly.[3]

Called "the people's orator" by his supporters,[4] Gaitán, as we have seen, used the formula "I am not a man, I am a people" as one of his principal slogans, unwittingly reiterating a Bonapartist claim.[5] Insisting on what distinguished him from the *caudillos* who were calling on voters to support them (they were often military men accustomed to leading their troops), Gaitán declared that, on the contrary, he was "led by the multitude," ready to give his life for the people. He was in no way a demagogue, in the literal sense of the term, as he repeated endlessly. He was thereby breaking with the Marxist vision of society[6] by considering the people as an entity broadened to include all those who could consider themselves *desposeidos*, dispossessed. For him, the people was defined above

all by its presumably self-evident difference and distance from the *oligarquía*, the *plutocracia*. Constituted by this radical distinction, the people did not need to be described with any precision in sociological terms: it was one and multiple. Thus for Gaitán it was a matter not so much of representing specific sociological conditions as of stoking that constitutive radicality, which found its crucial driving force in emotion; indeed, he was a pioneering theorist of the revolutionary function of emotion.

Hence the importance of moral consideration in his speeches. He was not seeking to mobilize arguments; the point was to provoke disgust. The oligarchs, as he saw them, were above all immoral and repugnant creatures against whom one had to incite an attack.[7] And he never stopped repeating that the people was "superior to its leaders." He led the fight under the banner of "Moral Restoration," and he proposed to overcome the gap between the "real country" and the "political country" that was in the hands of the elites. The chief object of the political struggle, he declared, was moral purification. The people itself was constituted by its members' shared indignation; this allowed for a definition of "people" that was at once imprecise and far-reaching.

The Peronist regime

Involved from the 1930s on in various putsch-like activities, Perón, who had become a colonel, was named secretary of state for labor and social welfare in 1945, in the administration that had emerged after the revolution of 1943. Very active in this position, he undertook a vast set of reforms, ranging from the establishment of collective agreements and labor courts to the development of a statute on agricultural workers and the establishment of a pension system for certain categories of wage-earners that had lacked retirement benefits. The strong economic growth of the period allowed him to finance multiple expenditures on social welfare and to raise salaries. His popularity stirred up jealousies and eventually provoked his removal from the administration, but he made a spectacular comeback in 1946 as the first president of the country elected by universal suffrage.

Like Gaitán, Perón continually portrayed himself as a son and servant of the people. "Fortunately, I am not one of those presidents who live a life apart," he was happy to assert. "On the contrary, I live among the people, as I have always lived; I share all the ups

and downs, all the successes and all the disappointments with my working classes."[8] Or this: "I have chosen the humble folk, for I have understood that only the humble can save the humble." Addressing the "suffering, sweating masses," he assured them of his unfailing support and his nearness to them: "I would like to hold you to my heart the way I would my mother." Even while sharing his reign with no one, he spoke of "depersonalizing the intentions that the revolution had embodied in him," underlining the populist claim that he embodied power in a purely functional way – in other words, that he fundamentally combined the democratic qualities of a perfect representative with the monarchic virtues of a power identified with the public good in that it was detached from any personal interest. The roles allocated to his wife Eva Perón, who insisted on being called Evita to show that she was accessible to everyone, were intended to make that solicitude perceptible. Alongside the mechanisms of the welfare state set up by the regime, the foundation she headed distributed clothing, household appliances, food, and social assistance on a discretionary basis. In this way Evita established a direct connection with the *descamisados*,[9] whom she never stopped courting.

Again like Gaitán, Perón relentlessly pilloried the oligarchy in order to constitute the people in its unity. But whereas the Colombian's momentum had been cut short at the threshold of power, Perón governed. With him, populism was not limited to political rhetoric: it established a regime of a particular type, one that the Argentinean meant to erect as an explicit break with what he called "the demoliberal world."[10] This break was destined, according to him, to lead from a formal democracy to a real one. "I am much more democratic than my opponents," he claimed, "because I am seeking a real democracy, one that has content, whereas they defend an empty framework, an appearance of democracy."[11] For him, this advanced form of democracy was anchored in the voting booth. In this connection we might speak of a "majoritarian absolutism." With the new Constitution that Perón put through in 1949, the powers of the Supreme Court were reduced and those of the executive branch greatly increased. The political parties saw their activity severely constrained, moreover, and they could now be dissolved, "if their ideological principles endangered social peace or if they had international ties." New legislation introducing severe penalties for the crime of "lack of respect for the established authority" made it possible to muzzle the opposition. While freedom of the press was formally maintained, many newspapers

were nevertheless indirectly silenced.[12] Government workers were called to demonstrate their loyalty to the regime or risk being fired.[13] In other words, government employment was supposed to be the instrument of majority rule. (In these respects, the Peronist vision of democracy and legitimacy bore a strong resemblance to the one the theorists of the Second Empire had produced a century earlier.) Characterizing Peronism as "hegemonic democracy," a specialist in Argentine history has insightfully noted that the distinguishing feature of Perón's regime lay in its being "anti-institutional and electoralist at the same time."[14]

On the characterization of Latin American populism

Neither Gaitán nor Perón was ever labeled a "populist." Analysts of the Latin American reality began to use the term populism only in the 1960s; at that point, the neologism reflected the difficulty of introducing into the usual conceptual frameworks of political science the type of ideologies and regimes that had marked the continent in the aftermath of the Second World War. But the term was never the object of truly satisfying theoretical analyses; most commentaries have been limited to describing the discourses and practices of populism and relating them to specific political styles or socio-economic contexts, depending on the country involved; the emphasis has been placed on the *causes* of populism.[15] The intellectual frameworks based on spontaneous apprehension of the realities in question kept these realities from being understood in depth: on one side, analysts tended to assimilate them to a form of fascism, while, on the other, historians and sociologists of the period felt obliged to interpret them in a Marxist framework.

There were certainly good reasons to relate these phenomena to the fascist experiment of the 1930s. First of all, there was the fact that Gaitán and Perón had seen that experiment first-hand and had been marked by it. Gaitán wrote his doctoral thesis in Italy, in the mid-1920s, under the direction of a jurist close to Mussolini. He had been in meetings with Il Duce and had been impressed by the tone and form of the latter's speeches. He had understood the essential role that radio would play in modern political life and had measured the importance of setting up organized and disciplined political forces. He would remember all this when he addressed crowds at home and structured his own movement. But his interest had gone no further. Things were different for Perón. He too had been a first-hand witness

to what the Mussolini regime represented, having undertaken a military mission to Rome in 1939. Later, he had manifested sympathy for the Nazi regime, adopting positions favorable to Germany at the onset of the Second World War (and, after 1945, protective of Nazi dignitaries who had taken refuge in his country). These sympathies had an ideological dimension, but also a historical basis: there were long-standing ties between Argentina's army and the Wehrmacht, which had trained a large number of Argentinean officers. Moreover, in Argentina there were numerous German immigrants who sympathized with Hitler, and there were also loyal followers of Mussolini – roughly half the population was of Italian origin. In the same period, the declared project of offering a third way between Soviet communism and American capitalism had an undeniable power of attraction over the entire South American continent.[16] All this gave legitimacy to the association of populism with fascism in the Argentinean case, by making populism look like "an incongruous telescoping of a shameful fascism and a social democracy under construction."[17] But "association" was not the same thing as analytic specification: indeed, it was rather a screen concept.

For its part, the Marxist analysis espoused by many social scientists in the 1960s had difficulty incorporating the phenomenon within its conceptual framework. For one thing, the populist celebration of the people was not the same thing as analysis in terms of class. The term "working class" was in fact foreign to the language of Gaitán, Perón, Getúlio Vargas (in Brazil), Lázaro Cárdenas (in Mexico), and their ilk. Moreover, the virulent denunciation of oligarchies proffered by these leaders had nothing to do with a critique of production. Hence the tendency of Marxist analysts to see in populist regimes only ambiguous, ultimately counter-revolutionary reformist approaches that were actually allied with big capital – or else to understand them as merely a transitional phenomenon linked to the preindustrial archaism of Latin America in those years.[18]

In both cases, these approaches from the 1960s, unable to account satisfactorily for the populisms of their own day, have proved even less capable of grasping contemporary populism. For, far from being an archaistic revival of a past form, the new populism maps out a future that is as lustrous as it is worrying. For that reason, its strength can be fully appreciated only if we consider its nature in new terms. The fact that contemporary societies have become societies of individuals, societies that can no longer be understood solely in terms of class, invites us to conceptualize contemporary populism in the framework of the indeterminacy that structures democracy itself.

This leads in turn to a new set of conceptual tools that will allow us to reread the history of Latin American populism, and to consider it as an archaic manifestation that has become, paradoxically, a precursor.

— 4 —

CONCEPTUAL HISTORY: POPULISM AS A DEMOCRATIC FORM

In the preceding chapters we have examined certain experiments and certain historical moments that may bring to mind some characteristic features of contemporary populism. But noting such echoes from the past, however suggestive they may be, has no explanatory value in itself. These echoes simply invite us to broaden our frame of analysis in order to take the full measure of populism in the present. To this end, I propose to start from a theory of democracy that focuses on its indeterminacy.[1] This more general perspective, which belongs in turn to the long history of the democratic experiment, is what will enable us to grasp the essence of populisms, in both their similarities and their differences. To speak of democracy's indeterminacy is to acknowledge that the most obvious notions that seem to underlie and sum up democracy – the notions of "power" and "people," first and foremost – have always remained open to multiple and potentially contradictory interpretations.

The democratic project has in effect constituted the political realm as a field that has remained wide open, owing to the very existence of the tensions and uncertainties that gave rise to it. If it is now considered as the inescapable organizing principle behind every just political order, the self-evidence that translates this imperative has always been as imprecise as its adherents are fervent. Because democracy is the foundational principle of an experiment in freedom, it has always been a problematic solution for instituting a polity of free persons. The notion of democracy has long contained the dream of goodness linked with the reality of vagueness. This particular coexistence does not depend primarily on the status of democracy as a remote ideal on which everyone would agree, for the differences of opinion about its definition have to do with the means used to bring

it into being. The history of democracy, then, is not simply that of an experiment thwarted or a utopia betrayed.

Far from corresponding to a simple practical uncertainty about the paths to its implementation, the fluctuating meaning of democracy is, more fundamentally, part of its essence. The word evokes a type of regime that has ceaselessly resisted definitive categorization; this is the source of the particular uneasiness that underlies its history. The string of disappointments and the feelings of betrayal that have always accompanied this type of regime have been all the more intense inasmuch as its definition has remained unsettled. Such fluctuations constitute the mainspring of a quest and a dissatisfaction that have by the same token remained hard to articulate. We have to start from these facts to understand democracy: within the notion are entangled histories of disenchantment and indeterminacy. The rising strength of populisms in the twenty-first century falls within this problematic story. We can appreciate this most clearly if we revisit some of democracy's structuring aporias, its irresolvable internal contradictions, the impasses that can make it turn back on itself.

Structuring aporia I: the unlocatable people

If the *idea* of a sovereign people has taken hold in its generality, the way to portray and express this commanding anonymous force has remained subject to debate. Starting at the time of the foundational revolutions, "the people" has been perceived as an inseparably imperious and problematic master for many reasons, the first being a semantic oscillation between the notions of *populus* and *plebs*. On one side, we find the objective, positive vision of society in general, the people-nation as an expression of public reason and the general interest. On the other side, in a narrower sociological perspective, we find the specter of the menacing plebs, or the multitude governed by the most immediate passions. During the spring of 1789 in France, the debates over what to call the new assembly formed by the newly autonomous Third Estate powerfully attested to the predicament facing the various parties. The proposal to call the new body the *Assemblée des représentants du peuple français* (Assembly of Representatives of the French People) met with considerable resistance.[2] Objections came from several directions: some critics pointed out that *peuple* was "a word that can mean anything," while Mirabeau, who had promoted the formula, backtracked and conceded that the word necessarily signified too much or too

little. The similarly controversial alternative designation, *Assemblée nationale* (National Assembly), ended up receiving a unanimous affirmative vote, which meant that the question of the living subject of democracy did not have to be faced.

Beyond this tension between plebs and populace, which could be called archaic, since it belongs to an almost pre-democratic order, the gap between the people as a civic body and the people as a society has always been problematic. Whereas the former is necessarily singular, an alternative figure for the form of sovereignty once embodied in a king, the latter is always manifested as plural and divided: it exists only in the form of differentiated social groups and diverse opinions. And we should note that the gap between these two visions of "the people" has continued to widen in a world where the ideal of unanimity has faded away. The people as a totality, taken in the singular, has thus become "unlocatable." Far from forming a bloc whose substance would be expressed by unanimity, it exists only in the form of various perceptible manifestations: the *electoral people*, the *social people*, which could also be characterized as "active," and the *people as principle*. Each of these thus expresses only one dimension of the civic people-body.

The electoral people is the simplest to grasp, since it takes on numerical consistency by way of the ballot box. It is immediately manifested in the division between a majority and minorities. It nevertheless remains much harder to pin down than that elementary arithmetic might suggest. For one thing, the electoral expression of a people is often highly diversified, sorting out public opinion under many different labels. Moreover, the electoral operation itself falls far short of representing public opinion completely: significant absences – potential voters who fail to register, those who register but abstain from voting, those who cast blank or invalid ballots – have to be taken into account. Above all, the electoral people is evanescent, becoming visible only fleetingly and intermittently, fluctuating according to the rhythm of the election calendar. None of these characteristics seems to characterize it a priori as the most adequate expression of society in general. Its justifications for holding that rank nevertheless exist. The test of an election makes it possible to bring controversies to an end: no one can argue with the materiality of the number fifty-one as opposed to the number forty-nine. The strength of an election also derives from the fact that it is rooted in the recognition of a radical form of equality expressed in the right of all to present themselves at the voting booth. While the results may be divisive, the procedures on which the election is based are unifying.

Whereas the members of the electoral people establish a power that episodically takes the form of a majority, a social people – whose members speak out, sign petitions, participate in demonstrations, join associations – takes on something like an uninterrupted succession of active or passive minorities. A social people piles on protests and initiatives of all sorts, exposes real-life situations as infringements on a just order; it is a perceptible manifestation of what enables or obstructs the possibility of a common world. A social people is a people in flux, a people of history, a people of problems. This people is the problematic truth of being-together, with its abysses and its falsehoods, its promises and its failures. It is in this mode that the people can be considered a figure of social generality. What establishes it as such is not the unity of a sentiment but the way the questions that underlie the collective bond are intertwined. It could also be argued that a people of opinion polls is manifested as a social people's twin and simultaneously as its shadow, as the submerged passive portion of the active people made visible to all.

The people as principle has no substantive form. It is constituted by the general equivalent that establishes the project of including everyone in the polity: equality. It is defined in a process of establishing what is common to all. To represent this people is to bring it to life; it entails preserving what constitutes the most structurally and most obviously public good: the people's fundamental rights. These rights are non-competitive public goods, in the literal meaning of the term: everyone can benefit from them without anyone being deprived of them.[3] They constitute, inseparably, the citizenship of every individual as the form of belonging to the community, and the humanity of human beings as the recognition of the irreducible singularity of each one. The whole and the parts of a society are perfectly bound together in these rights. Respecting these rights implies that all voices are heard, that all voices on the margins are taken into account. The legal subject is thus the essential figure of this people: it condenses what is essential in its multiple definitions, while its embodiment of the people is such that all members can recognize themselves in it. This shift from sociology to law is felt as all the more necessary in the contemporary world, inasmuch as the old categories descriptive of "the social" have lost their pertinence. Societies are less and less constituted by stable identities; the nature of a society is now primarily determined by its structuring principles. The legal subject is thus, today, the most concrete individual there is. Such an individual is the directly perceptible image of all those who are discriminated against, excluded, forgotten. The legal subject

is therefore connected to the recognition of singularities, so that all members of a society can see themselves as being part of it. Far from referring to an abstraction, it is this subject that from now on most visibly gives body to the idea of a political community.

Beyond the diversity of these figures of a perceptible people, the tension between the political principle of democracy and its sociological principle in general has been steadily exacerbated. Modern politics in fact entrusts power to the people at the very moment when the political project of emancipation is leading, along a parallel track, to a more abstract view of the social realm, one in which the sacralization of the individual is linked to an affirmation of human rights. This modern political principle consecrates the power of a collective subject even as the sociological principle tends to dissolve the perceptible consistency and reduce the visibility of that subject. The notion of the sovereignty of the people dealt with that tension quite well in a first phase, when it was limited to defining a principle of opposition and differentiation with respect to the past (via a critique of tyranny and absolutism) or with respect to the external world – or when the structuring of society into clearly defined classes made the notion of sovereignty easily representable, since the industrial societies had modernized the old societies of corporate bodies along class lines. The advent of societies of individuals modified the terms that had made the social realm legible, the terms in which the traditional idea of a people was anchored (for example, in the work of Victor Hugo, Jules Michelet, or Pierre-Joseph Proudhon). And this modification was reinforced by the imperative of equality, according to which every individual was to be a legal subject and a full-fledged citizen. This imperative implies considering individuals in a relatively abstract manner: all their differences and distinctions must be set aside so they can be considered only in their common and essential quality, that of autonomous subjects. In other words, it is the legal consecration of the individual that leads any substantive grasp of the social realm to be rejected as archaic and intolerable. For this reason, democratic society entails a continuous critique of institutions that might tie individuals down to a particular nature, rendering them by that very token dependent on a power external to themselves. If the attribution of certain identity markers (race, sex, and so on) remains in the foreground, this is because such attribution is perceived as constituting a denial of universality and of the right to be just any ordinary individual.[4] Everything is organized this way so that *the* people will be devitalized in contemporary democracy, even as the feeling of citizens that they no longer have any hold on the

course of things prompts them to seek a path toward a more active sovereignty.

Structuring aporia II: the ambiguities of representative democracy

The ambiguities in the way the sovereignty of the people is constituted stem from the fact that the people's power is not exercised directly; in practical terms, it can only take shape when it is mediated and instrumentalized by representative procedures. This observation was fundamental for the American and French founding fathers as they worked to frame a constitution; for them, democracy was defined, with reference to classical antiquity, by the existence of a people capable of serving simultaneously as legislator and judge while gathered together in a public space, a forum. But the seeming self-evidence of this definition has historically concealed a major ambiguity. From one perspective, the representative system has indeed been understood as a simple technical artifice resulting from a purely material constraint (organizing power in a society of large dimensions). This approach would suggest, implicitly, that such a system was only a last resort, a necessary substitute for direct government by citizens, the latter being impossible but also, in the absolute, the ideal political system. From another perspective, though, the institution of representative procedures has also been explicitly linked with a positive view affirming the intrinsic value of such procedures. In this light, representative government has been seen as an original political form defining an unprecedented type of regime, which would thus count as a fourth category in the classical typology distinguishing between monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy. These two perspectives were contradictory, insofar as representative government was understood in the first case as equivalent to democracy, while in the second it constituted, instead, either an improved or a restricted form of democracy. The line between these approaches became blurred as the term "representative democracy" came into use, oscillating between the two ideal types of *elective aristocracy* (introduced by Rousseau, this label was taken up again later in the French context by those who sought to "end the revolution") and *immediate direct democracy*. It is important to spell out the difference.

The view of representative government as an elective aristocracy plays out in four areas:

- *The concept of election*. Election is understood as a mechanism for *selection* (the term appears constantly in the writings of the American and French founding fathers). It is related to a process of classification, triage, and detection of a certain number of qualities. In this sense it comes close to the idea of examination or competition. The parallel was frequently drawn in the nineteenth century, by writers who referred to a "scientific or intellectual election" in characterizing this type of test.
- *The relation between representatives and the represented*. This relation is based on a distinction or difference that constitutes a form of intellectual and moral hierarchy[5] (on both sides of the Atlantic the terms "capacity," "virtue," and "wisdom" were in widespread use). Representatives were thus seen as forming an elite. The term "natural aristocracy" was often used by the American founding fathers; in France, it was anathema in the early years of the Revolution, but it resurfaced with Bonaparte under the guise of "meritocracy."
- *The epistemology of the general interest*. The general interest is brought to light in terms of knowledge. It is not deduced from scattered social demands, but rather constructed on the basis of a global understanding of a given society's situation and its needs at a particular time. In the language of the American federalists, Alexander Hamilton's expression "knowledge of the general interests of society" was used to characterize the representative bond; at the same time, "variables of connection" were highlighted: loyalty, trust, dependency.
- *The nature of representative government*. Of a different nature from democratic government, this form constitutes an original type of political regime, as we have just seen.

Immediate democracy can be contrasted with representative government point by point:

- *The concept of election*. Election is envisioned as reproduction. It entails the idea of mirror representation, as Honoré Mirabeau defined it when he noted that a well-composed assembly should be "for the nation what a scale map is for its physical expanse: whether of a part or of the whole, the copy must always have the same proportions as the original."[6] In this case, we cannot refer to examinations or competitions as models, but rather to the drawing of a random sample. The election-as-selection of eminent persons is opposed, here, to the model of drawing by lot – a model functionally

adapted to produce something unspecified – or to the model of proportional election designed to represent society in its differences.

- *The relation between representatives and the represented*. This relation is constituted by the existence of a similarity, a proximity. "They are always you, the elected ones," Jacques Necker wrote (to stigmatize the defenders of this approach) in his *Réflexions philosophiques sur l'égalité*, they are "you in every detail. Their interests, their will are yours, and no abuse of authority, on the part of these new twins, appears possible to you."[7] In noting that the term "representative" conveyed "the idea of another oneself," the same Necker powerfully underscored the potential strength of that insistence on a relation of similarity. In the United States this same theme was a leitmotif of the anti-federalists Hamilton and James Madison. They too spoke of a substantive representation that ought to be "the veritable image of the people"; the terms "likeness" and "resemblance" come up constantly in their writings.
- *The epistemology of the general interest*. The general interest can be seen to result from experiences shared with ordinary people, from direct engagement with social expectations, from sympathy with the suffering of society.
- *The nature of representative government*. This form of government is conceived as a functional equivalent of the ideal of democracy directly grafted onto the needs and feelings of society.

These two ideal types do not demarcate two camps or two competing ideologies, even if each has had its own most expressive interpreters. They depict rather the two poles of a tension whose effects have been felt everywhere, even if in each case this has been manifested in a specific way. Voters thus aspire to be governed by persons whom they deem capable of carrying out their tasks, but at the same time they want to choose individuals who will express the voters' own expectations and speak their language. This tension is manifested, too, in the difference between the language of electoral campaigns (which highlights the possibilities and stresses the proximity between the candidates and the voters) and the language of governmental action (which reminds the public of the constraints in play).

Structuring aporia III: the avatars of impersonality

A defining feature of democracy is that it puts the general will in charge. If the law expresses this general will, it is because that will

is the product of consent by all. Generality and impersonality are the two complementary features that characterize the law, in its substantive quality, on the one hand, and in the form of power that it exercises, on the other. It can command without being oppressive because it is presumed to be structurally objective, detached from any self-interested aim. The law is the just master par excellence, a force of order that obliges citizens without dominating them: it constrains those who obey it without violating or humiliating them. The democratic rule of law is thus at the opposite pole from personal power: it implies a radical depersonalization at the site of power. After the king's fall, this was the great guiding idea of the French revolutionaries: the installation of a collegial executive power was the central feature of the Constitutions of 1793 and 1795 (the regime set up under the latter was called a "Directorate," with a triumvirate at the head of the executive branch). Let us note, moreover, that one of the decisive motives for the accusations leveled against Maximilien Robespierre was his alleged intention to seize power for himself and make himself king.[8] And we should also recall that the idea of installing a "president of France" was unanimously rejected after the abolition of the monarchy in August 1792.

This depersonalization of power went hand in hand, during those early years, with the devaluing of executive power; the production of laws by an assembly was viewed as the beating heart of a democratic republic. But everything changed at the turn of the century. In the face of the impotence of Parliament and the intellectual disarray of the Directorate period, the effort to solve the French constitutional and political problem led to a quest for a sword. With the Constitution of Year VIII, drafted as a way out of the crisis, the dominant idea was the necessity of concentrating power in the hands of the executive, with a parallel move to revoke the principle of impersonality. As Bonaparte summed it up laconically, "People were tired of assemblies."[9] In formulas that have remained famous, Mme de Staël succeeded in characterizing the shock provoked by Bonaparte's ascension upon his return from Egypt:

> It was the first time since the Revolution that one heard a proper name in everyone's mouth. Until then, people said "the Constitution Assembly has done such-and-such, the People, the Convention"; now, one spoke of nothing but that man who was supposed to put himself in the place of all, and make the human species anonymous, by seizing fame for himself alone, and by preventing every existing being from ever being able to acquire any.[10]

A succinct way of describing the abrupt dismissal of the earlier ideal of impersonality.

Napoleon was the first head of state in the democratic age who claimed legitimacy on two counts: by virtue of consecration at the ballot box, but also by virtue of a certain aptitude for embodiment. He was later said to have been a "shining example of the gift of personification,"[11] capable of "absorbing an entire generation in himself";[12] so much so that an observer of his ascension could exclaim: "You bear our name. Rule in our place."[13] But after Napoleon's fall, the heresy constituted by the idea of personified power came to unite liberals, republicans, socialists, and communists of all stripes in shared reprobation. With Mme de Staël, they vilified "a man elected by the people, who sought to put his gigantic *ego* in the place of the human species."[14] On the left, impersonality had a new face from then on, that of the living people. Revolutionary crowds or electoral majorities: the formulations varied, but the perspective remained the one Michelet captured: "The masses do everything [and] the great names do very little . . . the alleged gods, the giants, the titans . . . mislead as to their size only by hoisting themselves fraudulently onto the shoulders of the good giant, the People."[15] Michelet liked to cite a phrase by Anacharsis Cloots in his *Appel au genre humain*: "France, cured of individuals."[16] Léon Gambetta echoed the expression later on by inviting his contemporaries in the Third Republic to be suspicious of "excessive personalities."

At the turn of the twenty-first century, the increased potency of executive power, with the imperative of putting the responsibility that accompanies it to the test, has reopened the question of the personalization of power in a democracy.[17] At the same time, the crisis of representation has restored strength and meaning to a certain demand for embodiment. Hence the persistent tension with the historical imperative of impersonality.

Structuring aporia IV: defining the regime of equality

Democracy does not simply designate a type of political regime: it also characterizes a form of society. Historically, moreover, the term was initially attached to that second dimension. In France, the word "democracy" was used in the 1820s to designate a society built on the principle of equal rights. At the time, it was the term "republic," not "democracy," that served to designate a regime based on the exercise of universal suffrage and the principle of sovereignty of the

people.[18] When Tocqueville described the America of his day, he thus placed special stress on the fact that he was describing a society of individuals equal in freedom and dignity, a society that went beyond simple equality before the law and constituted a society of fellow humans. From the outset, then, the democratic ideal has entailed the formation of a society of equals as much as the participation of all in the exercise of sovereignty.

If the meaning of sovereignty of the people and the modalities of its exercise have never stopped being controversial, as we have seen, the debate over the scope and forms of democratic equality has been even more bitter. The various conceptions of equality in fact entail much more important material and institutional consequences than the conceptions attached to the modalities of suffrage. Most notably, the welfare state itself is at issue. There can thus be an immense gap between simple equality of rights and equal access to public functions for all, connected as these functions are to a restrictive conception of equal opportunity and a well-developed understanding of what is meant by a society of equals.[19] Reference to one and the same democratic ideal can thus refer to a whole gamut of *regimes of equality* that are symmetrically linked to very different perceptions of allowable inequalities.

Limit forms of democracy: the three families

These varying figures of indeterminacy underlie the political and social history of modernity, structuring democracy as a vast field of explorations and experiments, simultaneously nourishing the fears of some and the impatience of others. This is what explains, moreover, why the very term "democracy" came only very gradually to designate the type of regime to which societies should aspire. It was not part of the vocabulary, for example, of the framers of the French Constitution or of the founding fathers of the American regime: these men spoke of representative government as their ideal. For a long time, the word "democracy" was deemed problematic. Initially, some saw it as having archaic overtones, as appropriate mostly for history books.[20] For conservatives, it evoked more directly the advent of a power grab by people in the streets, a prospect that made them very nervous. In 1848, François Guizot wrote that "chaos is hiding today under a word: democracy."[21] On the other side, references to socialism, communism, or the institution of a republic began to appear frequently starting in the 1840s, in appeals

for the constitution of a world organized for the good of the greatest number. It was in fact only with the advent of suffrage for all that the word "democracy" became universally honored.[22] But it was understood in very different ways. Some meant to limit its scope; they saw universal suffrage as only a concession made in order to channel social violence and serve as a pressure valve for the impatience of the masses.[23] Conversely, others sought to broaden its narrowly procedural scope and open it up to the prospect of achieving a society that would be a community.

In this context, we find a variety of figures meant to grasp democracy in terms that would stabilize the various types of expectations or fears associated with it, that is, in terms that would eliminate its indeterminacy and thereby put an end to debates and interrogations about its achievement. Here we shall have to speak of *limit cases*, extreme forms of democracy that end up problematically exacerbating certain features to the detriment of others, at the risk of seeing democracy turn against itself. Three principal families of democracies can be identified from this standpoint: minimalist, essentialist, and polarized.

From the nineteenth century on, the minimalist vision of democracy has had defenders who, guided by a fear of numbers, limited the democratic ideal to the establishment of a state governed by the rule of law. But this vision did not find its theorists until the twentieth century: Karl Popper and Joseph Schumpeter in particular gave it some coherence by proposing normative definitions of democracy. The philosopher Karl Popper, a proponent of open societies, defended a negative conception of democracy in *The Open Society and its Enemies* (1945). In this work, nourished by a meditation on the origins and meanings of totalitarianism, Popper proposed to replace the old questions raised by Plato and Rousseau about who should govern by a quest for means that would make it possible to avoid violence and oppression during periods of change in government. "Democracy does not mean rule by the people, but rather avoidance of the danger of tyranny," he wrote elsewhere.[24] If "the key point of democracy is the avoidance of dictatorship," it is dangerous to act as though the word "democracy" means "people's rule"; Popper understood the role of elections to be that of a "people's tribunal" and not the direct exercise of a will.[25] Schumpeter went in the same direction in his *Capitalism. Socialism. Democracy*. He too denounced the idea of a "popular will" as dangerous.[26] Applying his vision of economics to politics, he conceived of democracy as a competitive system in which political

entrepreneurs use the exercise of voting to obtain decision-making power.[27] Under these conditions, he insisted, "democracy means only that the people have the opportunity of accepting or rejecting the men who are to rule them."[28] Confined by decree within this boundary, minimal democracy had an undeniable seductive power in a world where visions of the political were in part overdetermined by the specter of communism. Its modesty appeared to be a guarantee of protection.

This minimal or negative understanding of democracy was summed up in Winston Churchill's famous aphorism: "it has been said that democracy is the worst form of Government except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time."[29] In reality, it came to correspond to a world in which Schumpeter's "political entrepreneurs" took on the aspect of eminent figures and parties confiscating sovereignty – or else it was degraded into forms of democratic oligarchy, as happened in the United States, where money became one of the essential resources of political action. Since it does not conceive of the welfare state as a constitutive pillar of democracy, minimal democracy is not concerned with constructing a true community of citizens, and as a result it leaves the door open to the exploration of other limits.

Essentialist democracies, for their part, are based on denunciation of the lies of democratic formalism. This is why they are often characterized as "real democracies." Critical of the individualist and proceduralist visions that emphasize the role of the citizen-voter, essentialist democracies have identified the democratic ideal with the achievement of a communitarian social order. "The establishment of community is the final goal of democracy," according to Étienne Cabet, the first to have set forth this view in his *Credo communiste* (1841).[30] Cabet's communist democracy was defined as a form of society, not as a political regime; it thus displaced and resolved the questions raised by the latter. Accordingly, the distinction between civil society and political society was abolished: in Cabet's view, all work was public work. Society in the singular was a community of life and work, a "unitarian, egalitarian, and fraternal" community that we would now call self-governing. Marx overtook Cabet a few years later, shoring up this perspective with a philosophy of history reassuring humanity that such a society was achievable. He too encouraged abandoning the distinction between individuals and citizens, the goal being that society should signify only itself, according to his celebrated formula.[31] Political democracy as a regime, that is, as a separate system of organization and regulation,

was consequently expected to fade away; social organization was to arise from simple management principles.

Whereas the minimalist definition of democracy attempts to absorb its indeterminacies by a "realist" shrinking of its procedural definition, the essentialist approach entails an effort to achieve a sort of resolution by its own dissolution within a utopian vision of society. This vision rests on the idea that a good social organization, in a world that has shed the reign of merchandise and capitalist exploitation, could eliminate conflicts and divisions. In a society of this type, the people would constitute a united and homogeneous group in which differences would be purely functional. The formation of the general will would not result, then, from the arithmetic of individual preferences and opinions, as expressed at the ballot box. Instead, it would be the very life of a united, coherent community, the polar opposite of the classic liberal vision that conceived of society as a complex interlacing of divergent and equally legitimate positions and interests. The question of representation would thus be settled, as the expression of social life would be totally absorbed in the objectivity of situations. There would be no difference between representation and social knowledge. While this extreme form of democracy may seem far removed from our contemporary universe, it governed hopes with great intensity, as we know, during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

History has shown that this utopia "precipitates" – in the chemical sense of the term – into totalitarianism as soon as people seek to force the hand of real-world resistances in order to achieve it. As Claude Lefort has made emphatically clear, totalitarianism turns democracy against itself when it forbids the expression of social division by invoking the imperative to overcome it. It thus imposes by force the fiction of a people as one body that is presumed to be perfectly incarnated by its leader, allowing the latter, whom Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn called an *egocrat*, to declare with confidence: "I am society."[32] The society-power that was alleged to fulfill the promise of full collective control of its own fate proved in the Soviet case to be the cruelest of powers exercised over a collectivity. This power is even more implacable than extreme despotism, since despotism cannot deny its own externality, whereas the egocrat claims to be simply the voice and the right arm of society itself.

Polarized democracies make up the third family of extreme cases. Populisms fall into this category.[33] These democracies are also defined by a specific mode of resolving different types of democratic indeterminacy: they tend to be absorbed in just one of the dimensions

that constitute them. The imperative of representation is satisfied by the mechanism of identification with the leader; the exercise of sovereignty is achieved through recourse to referendums; the democratic character of an institution is assured by the election of those who take responsibility for it; and the expression of the people takes place through unmediated face-to-face communication with those in power. At the same time, the vision of society is reduced to an elementary dichotomy. There is thus a double mechanism of simplification and radicalization in this populist approach, which leads to generalized polarization of the framework and modalities of democratic activity. I shall develop a detailed critique of this mechanism in part III of this book, and we shall examine the conditions under which this form of populism can devolve toward democratorship.

These dissimilar types of extreme democracies allow us to distinguish three figures of democracy turning back on itself: elective oligarchy, totalitarianism, and democratorship. Identifying these figures helps keep us from conflating them; we want to avoid confusing democratorships with totalitarian regimes, for example. But at the same time the categorization allows us to characterize the powers of attraction that these extreme types can exercise, with the parallelisms that may result. If Gaullism, in France, is clearly not a form of populism, in the sense of the word developed here, we can nevertheless note that it has certain features in common with a polarized version of democracy. When de Gaulle famously said that "in France, the Supreme Court is the people," he was in effect adopting a polarized vision.[34] Closer to our own day, if Emmanuel Macron is even less a populist, he is nevertheless characterized by a certain tendency to want to govern in direct face-to-face interaction with the country, attaching relatively little importance to the intervention of intermediate bodies. Just as we have been able to speak of a "diffuse populism," so a history of this political form of democratic polarization invites us to take into account the gravitational field that constitutes its atmosphere.

— III —

CRITIQUE

INTRODUCTION

To develop a critique of populism, we need to start with the categories identified in the first two parts of this work. For the critique has to be pursued in two different ways: in theoretical terms, in order to address the populist vision, and in historical terms, in order to analyze "populism in action" as it can be grasped on the basis of existing populist regimes and their practices. In the second case, the term "real populism" might apply, by analogy with the once-familiar formula "real socialism," a descriptor used to characterize communist regimes with an emphasis on their deviations from the principles they claimed to espouse. In both of these approaches, the groundwork for the critique has already been laid: the terms in which the histories of three earlier populist moments have been presented contain implicit critiques (this is especially true for the analysis of Caesarism in France); in addition, developing the notion of extreme forms of democracy and analyzing the position of populism in those extreme contexts has helped establish an overall conceptual framework capable of shedding light on the category of populism itself.

The third and final part of the book, organized around two major axes, gives greater cohesion to that framework. We shall start by examining how the workings of democracy are conceived, emphasizing the issue of referendums – because this procedure has too seldom been the object of in-depth studies – and the issue of democratic polarization, with the critique of intermediary bodies that it implies. We shall also look at the type of social analysis that opposes the 1 percent to the 99 percent on the basis of a presupposition that there is such a thing as a people as one body. We shall extend the investigation by looking at the conditions under which a

populist regime becomes a democratorship, focusing especially on the notions of reversibility and irreversibility, where irreversibility marks the tilt of a populist democratorship toward a form of traditional dictatorship.

The critique of an important dimension of populism, national protectionism, will not be a focus here, for want of expertise: I am not well enough versed in that economic field to debate the issues and offer relevant remarks. Still, I am struck by the fact that the "technical" scope of the question appears secondary in relation to its properly political dimension in populist rhetoric. It is actually a commitment to national sovereignty that is at stake here in the first place – for populism is first and foremost a practice of sovereignty. On this legal and political terrain, it is useful to stress the simultaneously idealist and formalist character of the implicit definition of sovereignty contained in the national protectionist vision. From this standpoint, sovereignty is understood as the exercise of an unlimited self-determining will, inscribed in a zero-sum game. (Here the two classic juridical notions of *dominium*, absolute ownership, and *imperium*, higher power, are superimposed.) No international law could be established if all nation-states adopted this purely theoretical definition of sovereignty as a legal status, an indivisible and absolute attribute. Such a definition, for a nation-state, is as idealist as the libertarian definition of liberty for an individual. In both cases, it is essential to think in realistic and instrumental terms, that is, in terms of *effective capacities* for action on the part of a state power or an individual. These capacities are defined, for a nation-state, as the capacity to protect citizens, to organize civil peace, to integrate everyone into the community; for citizens, they are defined in terms of rights, guarantees, and allocations. In this framework, one can, for example, deem that a nation-state within the European Union is or is not more protective of its citizens than an isolated nation-state could be. Here the question of sovereignty can be situated within a positive-sum game. The exchange of arguments can at least be solidly included in such a framework, whereas a metaphysical conception of sovereignty can be located only on the register of beliefs and passions, with impotence as a possible outcome: the tragic example of Brexit is a case in point.

— 1 —

THE ISSUE OF REFERENDUMS

Acclaim for referendums occupies a central place in the rhetoric of contemporary populisms. Referendums are presented as among the most obvious and appropriate ways to restore the magic of democracy and to respond to the widespread acknowledgment that the traditional representative or parliamentary procedures and institutions are losing their luster. The call to establish forms of direct intervention by the people has a long history. While the use of the term "referendum" has been commonplace only since the late nineteenth century,[1] the practice itself had long since been theorized and implemented. We need not go back to the many examples, some quite ancient, of decisions made by assemblies that included members of different types of communities; it was with the American and French Revolutions that recourse to forms of direct democracy was widely discussed and put into practice, first and foremost in the context of ratifying constitutions. The terms "popular ratification," "plebiscite," and "ratification by the general will" were used during the revolutionary period in debates over appropriate ways for the people to exercise its newly acknowledged sovereignty. Since then, whenever there has been an outbreak of anti-parliamentarianism and outraged claims that democracy has been confiscated by elected officials, the issue of referendums has returned to center stage. In the French case, a new Constitution consecrated the legitimacy of the Fifth Republic by noting that the sovereignty of the people "is exercised by its representatives and by way of referendums" (article 3), and the new regime in fact conducted referendums on several occasions.

At the same time, though, referendums have continued to be viewed with suspicion. Attitudes toward them combine a spontaneous recognition of something self-evident with a diffuse sense of

something problematic. Hence the restrictions surrounding them almost everywhere, even today, and the limits placed on their field of application (in the United States, while the use of referendums is solidly entrenched in some thirty states, the practice does not extend to the federal level). This awkward situation can be read in two ways. It can be traced, on the one hand, to a tacit skepticism about universal suffrage itself; on the other hand, it may reflect simple perplexity, given the challenge of defining adequate forms for a more directly active democracy. The problem is that these two understandings are often confusingly blended.

In the first case, we can identify what might be called an "aristocratic" critique of the practice of referendums. It is striking to note that a great many of the negative judgments on the use of referendums rely on linguistic elements and arguments associated with the nineteenth-century adversaries of universal suffrage, whether the latter practice was rejected in principle or deemed premature because the people were not sufficiently well educated. In our day, this attitude unfailingly emerges when referendums are stigmatized as problematic instruments favoring an unchanneled expression of the spontaneous passions and prejudices of the masses. A "weapon of massive frustration," an instrument turned over to "the meteorology of humors and qualms," a vector of "the whims of an instant," a procedure that could have unintended consequences (as at least one prominent French political figure in the 1990s suggested: "Are we not lighting with the wick of a referendum a fire that will be impossible to control?"): referendums, endlessly invoked in such terms by people who feared them, were depicted as procedures that rejected every rational political perspective. Denouncing the risk of referendums was in all such cases simply a euphemistic way of manifesting one's skepticism about democracy – or else of asserting one's advocacy of a minimalist version of democracy as simply the rule of law, accompanied by the possibility of choosing and/or dismissing the leaders of a country.

To see things this way is to forget, first of all, that democracy in its very principle is always at risk of deteriorating into demagogy when the people as a civic body disappears behind its distorting double, a crowd governed by the passions of the moment. Democracy can live only if it confronts this structural risk with lucidity. Doing so implies not succumbing to the temptation of exorcising the risk by denying it or by considering the battle lost in advance. The democratic ideal has never separated the principle of sovereignty of the people from the imperative of shaping lucid and informed citizens. Democracy must be understood as *the regime of the free human condition*, with

all the attendant possibilities and burdens. Demonizing referendums comes down to closing one's eyes to the fact that democracy is always at once the problem and the solution for the organization of a human community. It is more useful to explore the specific difficulties that may stem from the use of the referendum process, in order to determine the conditions for the positive exercise of a more direct and more active sovereignty on the part of the people. The problem is that such an exploration has never been carried out in a systematic way. Hence the usefulness of proposing in these pages a sketch of what a *theory of democracy* that is critical of referendums might look like if it moves beyond the traditional "liberal" grasp of the limits of that procedure. It is only from this perspective that referendums can be discussed in a worthwhile and constructive way. Such an "internal" critique, aiming at a reinforced and renewed democratic ideal, needs to be accompanied by a reflection on alternative paths for developing the democratic functions and mechanisms that are generally attributed to the referendum procedure by its advocates.

If referendums present the advantage of allowing voters to decide a question for themselves, this self-evident positive assertion needs to be modulated and reconsidered through a reckoning with some of its implications, in particular those that have a negative effect from the standpoint of that same project of democratic renewal. To this end, we can distinguish four blind spots concerning the referendum procedure that complicate its integration into a theory of democracy. First, referendums tend to dissolve the notion of political responsibility. Next, they imply a prejudicial confusion between the notion of decision and the notion of will in politics. In the third place, they are accompanied by a downgrading of the deliberative dimension of democracy. Finally, they consecrate the role of the majority, tending to give the majority's decision a dimension of irreversibility. Moreover, from a standpoint that could be depicted as more "technical," expression by way of a referendum has a binary all-or-nothing character, which means it remains silent as to how the choice made is to be translated into norms and practices (a situation exemplified by the all too obvious consequences that followed the British vote on Brexit).

The dissolution of the notion of responsibility

One of the most indisputable characteristics of a democratic power is its responsibility to its citizens, that is, its openness to being called

to account and potentially to being challenged by citizens. The election process can thus alternatively legitimize and sanction: it can choose a person to exercise a specific function and later dismiss that person. More broadly speaking, responsibility rests on the idea of a controlling factor, that is, a *relation* between two poles. One is always responsible in relation to someone else. In a democracy, this relation is defined by the recognition that the governors depend on the governed: the power of the governors is thus limited, in the sense that they act on the orders of the sovereign people. The exercise of responsibility thus presupposes a separation between the two, and a relative autonomy on the part of the governors with respect to the governed. We can see, in such a case, that the principle of representation is not simply a technically necessary delegation of sovereignty (the assembled people cannot be an instance of permanent government), but that it also brings into political life a *dimension of reflexivity*, a dimension that is an essential component of the effective exercise of responsibility. The sovereignty of the people can thus be asserted *in a continuous fashion*, but in an indirect mode. Its direct sovereignty is expressed only intermittently at the moment of an election in order to institute and regulate this specific mode of continuity.

When a people makes a decision for itself, conversely, it cannot turn back against anyone; its decisions cannot be appealed, as there is nothing above it. A people as a civic body is irresponsible by construction, since it is the creative power of a given political order. When the result of a vote does not lead to the expected consequences, the people thus finds itself disarmed. If responsible political authorities disappoint their electors, the latter have the possibility of sanctioning them. But the electors cannot pursue those who have incited them to express themselves in a certain way on the occasion of a referendum. This is what happened in Great Britain after the Brexit vote. The political figures who led the campaign to leave the European Union then left the stage, abandoning voters to the expression of their sovereignty; the voters themselves were responsible for nothing.[2]

Taking this dimension into account does not invalidate the principle of the referendum itself, but it invites us to specify the objects and modalities of the procedure in such a way that it will not be used in cases that would lead to reducing a people to the state of an impotent sovereign – a situation that could undermine faith in democracy and contribute to the advent of an authoritarian regime. This also implies that the privileged dimension of expression by way of a referendum has to be the creation of a political order: in other words,

the adoption of a constitution. At that exceptional moment in the expression of a constitution-making power, the people is in fact a living figure fully realizing its concept.

A detour by way of the French Revolution, in which the notion of constitution-making power played a central role, will make it easier to understand this specific function of referendums and thus to consider the broader issue of referendums in a new light. During the revolutionary period, the referendum procedure appeared to be the most exemplary way for an immediate democracy to function. And it was indeed in terms of immediate democracy that the issue of popular government was envisioned throughout this time: thinking in these terms made it easier to see that "the people" was a reality that made sense and was taking a perceptible shape. The reference to immediate democracy was thus theoretically more central than what might be called direct democracy. If direct democracy rejects delegation, the principle of acting and speaking for others, immediate democracy for its part rejects the interface, that is, the institution or the procedure that contributes functionally to a shaping of collective expression. Direct democracy aims to eliminate, "technically," the mechanisms of substitution that put the representative in the place of the represented, while immediate democracy rejects, in a more "philosophical" fashion, any capacity for reflexivity within the social order (in the sense that it does not consider that the formation and expression of the social order presuppose the intervention of a reflexive position). It was from this stance in favor of immediate democracy that the stigmatization of political parties and intermediate bodies proceeded during the French Revolution: these were accused of structurally corrupting the general will by tending insidiously to distort its spontaneous mode of formation, deemed the only authentic one. Whence the idea, fundamental at the time, that legitimate popular expression is a kind of "moral electricity," an authentic vector of a unanimous affirmation. Radicals and moderates alike adhered, during that period, to a diffuse Rousseauian tendency of this type.

This way of envisioning democracy was inseparable from a structural identification of popular sovereignty with an enterprise of self-institution on the part of the social order; hence the fascination with constitution-making power as the exemplary modality of the democratic ideal. For this ideal alone is an originating and thus radically creative power, the expression of an emerging will, a naked power conditioned by nothing. These are the characteristics that Sieyès stressed in early 1789 to justify the enterprise of creative rupture his

generation had launched. With constitution-making power, he noted, "reality is everything, form is nothing."[3] That power is "the national will . . . that cannot be subjected to any form, to any rule."[4] The power to establish a constitution, as an extraordinary formula puts it, is thus "the secularized version of the divine power to create an order without being subjected to it"[5] (Sieyès distinguished such an extraordinary power from constituted power, which consisted, as he saw it, in the more routine exercise of collective sovereignty by elected representatives). A century later, Carl Schmitt theorized his fascination with constitution-making power in similar terms. For the author of *Political Theology*, constitution-making power was the vital, irreducible manifestation of the existence of a polity.[6] To decide meant first of all, for Schmitt, to decide on its existence, the general will being nothing but the inseparable manifestation of that existence.[7] "The constitution-making power is political *will*, that is, concrete political being": with this summary formula, Schmitt was proposing another vision of an immediate social power.[8]

In the twentieth century, the horizon of such immediacy also subtended the communist perspective of a "state of the people as a whole."[9] Indeed, the claim to have instituted a society power and thus to have "eternalized" the constitutive moment, as it were, has been at the heart of totalitarian rhetoric. Hence the logical justification of a single party as the simple "form" of an objectively homogeneous class, the perfect expression of social generality. There is no longer even the possibility of a distinction, in this case, between direct democracy and representative democracy. A founder of the French Communist Party thus deemed, in surprising terms, that the Soviet regime was "the only known form of *direct representation* of the proletariat as a whole."[10] It is striking, moreover, to note that communist regimes, even while claiming that they have actually constructed an immediate democratic power, have taken great care to present the appearances of an electoral democracy that has arithmetically achieved the ideal of unanimity. The procedures for representation had been improved so much, these regimes have insisted, that there were no longer any substantive differences between direct government and a representative system. Their propaganda has emphasized, for example, the proliferation of meetings involving virtually the entire population. Vote totals higher than 99 percent were simply the logical corroboration of these phenomena, in the end. The qualities of the procedural and substantive dimensions of political life are thus purported to be in perfect alignment, in the realization of an immediate democracy.

Even while rejecting claims of this type, which are destructive of the democratic ideal in the name of its supposed achievement, we still have to recognize the specificity of constitution-making power as the foundational figure of democracy. Foundational and at the same time limiting, with respect to a power that is in essence irresponsible because it is immediate to itself and therefore presents a character that has to remain exceptional. Hence the problem raised by the temptation to banalize this constitution-making power, unless the effort is tied to *management* of both crucial and everyday questions (along the lines of what is accomplished by local referendums that have limited goals).

The difference between decision and will

A referendum is a democratic decision-making procedure, a *votation*, as it is called in Swiss procedural language. This form of direct democracy has long been considered suitable only for exceptional use, for another purely technical reason: the practical impossibility of having frequent recourse to it, given the material constraints and organizational costs implied. From the late 1970s on, this technical obstacle was nevertheless viewed as surmountable thanks to the anticipated progress of information technology; one could envision the possibility of virtually constant consultation of the electorate via the Internet. The term "electronic democracy" was introduced to characterize the likely entry into a new age of direct democracy. What had once been utopian would now be relatively easy to put in place. It would be technologically possible to organize a handful of referendums on a variety of subjects every day; voters would need only to express themselves with a few clicks. Would this be the path of democratic progress? Everyone has the intuitive sense that the answer is no, for the fundamental reason that it would inevitably lead to decisions that would be contradictory and even paralyzing. Moreover, the problem would lie not so much in inconsistencies on the part of the voters as in the very fact of taking political life to be the sum of specific decisions. Politics consists in effect, first and foremost, in constructing policies, that is, in pursuing projects over time, in giving body to orientations endowed with a certain coherence. This is what the notion of *will* means. Will is a construction carried out over the long term, and in this it is distinguished from a decision whose expression and effect are achieved in concert and in the near term.

The representative dimension of democracy is what makes it possible to maintain this requirement of consistency over time. Here again, beyond the technical dimension of delegation, the election of representatives in fact inscribes political action within the duration of a mandate, thus making it possible to carry out policies. This is a second dimension of the function of reflexivity attached to representative government. In many constitutions, a limitation on the type of questions that can be subjected to referendums proceeds from this instinctive (because often untheorized) reckoning. Taxation is the domain in which the need for consistency among the various interventions of public authorities is most obvious, and the questions submitted for referendums indeed often concern taxation.[11] But diplomatic questions structurally inscribed over the long term in the politics of a nation-state may also be raised in referendums, to take only these two emblematic examples.

In a democracy, there is always a structural tension between what is wanted and what is decided, between the short run and the long run, and citizens themselves are torn between impatience and an expectation of stability or of change that will last, torn between the desire to be able to recover control of an elected authority at any time and the demand that "real" policies be implemented. The increasingly frequent gap between the results of a vote that brings political leaders to power and subsequent shifts in the trust placed in them only exacerbates this tension: hence the centrality of debates over the length of mandates and the concomitant multiple proposals for more frequent opportunities for voters to voice their opinions. A referendum is thus viewed as a substitute for a more general function of control over the authorities and as a way of purging distrust in them. But the procedure has the major disadvantage of wiping out the distinction between will and decision in a democracy.

Deliberation relegated to second place

The defining feature of a referendum is that it offers a binary choice. It is a matter of responding yes or no to a question that has been submitted to the voters. This is the case no matter where the question originates – whether formulating it is a privilege reserved to an executive authority (perhaps after formal consultation with Parliament, as is the case in France[12]) or the product of a popular initiative. The campaign associated with a referendum is thus structured by an exchange of arguments between those in favor of accepting the

measure and those in favor of rejecting it. A campaign may turn out to be rich and vibrant in this framework, but it remains restricted by the terms of the choice proposed. This limitation can prove catastrophic if these terms appear increasingly problematic as the public debate proceeds. For unchallengeable binary choices remain limited, apart from acts of constitutional ratification; history is not short on examples. In the case of ratifying a constitution, we might say that, prior to the deliberation that established the pertinent terms of a choice, the democracy in question did not exist. Representative institutions do not have this limitation. They have the ability to link the development of a decision to a possible reformulation of the terms of that decision in the context of debate. This is why it has long been commonplace to speak of Parliaments as *deliberative* assemblies, moreover. When a proposal is introduced, the addition of amendments allows it to be enriched and defined more precisely; the oppositions it arouses can be clarified, the goals being pursued can be confronted with the means that will need to be adopted to reach those goals.[13] Democracy is expressed as much in this process of exchange and confrontation, which can be very lengthy, as it is in the final moment when a text is ultimately adopted or rejected.

In this connection we can speak of a third reflexive dimension of representative institutions, one that is lacking in the practice of referendums. A referendum immediately brings to the fore a confrontation that defines two irreducible, definitively designated camps, whereas parliamentary debates are based on the idea that a common quest for the public good can bring new solutions to light or make room for win-win compromises:[14] the idea is not to accredit consensus a priori but rather to try to clarify the stakes by distinguishing the misunderstandings that may emerge from the underlying divergencies that inevitably remain present. Democracy may imply confrontation, and in fact it does so, structurally, in unequal and divided societies, but it seeks accurate ways to formulate the terms of the confrontation.

It is worth recalling, on this point, that Rousseau incorporated distrust of the deliberative process in his model. He feared that deliberation would disrupt the expression of the general will, the latter being based, as he saw it, on the instinctive ability of citizens to discern the common good. He went so far as to judge, in this light, that the ideal would be for citizens to express their wishes "without having any communication with one another" and to abstain from "stating views, making proposals, dividing and discussing."[15] In contrast to the deliberative vision of a Condorcet, many players in the French Revolution grasped the democratic ideal in these same terms.

The Abbé Claude Fauchet, one of the most influential commentators on Rousseau, and also one of the most virulent opponents of "representative aristocracy," became one of the principal advocates for direct sovereignty on the part of the people. To that end, he proposed that laws be voted on in primary assemblies.[16] But the terms in which he spelled out the conditions of that exercise are surprising, to say the least.

> It must be solely a matter of listening to the law, and then saying yes or no according to one's soul and conscience. It will be said that it is a violation of freedom, in my system, to disallow freedom of debate for the people. But this is much less to violate freedom than it is to ensure it: it is to prevent the district or village magistrate, the parish priest, the accredited rich man from violating it. The people in general will not demand the right to debate it, for the people does not know how to debate. Readers and debaters will read and debate at their leisure, at home, with their family, in their neighbors' homes. But the people taken together has neither the time nor the power to comprehend the subtle and absurd politics of the fine minds of the canton. It has no use for such matters, wants nothing to do with them, has nothing to seek from them. The president of the Assembly will pronounce each article of the law distinctly, and will take votes, yea or nay.[17]

This lengthy citation makes it clear how the virtues of immediate democracy were perceived at the time. In the summer of 1791, when proposals for organizing this sort of popular ratification of laws were multiplying, what was envisioned was more like the staging of a liturgy than the organization of a vote. "No discussion," went the repeated refrain, along with enthusiasm for the idea of *popular acclamation*. Everyone dreamed of a general will that would manifest itself "in a terrible, spontaneous, and unanimous manner."[18] Carl Schmitt took up the same refrain a century and a half later, linking his radical anti-liberalism with the celebration of democracy by acclamation, as opposed to the "debating democracies" that he despised.

Contemporary populisms have made clear their attraction to this conception of immediate democracy. But we might well judge, to the contrary, that democracy's renewal lies in the extension of deliberative practices, for two reasons. First of all, because deliberation has the effect of producing an alert, rational citizenry, while producing resistance to the simplifications that obscure the conditions for instituting a social realm and prevent recognition of the real divisions that constitute that realm. But also because deliberation can allow the vibrant participation of the entire citizenry in public life. We

must also recall that, historically, direct democracy in small groups was initially defined by the principle of meeting in an assembly. This type of democracy was realized in the Athenian *agora*, at town hall meetings in New England, or in the *Landsgemeinde* of Swiss cantons. In this context, the citizen, the one who participates and can make his voice heard, is something more than a voter. In contrast, referendums tend to reduce citizens to voters.

A propensity for the irreversible

When the people expresses itself directly, its voice links the solemnity of a procedure to a certain dimension of irreversibility. While governments can succeed one another according to the fluctuation of electoral majorities and thus pursue contradictory policies, this does not hold true for the results of a referendum. There are two reasons for this. First, because the relatively exceptional use of referendums, in many countries, confers upon the procedure a sort of gravity that other votes lack.[19] But even more because the notion of majority does not have the same meaning in the context of a referendum as the one it has in the context of an ordinary vote. An ordinary election, which aims to select persons, brings into play a whole set of factors involving the evaluation of candidates, factors that can vary from one voter to the next. Recourse to the judgment of the majority as a way of deciding among voters' preferences is in this case the simplest procedural arrangement and the one that is most widely accepted for its arithmetic character: it has the merit of instituting a necessary power that adheres to "the last word." In this framework, the expression of the citizenry can be viewed unproblematically as reversible. The voters' judgment of persons and proposals will vary legitimately in relation to the conduct displayed and the results achieved by those in power, according to the citizens' disappointments and expectations. In this case, then, the notion of majority can be considered structurally variable without any ramifications for the democratic ideal; on the contrary, it is even a given, an essential feature of that ideal. An election of persons in fact implies a *mediation* by way of *judgment*, since the objective evaluation of programs is always inextricably mixed with subjective considerations about persons. Voters whose vote changes direction from one election to another often do not think they are contradicting themselves: in their eyes, it is the situations that have changed, the politicians who have evolved.[20] Electoral majorities fluctuate for that reason, and all

the more so when voters refrain from defining themselves in terms of well-established social identities.[21]

Referendums work differently. In that framework, citizens participate in the expression of the general will; their judgment applies directly to a proposition. Voting in a referendum is not the same as voting in an election. The principle of majority rule is thus not of the order of a *procedural commodity*: it has a *substantive* dimension. In the case of a referendum, the majority *is* the general will, in the guise of a fictional people as one body.[22] To be sure, this feature of democratic fiction also applies to the election of persons as a technique for selection, but in that case it is relativized by the idea of democratic alternation: thus the people can be construed as a superimposition of the faces of successive majorities. The fiction is thus relativized by the fact of that plurality, whereas it is on naked display in the framework of a referendum. Hence the long-held idea that the horizon of unanimity is what ultimately constitutes the only adequate expression of the general will.[23] In the French case, the first uses of referendums during the Revolution gave body to that ambition. And the exceptional character of the procedure was reaffirmed, moreover, with the idea that constitutional revisions could occur only with the arrival of a new generation, a "new people" emerging onto the political stage every twenty years;[24] in this way, the reversibility of the result of a referendum was strictly circumscribed and limited.

These remarks suggest that we should be skeptical of the temptation to consider referendums as simply one mode of democratic expression among others. Making referendums commonplace carries a double risk. First of all, there is the risk of devaluing the procedure by failing to recognize the specific features that distinguish it from other procedures in its register. From another standpoint, there is the risk of seeing the achievement of a majority as an absolute, losing sight of the fact that a majority is simply a limit case of the expression of the general will; as such, its recognition must be linked – we shall come back to this – to the establishment of complementary instruments for developing an approximate formulation of that will. The danger lies both in making the commonplace exceptional and in radicalizing the commonplace in the life of a democracy. Thus we need to acknowledge the distinction between democracy as it is exercised and democracy as an institution; the practice of referendums applies most specifically to the latter. In other words, we need to distinguish between the principle of majority rule as a technique for decision-making and the principle of majority rule as an approximate expression of the general will. In the first case, a straightforward arithmetical

majority seems to impose itself as a simple and efficient instrument to decide among competitors. In the second case, however, we may well think that more stringently defined majorities could be required (a two-thirds majority, for example), in order to translate the general feeling of the population more adequately. The election of a person may legitimately be decided by a one-vote margin, but not the general will. These remarks lead me at the same time to stress that such a reinforcement of the solemnity of a referendum, consecrating its dimension of relative irreversibility, is inseparable from an enriched deliberative process, consecrating the specific importance of this type of vote.[25] And we are also invited to be skeptical about referendums introduced as *substitutes* for actions those in power have failed to take (the vote that led Great Britain to Brexit is a good example): these are referendums that call upon the people when the governing authorities have proved incapable of exercising their responsibility by making a decision. They may also be characterized, for this reason, as *abdication referendums*.

Silence about the normative impact of referendums

A referendum decides between two propositions. But it does not necessarily indicate the conditions under which the option retained will be implemented. That caveat has no importance if the conditions of implementation are spelled out in the question itself. If a vote to abolish the death penalty takes place, for example, in a country that includes execution in its penal arsenal, a negative vote is applied directly.[26] The same thing holds true for consultation on a constitutional text: the yes or no vote closes the debate, for the vote perfectly superimposes the affirmation of a choice and its conditions of application. The vote itself is a decision. But this is not always the case. Sometimes the vote gives no indication whatsoever as to its normative import; the latter must then be "fabricated" by representative institutions and/or governments,[27] a process that may lead to depriving citizens of their votes. There are celebrated examples of this. In 2014, for example, Swiss voters responded "yes" in massive numbers to the question "Do you accept the people's initiative *Against mass immigration*?" (an initiative instigated by Christoph Blocher's Swiss People's Party). But the vote gave no indications as to how the result should be implemented. The Federal Council then took the matter in hand, according to rules set by the Constitution; it was charged with determining the conditions under which foreigners could be admitted

to work in Switzerland (the Council recognized, moreover, that the conditions were constrained by border agreements and the country's relation to the European Union). In France, the 2005 referendum on ratifying the European constitutional project presented the same difficulty: the "no" vote gave no indication of how it should be implemented. (Leave the European Union? Ask for a new negotiation, something that would be clearly unacceptable to the other member states?) The solution was found in a sort of sleight of hand: the elements of the constitutional project were included two years later in what had been accepted at the level of a simple treaty (the Treaty of Lisbon) and ratified in 2008 by the French national Parliament. This solution was broadly and rightly perceived as a bypassing of the popular will. But at the same time, the organization and terms of the referendum had not been well thought out (not to mention the fact that the term "constitution" had been used for a text that did not have the features of a constitution). More recently, in Great Britain, the Brexit vote could be analyzed in the same conceptual framework: the British Parliament proved incapable of giving body to the popular response, because the forms that the principle of Brexit might take left so much room for incompatible interpretations.

In these three cases, the question raised led to giving voters the sense that they had been swindled and dispossessed of their sovereignty. The fault lies first of all with those who formulated the question in terms that indicated no practical alternative. In the Swiss case, the promoter of the referendum had been seeking primarily to bring about a "political coup": the initiative that launched the process was much more an act of propaganda than the equivalent of a positive act of governance. These various referendums could also be said more generally to have had a dissymmetrical character, in the sense that they proposed a choice between a status quo, thus something perfectly graspable, and a vote in favor of rupture that urged in a wholly indeterminate fashion a "policy change" on a given subject. By contrast, a "good" referendum would entail a choice between two options, each of which would have a positive status.

The paradoxical diminishment of democracy by referendums

While it increases the direct intervention of citizens, the use of a referendum leads to reducing and devaluing legislative power. By the same token, it contributes mechanically to reinforcing the role of the executive branch, and to putting in place a paradoxically

hyper-presidential regime. Developed on a certain scale, a referendum thus tends to institute a privileged face-to-face encounter between the people and the prince. With populism, referendums go hand in hand with the idea of representation as embodiment. The sovereign people at the bottom and the people embodied in one leader at the top are mutually reinforcing; the historically attested risk is that the latter will take control of the former on the pretext of protecting it against its enemies. The mainspring of Caesarism as a specific mode of voluntary servitude is expressed in that link. Here we have a perverse form of "democratic" radicalization that demands our attention.

Responding to the democratic expectations that underlie the idea of the referendum

Taking into account these different modalities of democratic non-achievement prompts us to restrict referendums and specify how they should be used. But we are forced at the same time to observe that the preference for referendums found at the heart of populist rhetoric also entails projecting onto referendums a whole set of unsatisfied expectations. In this case, we could speak of the referendum procedure as a *crutch* or a *substitution*.[28] Thus any democratic critique of referendums must take into account the democratic functions that these procedures are expected to perform. Three such functions can be identified: citizen participation in public affairs by way of a ballot initiative; the "refreshing" or reformulation of electoral expression through referendums that result most often in restoring free speech to the people; recourse to a form of direct democracy to remedy what is perceived as a deficit in representation.

We shall return later on to explore alternative solutions to the problem of deficient representation.[29] For now, let us consider the other two dimensions. The question of ballot initiatives is essential. In France, a ballot initiative is often confused with a referendum (as in the proposed RIC, or citizen-initiated referendum). But the two procedures are not the same, and many countries recognize the distinction.[30] While the goal of a referendum is to invite voters to make a choice, a ballot initiative aims to put a question on the agenda. This operation thus proceeds, in a way, from the ongoing work of public opinion as gauged by surveys, social movements, or interactions on social networks that pick up echoes of certain themes spread throughout the population. But such an initiative may also be formalized and institutionalized in such a way that

problems are obligatorily placed on the agenda of assemblies or government agencies at the end of certain procedural steps; the institutions involved are then required to discuss the issues in interactions with the public. The right to introduce initiatives of this type would be a way of extending and modernizing the old right to petition, which once had constitutional status.[31] This would establish a more vibrant and more responsible democracy in which citizen participation would be more active and more habitual; the role of representative institutions and the legitimacy of governing bodies would be correspondingly expanded. The initiative function has the advantage that it can be exercised repeatedly without being exhausted, whereas recourse to referendums, apart from the reservations already mentioned, can only be circumstantial: that practice, repeated too often, risks demobilizing the citizenry. There is more democratic vitality and direct democracy in the practice of ballot initiatives than in the practice of referendums, for in the first case citizens can always remain active without running the destructive risk of finding themselves reduced to impotent sovereignty.

Referendums are expected to restore the people's voice on more frequent occasions than those determined by electoral calendars. Here, too, however, one can argue that referendums are not appropriate instruments for satisfying that expectation. Today, generally speaking, a more continuously functioning democracy is needed to overcome disenchantment with democratic institutions: an *interactive democracy* in which power is actually responsible, manifests its accountability more frequently, and has its actions evaluated by independent agencies. Such a democracy organizes *the people's vision* and remains permanently open; it does not settle for allowing the people periodic occasions to speak out.[32] Public speech becomes atrophied, moreover, when it is reduced to the exercise of the vote. Instead of supposing that mistrust can be purged by the use of referendums, it is possible to act more positively and set up enduring mechanisms designed to produce trust. These alternative procedures would produce more true democracy than is found in what is often simply its grandiloquent caricature.

— 2 —

POLARIZED DEMOCRACY VS. PLURALIZED DEMOCRACY

In denouncing the non-democratic character of independent authorities and constitutional courts as institutions that are not validated by universal suffrage, the populist vision of democracy leads paradoxically to a form of absolutism in which legitimacy is granted solely via the ballot box. This absolutism is paradoxical for two reasons. It can be attributed in part to the decline in the democratic performance of elections, a characteristic that has gradually become more pronounced. But it results above all from the fact that the majority party or coalition that wins at the ballot box cannot be considered an adequate expression of the people as a whole, the people understood in the singular. To assess the scope of this limitation, we must start with the observation that two elements are combined in a democratic vote: a technique for selection (or decision-making) and a principle of justification. The problem is that the customary blending of these elements ends up obscuring the underlying contradiction between them. As a procedure for making a choice, the notion of majority is easy to accept, for everyone can agree that fifty-one is higher than forty-nine. But it is different if we grasp the notion in sociological terms, for in these terms a majority remains a fraction of the people. Yet the justification for attributing power via the ballot box has always been grounded in the idea of formulating a general will, and thus in the idea of a people-figure encompassing society as a whole. It is only for practical reasons – for, in an election, a winner has to be selected in the end – that the pretense has arisen according to which a majority is equivalent to unanimity.[1]

Democratic fiction and the horizon of unanimity

This foundational fiction has never been conceptualized as such by theorists of democracy,[2] for the simple reason that all the "founding fathers," whether they were emblematic figures such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau or revolutionary figures in America or France, took for granted the implicit horizon of a unanimous choice by the citizens. This way of seeing things has a long history. In the ancient world, the achievement of a unified and pacified society already defined the political ideal. *Homonoia*, the goddess of concord, was celebrated in the Greek city-states, and temples to *Concordia* were erected in the Latin world. In these different universes, to participate was first of all to affirm one's membership in a community, to manifest one's belonging. Hence the central role played by popular acclamation in Rome: it expressed the ideal of consensus that was supposed to reign in the city-states and throughout the Empire. Equivalent "rituals of unanimity" were also present in the Gallic and Germanic worlds. Tacitus and Caesar described assemblies of armed men who expressed their approval of a leader's proposal by waving their javelins around boisterously; conversely, the assemblies rejected unwelcome opinions with mutterings. Here again, it was the crowd that consented. It was never a matter of counting voices in these contexts; the popular assembly simply served to test and reaffirm the cohesion of the group.

This political culture of unanimity remained deeply anchored in people's minds. It has been found everywhere: in medieval Italian communes; in Muslim countries with the emphasis on *igma'*, the unanimous accord of the community as the basis for legal statutes; in the Chinese world with the Confucian reference to harmony; in Africa with the culture of palaver, or endless debate. It had a universal dimension. In these diverse societies, the notion of unanimity had no arithmetical meaning, it did not designate something that would result from counting; it essentially designated a *quality of a given society*. Unanimity defined the state of a collectivity; it characterized its constitution, its enduring rootedness. Everywhere, this dimension depicted what might be called the implicit horizon of the earliest perceptions of popular participation in the expression of collective life. Participating in the life of the polity, from the start, never meant taking sides, manifesting an individual opinion, proclaiming one's preferences for a clan or a faction. On the contrary, the civic ideal of inclusion and participation was first affirmed against a vision that we would characterize today as pluralist-individualist. In all these

contexts, the unanimist vision of political consent was nourished by the convergence of a communitarian form of representation of the polity and an absence of procedures designed specifically to measure the support granted to those in power. It was as if the moral imperative of concord and governance of the general interest were permanently superimposed on institutional considerations.[3]

Did the advent of societies of individuals, symbolized by the American and French declarations of the rights of man and of citizens, and the concomitant introduction of modern electoral techniques that accompanied the movement toward universal suffrage, lead to a break with that ancient universe? One might suppose so, a priori, since the formalization and individualization of political expression led mechanically to the adoption of a more arithmetical version of the general will, giving a perceptible consistency to the phenomenon of a majority in terms perfectly legible to all. The ideals of a united community have nevertheless survived the introduction of the personal right to vote.

The very material conditions of the exercise of this right of suffrage attest to the persistence of the ideal of unanimity. In the French case, the outlawing of candidacies (during the revolutionary period) and the practice of voting in assemblies were obstacles to seeing elections as electoral competitions, as confrontations between persons or ideas. Moreover, there were as yet no polling booths to individualize the voting process in a visible way (that system did not become widespread until the early twentieth century). Even after 1848, virtually unanimous election outcomes remained commonplace in French political campaigns; the occurrence of an electoral battle was seen as an illness of the social body. In America, the same situation pertained for a long time on the local level in New England, where the spirit of *townships* remained highly pervasive, with its characteristic egalitarian and communitarian ethos. While respect for the principle of majority rule was proclaimed everywhere, the concern for group unity remained primordial. "True" legitimacy thus always referred to the fact that there had been an agreement of minds expressing a common perception of the social world. British electoral rituals, too, shared the same communitarian spirit until the 1860s, with the second Reform Bill.

The very fact that the technical notion of a majority was only very gradually imposed constitutes an indication of the persistence of the old in the new. One of the principal French dictionaries of the mid-nineteenth century could still note that the word "majority" was "new in politics."[4] The word did not yet have a specifically

arithmetic meaning: it was assimilated to "the general voice," the "assent of the greatest number." It was used primarily in opposition to the previous regime of censitary suffrage (votes weighted differentially according to the voter's tax status in the census). In French, the word was essentially foreign to the political language of the eighteenth century; there is no article titled "majorité" in Diderot and d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie*. While the term "majority" had made a timid appearance in British parliamentary vocabulary in the first half of the century, its equivalent was not yet in wide use in French. In its 1814 edition, the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* still defined "majorité" in the sense of "the age of competence for the full enjoyment of one's rights." A *Dictionnaire démocratique* published in 1848 went so far as to call the term "dangerous and subject to false interpretations."[5] Symmetrically, the notion of minority was also considered problematic; it was felt to be a sort of challenge or anomaly in the democratic universe. It referred either to the persistence of an archaic form, a vestige of the past in the present, or to the expression of a new idea that had not yet been commonly accepted. Minorities were thus not defined as political positions and still less as social facts, but only as "moments" in a dialectics involving the development and spread of ideas. They were construed as structurally fleeting, destined to wither away if they represented retrograde ideas and aspirations ("minorities of the past") or on the contrary to expand to the point of expressing, one day, the sentiment of the society as a whole when it was a matter of new ideas ("minorities of the future").[6] In other words, the notion of minority was in no way envisioned in a perspective of "democratic normality" in which minorities would persist in the political sphere over the long run, corresponding to the phenomenon of a divided society.

New paths for expressing the general will

This vestigial communitarian vision faded away only gradually. In the French case, for example, not until the late 1880s did republicans agree to acknowledge that there could be structural divergences at their core.[7] Various factors helped invalidate the unanimist vision of democracy: the advent of class societies, first of all, with the development of a capitalism that produced a fundamental social fracture.[8] But even beyond that characteristic, which socialism hoped to surpass, thereby restoring coherence to the ideal of a unified society,[9] it was the transformation of societies themselves that led

them to be viewed in a new way. They became culturally more diverse, first of all, with the lessening of the weight of the religions that had long bound men and women together. The advent of a society of more autonomous individuals, more capable of making personal judgments, also led to greater variance in ways of apprehending the present and the future. Even beyond the extreme gaps in income and assets between the best-endowed 1 percent and the rest of the population, situational differences have brought conflicts in values and divergent appreciations of social justice to the surface. Economic mutations have also led to new forms of fragmentation distinct from the earlier divisions. More diversified electoral preferences have resulted from these multiple distinctions, leading to a political volatility that has weakened earlier ways of envisioning the principle of majority rule itself. These developments have resulted everywhere in electoral victories won with very small margins, owing in part to declining levels of participation; at the same time, majority rule has been legitimized de facto. Even as the identification of the nature of a given political power with the conditions that had established it was fading, the bond of trust in the wake of elections was being eroded at an increasingly rapid pace. The part counted for the whole, and the sanctity of the ballot box counted for the duration of the mandate: these two presuppositions on which the legitimacy of political authority had long been based have thus been largely invalidated.

Before examining what might be new paths for the expression of the general will, it is important to note that the principle of majority rule plays a specific role in divided societies: it serves to arbitrate between divergent interests; it allows a definitive choice between opposing interests to be made at a given moment. While recourse to majority rule in this sphere of managing antagonisms is worth noting, it does not invalidate the broader notion of the general interest that underlies the democratic ideal by rooting it in the project of a meaningful common history that must be shaped. The *power of everyone* that democracy seeks to place in the position of authority is not expressed solely in the form of an *enumerated people*, the incompleteness of which is visible in numerical electoral results. It can also take two other forms: first, that of the *power of anyone*, which treats the ordinary individual as fully capable of social representation; then, that of the *power of no one*, which grasps democracy in the negative as the regime in which power cannot be confiscated, "privatized," by any group or individual whatsoever. In this sense, democracy disqualifies the claims and efforts of oligarchies, partisan

structures, or interest groups to appropriate power for themselves; a majority is a hybrid reality representing the extreme form of that expression (one might say that a majority is "the most acceptable of minorities").

The power of anyone

The power of anyone can take two forms. In terms of representation, it means that any individual whatsoever can count as the whole. This power has an eminently representative character owing to its random character (a character that is consecrated when it takes, in the plural, the form of what becomes a sample). Drawing lots is the procedure that institutionalizes this quality, which is based on the idea of equality that implies a capacity for non-differentiation among the citizenry. It is a procedure that accredits what all individuals have in common. In this respect it differs from examinations and competitions (which aim at selecting specific competencies) and from elections (which proceed to a choice according to criteria that are a priori indeterminate, since each voter is free to establish those that will condition his or her choice). This specific aspect of the procedure of drawing lots invites us to give it its full place in democracy, all the more so because the contemporary context has led to an impoverishment of the representative capacity of elected officials.[10] With the drawing of lots, citizens who have an equal chance of being chosen can consider themselves to be of equal importance. Each one (from the subjective standpoint) and anyone at all (from the objective standpoint) can in this case identify himself or herself with the collective "we" and constitute that "we."

The power of anyone at all resides, moreover, in the fact that every individual is recognized as just as important as the others in the community. This recognition extends and completes the *status* of voter: it is as the holder of opposable rights that the individual voter stands as sovereign. The power of these individuals is instituted in the protection of their persons and the guarantee of their rights. Constitutional courts are the guardians of these rights and of the protections they ensure. In this way they share in the expression of the general will by making sure that all citizens are equally important in the polity, with all that that implies in terms of autonomy and capability. It is important to emphasize, moreover, that by ensuring control over the constitutionality of laws that are passed, such courts have the function of representing the general will; constitutions are

in effect the memory of that general will, while at the same time they summarize its organizing principles.

Constitutional courts thus give life to what I earlier called the *people as principle*, a figure that has continued to increase in importance in the new world of singularity that we inhabit. This sociological revolution has led to a transformation in the relations between law and democracy, and thus between the control of constitutionality and the principle of majority rule. It thus becomes more important than it was in the past to highlight the full existence of this people as principle whose visage is being taken on more and more by the perceptible people. This is a task that belongs quite specifically to constitutional courts, because they have the function of reminding the citizenry that the sovereign is not reducible to its majoritarian electoral expression – that it always exceeds that definition. By making the gap tangible, such courts make it necessary to reckon with it, and they lead toward the institution of a permanent confrontation between the various democratic peoples, those of the ballot box and those of principles in particular. Far from being limited to judging and censuring, constitutional courts participate in this way in enriching democracies and ensuring their durability. The people construed as voters is always grasped in the register of immediacy, whereas the people construed as principle persists over the long run. The latter people is naturally identified, owing to that persistence, with the idea of nationhood. Sieyès strongly emphasized that point during the French Revolution. "The true relations of a political constitution," he wrote at the time, "are with the nation, which remains, rather than with a certain generation, which passes; with the needs of human nature, common to all, rather than with individual differences."[11] An abstract figure of sovereignty, the nation becomes perceptible only through the validation and practice of its founding principles. It thus needs an organ to represent it. Constitutional courts also help carry out that task. In functional terms, beyond their attention to the coherent production of norms, they help increase the power of citizens by setting up a "competitive regime for articulating the general will," in Dominique Rousseau's suggestive formula.[12] In America, it was Jefferson who first developed this concept. Whereas Madison, as a good liberal, worried first about the risks of overreach on the part of populist majorities, Jefferson for his part thought that the main problem lay in "the tyranny of legislatures."[13] From this perspective, judicial review can be conflated with a popular power of resistance. In the same vein, Jefferson called for the adoption of a declaration of rights, understanding this as a way of protecting

citizens against possible missteps by the federal government. If the risk of oppression lies first of all in the government, what limits the government is thus a means for reinforcing the power of the citizenry. The rule of law can be understood in this framework as equivalent to a mechanism of direct democracy.[14] In the France of spring 1793, many proposals envisioned the institution of a national jury in these terms. Far from curbing the power of the people, this jury was conceived by some as "a means for protecting the people from the oppression of the legislative body."[15] In this democratic conception of the control of constitutionality, social power is presented in the form of pincers gripping the governing authorities. Social power names these authorities as direct electoral powers, and it then boxes them in by way of constitutional judges. The two means converge to make legislative power better controlled by society. The judges' independence vis-à-vis the power of the legislature thus indirectly makes it possible to render the legislature more dependent on all.

The power of no one

One can characterize an institution in the service of all as impartial, independent of any special interest whatsoever. In a world where lobbies and efforts to privatize public goods are proliferating, this quality of impartiality embodies a dimension of the democratic ideal of a collective power that is deemed essential. Legitimacy by virtue of impartiality is distinct from legitimacy by virtue of election. The latter is based on a type of social generality conceived in an aggregative numerical mode. Impartiality is based rather on a negative generality, constituted by the fact that no one can benefit from an advantage or a privilege. In a divided world in which the project of a generality of the *positive aggregative* type is no longer self-evidently meaningful and the definition of the general interest always remains uncertain, subjected to pressures from multiple groups, the attachment to a form of *negative procedural generality* is strengthened. One becomes more and more attentive to whether society is governed by principles and procedures based on the project of destroying individual advantages and partisan monopolies (this is what also underlies the denunciation of lobbies and of all the interest groups that aim to subject the general interest to private ends). It is this distancing from private interests that most adequately guarantees the pursuit of the general interest in this framework. Independent authorities of oversight and regulation are structurally designed to achieve these objectives. Moreover, it is

in this respect that such authorities display a certain kinship with judicial institutions, even if in functional terms they fulfill much broader tasks (of the executive and normative sort). The history of their development attests to the importance that has been granted to the category of impartiality for the establishment of a government based on the general interest.[16] It became possible to speak of an institution in the service of ordinary citizens.

The democratic project refers in this case to the idea that power must also designate an "empty space." Claude Lefort forged this suggestive expression to emphasize that democracy could not be defined solely as the regime founded on the free consent of its citizens, but that it must simultaneously be understood in terms that precluded its monopolization by anyone at all who might claim to embody the entire community of citizens (which is what totalitarian regimes have done in an exacerbated fashion).[17] If power is indeed the undivided property of a subject called the people or the nation, neither ever manifests itself concretely in its unity, as we have already seen, and there is thus a great risk of seeing "thieves of people-power" seduce the citizenry and claim to be its interpreters and its agents. The expression of the socialization of power in a negative mode constitutes, in this context, a complementary way of exercising sovereignty.

Of institutions that are democratic and not merely liberal

Constitutional courts and independent regulatory institutions have often been described as "liberal," in the sense that they are thought to protect individuals from the risks of tyranny at the hands of the majority. It is true that from this perspective they have a "liberal effect." But they must be considered at the same time as fully democratic institutions, that is, as participating in the implementation of a collective sovereignty. Their distinguishing feature is their *indirect* character, since they help construct the general interest in a functional way. Institutions that have a democratic *status* (those whose authority derives from the electoral process) must thus be distinguished from those that have a democratic *quality*, by virtue of their objectives and their mode of operation.

The problem is that the definition of the constitutive criteria of such a democratic quality is still in its infancy. There is a sort of muted intellectual resistance to thinking in these terms, given the persistent dominance of the narrowly electoral conception of democracy.[18]

This democratic character must first be attached to the mode of nomination of those who make up such institutions, submitting them to various series of tests and verifications (conditions of competence, criteria of independence, submission to public hearings, transparency of all these elements, and framing by the intervention of executive power). The democratic quality of an institution must moreover be assessed in terms of the conditions of its organization (the collegial character of such institutions has a decisive importance). Finally, it must be bound by specific working rules (transparency, publicity of declarations, accountability, assessment, citizen communication, interaction with agencies of civil society that operate in the same field).[19] We can see that a great deal remains to be done to define and organize the democratic quality of this type of institution. It is this endeavor that must be considered, rather than the existing state of such institutions, in order to assess their eventual role in a more advanced democracy.

— 3 —

FROM AN IMAGINARY PEOPLE TO A CONSTRUCTABLE DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY

There are times and places in which the people, in the singular and at full strength, is self-evidently present. On these occasions, it is manifest in the form of a crowd electrified by a common exasperation, as we saw not so long ago in Tahrir Square in Cairo, in Maidan Square in Kiev, and more recently in the streets of Algeria or Hong Kong. These are the peoples of independence and regime change, of resistance to oppression and the conquest of freedoms, figures of a country speaking in unison to demand a new course of events or to banish the specter of a terrible regression. These are the peoples exemplified in the foundational revolutions in Haiti in 1804, or in France in 1789 and 1848. In each of these cases, the people as one body is visible, perceptible, expressing an indisputable expectation; it is the general will made flesh. It is as much the Romantics' people as spiritual resource as it is the historians' people as nation or Victor Hugo's people as insurrection.

But how can a people-event that has imposed itself on city streets and squares with its physical and moral self-evidence be made to last? How can it be constituted in a civic body able to write its own history? The failure of the Arab revolutions in the 2010s obliges us to raise these questions, and to interrogate more generally the difficult passage from negative to positive politics, a passage often experienced as painful. The problem, to put it succinctly, is that in such cases the people-event has failed to engender a real democratic people. This is one of the key problems of modern politics, the source of all its disappointments. It is the source, too, of all the simplifying attempts to obscure the fact. Broached in these terms, the issue is hardly a new one. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, one of the founding fathers of French socialism, was the first to grapple with it directly,

in the aftermath of France's 1848 revolution. In a prophetic text titled "La démocratie,"[1] he asked how the people could manifest its will other than "by flashes of lightning." He was not prepared to settle for the warm incantations of Jules Michelet, even though he admired the latter's capacity to give life to the people that suffered and fought in the great revolutionary eras. Proudhon was obsessed, rather, with establishing the people in a durable way, after the reviled power had fallen and the barricades had achieved their aim. "The people," he observed, "has only a mystical existence. . . . Once the revolution is over, the people is silent."[2] How is it possible to move from a democracy grasped as a religion to a democracy conceived as a form of society and an actual regime? For Proudhon, this was the crucial question of modern politics, given that he was not prepared, either, to confuse the voice of the people with a mechanical count of ballots cast. If the people were to have life and strength, Proudhon held that it had to be recognized in the diversity of its conditions and its expectations; it had to be freed from its confinement to pious images or hollow incantations. This problem remains our own – all the more so in that a new social world has emerged at the dawn of the twenty-first century, while at the same time, under the heading of populism, we find a growing temptation to hold onto a mystical grasp of democracy as a way of envisioning the bond between society and politics.

The gap between the two conceptions of the people was reduced, in a way, within the Marxist perspective. The notion of a working class in effect conflated a prospective vision of the social world and a political theory of revolution. In sociological terms, the working class was described as necessarily constituting the immense majority of the population; social groups such as executives, middle managers, and technicians were viewed as functionally tied to the world of workers owing to their neighboring positions in the relation to production. The working class was construed as a "universal class," to use Marx's own terms. Indeed, socialists and, later, communists gave the word "worker" an extremely broad definition. "By workers," Jean Jaurès noted, for example, "I do not mean only those who work with their muscles, but all those who produce and create, whether they work with their minds or their hands, laborers, engineers, scientists, artists, poets, all the creators of wealth, of beauty, of joy."[3] Even the notion of proletariat was conceived expansively, in references to the "rural proletariat," the "administrative proletariat," and even the "intellectual proletariat." The socialists of the late nineteenth century saw themselves as a party defending "the rights and the interests of all

those who work: factory workers, day workers on farms, land-owning growers, employees, businessmen, schoolteachers, etc."[4] Kautsky and Lenin spoke the same language. What was described as a process of pauperization and proletarianization resulting from the development of capitalism nourished a unifying vision of the social world, while at the same time opposition to the "two hundred families" was taking hold in a perspective of class struggle, absorbing in this way the "populist" opposition of the interwar period between the "small fry" and the "big guys."[5] A significant fact: the *Dictionnaire critique du marxisme*, published in the early 1980s, did not include an entry for *peuple*; instead, it referred readers to the well-developed entries for *classes* and *masses*.

The populist vision reckons with the fact that classes no longer have the structuring role they once had, but it does so in terms that show no concern for analyzing the new social world that is emerging; this vision settles for constructing a people of the 99 percent, with necessarily fuzzy contours, as an actor of emancipation and a new figure of the democratic sovereign. At the same time, the conflict with the 1 percent that constructs this people negatively sketches only an impoverished grasp of the tensions, divisions, and solidarities that must be taken into account in order to constitute an effective political community and a society of equals.

From the imaginary society to the real society

The distinguishing feature of the class society was its division between different worlds, each of which had its own strong internal cohesion. To be sure, being a worker referred to a certain type of work, to a specific mode of hierarchical dependency; but it also referred to a vision of leisure time and of relationships with others, to a whole cultural universe, to shared values.

The notion of class was inseparable from the idea of a certain homogeneity proper to each group. The life of individuals was conflated with that of the collective to which they belonged, as Pierre Bourdieu's analyses in *Distinction* (1979) attested in an archetypical fashion. Such a class society was thus both structured by conflict and characterized by a constructive feeling of belonging that could entail a form of pride. This was a modernized version of the old corporatist society, harmonized with the industrial revolution (and with the advent of capitalism). Consequently, the expectations of emancipation were logically linked to general measures for improving the

condition of wage-earners; trade unions were seen as the effective forces of mobilization and negotiation that would enable progress in that direction.

This universe has been set askew, in a dislocation that is only very partially accounted for by the advent of a society of individuals. There is nothing more deceptive than the vision of a society that is reputed to have become atomized and undermined by the dynamics of self-interest. Behind the globalizing invocation of a suspect individualism, a triple evolution is in fact under way. The first is related to the advent of a new type of capitalism, which can be called the capitalism of innovation. This type is based on exploitation of the specific contribution of each individual (his or her use value for an enterprise). It is the successor to the capitalism of organization, capitalism in the historic sense of the term as analyzed by Marx. This earlier type was based on exploitation of the general force of work, that is, on whatever generality can be found in the work of each individual (work time, qualifications); the direct debit of added value is measured by this standard. The individualization of work thus proceeds not only, in this case, from a strategy of dividing wage-earners; it corresponds to a new mode of value production (and thus of exploitation); from this point on, what must be mobilized more and more is singularity. At the same time, the evolution toward a society in which the intellectual and cultural level of the population has increased considerably has led to stronger individual expectations of recognition and personal development. The terms in which demands for emancipation are formulated thus turn out to be modified. The perspective of an equality inseparable from singularity has taken hold as a positive figure of the social bond, moving away from an individualism that tended to separate. By the same token, new lines of fracture have been drawn in society with these mutations, complicating the earlier understanding of inequalities, which could all be measured on a single scale in terms of gaps in remuneration and patrimony. These new dividing lines raise the question of solidarities in unprecedented terms.

In the 1990s, economists and sociologists spoke of intra-category inequalities as a way of accounting for the fact that inequalities no longer simply divided up the population according to socio-professional categories,[6] first of all because new forms of poverty were appearing in the context of the end of full employment, but also because the variations in pay had become greater between businesses as well as between individuals, and thus calculating average salary figures became less and less relevant. Among the many other factors

that must be taken into account if we are to understand the system of contemporary social divisions, there are four that stand out: the weight of individual situational variables, relative to the variables of social conditions; the effects of the dynamics of selective pairings and separatisms in relation to the occupation of territory (housing, in the first place) or to the use of public services (schools, most notably); differing capacities for planning for the future; and degrees of social invisibility. These factors generate suffering and fractures today that can be perceived as at least as essential as more narrowly statistical ways of grasping inequalities. One cannot conceptualize and represent an actual people without taking these different variables into account.

If membership in socio-professional categories, income levels, and place of residence strongly determine the situation of individuals and consequently suggest that their social *conditions* should be described in sociological terms, the weight of variables in individual *situations* plays an increasingly determining role. This latter notion must be understood in two ways. In the first place, it refers to the structural importance of certain events in individuals' lives, whether these are negative (loss of a job, for example, or divorce) or positive (passing an exam, for example, or receiving a promotion). Events such as these may upend people's lives. To understand how individuals are positioned, then, their trajectories must be followed closely: in other words, it is important to shift from a sociology of categories to a sociology of life courses. In the second place, distinguishing among social conditions and situations requires referring to polarizing specificities: for example, the fact of creating a single-parent family, or going seriously into debt, or being subjected to exceptionally tiring commutes to and from work. Such factors can introduce considerable variations in the weight of unavoidable expenses and can lead to significant differences in standard of living among individuals whose incomes are the same. Elements such as these act as social determinants that stem only in small measure from the traditional category of risk (the classic visions of the social realm were based on the one hand on risk – with correlated procedures of social insurance against risk – and on the other hand on improvements in the variables defining general social conditions, such as salary levels or working conditions).

Another essential factor invites us to differentiate between the people as a mass one can imagine and the reality: the factor that might be called *the new physics of distinctions*. Whereas the sociology of the 1950s and 1960s emphasized that the working world saw itself

in a binary opposition between "them" and "us," between those on top and those on the bottom (see the emblematic work of Richard Hoggart in Great Britain), numerous recent studies have emphasized the "triangular" consciousness of the social world that is present today in lower-income milieus. The difference between the top and the rest was polarized first. It is the distance from the "rich" that is now widely denounced, the rich being perceived as a very limited minority (the 1 percent), whereas the earlier upper/lower gap was experienced more as the pervasive one that marked the distance of commoners from college-educated individuals and "professionals." But the affirmation of a split from what is denounced as the world of those who benefit from public assistance (a world that includes immigrants, the socially disadvantaged, and those who are perceived as "profiting" from the welfare state) now also plays a major role.[7] Parallel to this new "triangular vision," we find, more broadly, a whole set of mechanisms of social separatism and selective pairings that trace a complex web of distinctions to which individuals cling and that count in their perception of the world.[8] These factors turn society into a sort of layered puff pastry, with multiple regimes of identification.

Differences in the ability to project into the future also trace a line of demarcation that is strongly felt in contemporary societies. Some analyses have even suggested that this was one of the most pertinent explanatory variables behind populist votes.[9] The impact of relations to time on the type of relation that individuals entertain with others was brought to light long ago by sociologists such as Georg Simmel, but it has taken on increased importance in the contemporary world. Research has recently emphasized that the feeling of being poor is not linked exclusively to objective factors; it is also attached to pessimism about the future and points more to a situation of social insecurity than to poor integration as measured by objective standards (of a monetary nature, for example).[10]

The feeling of not being recognized, of not mattering, of being "invisible," as it is often expressed today, traces still another essential line of fracture. We need only think of all those individuals who never appear in televised series, in films, novels, or newscasts, the vast set of individuals who scarcely have the right to speak or whose voices remain inaudible, all those nameless men and women. Here, too, statistics demonstrating financial inequality are not the only elements that account for the reality of social fractures in their diversity. All these factors invite us, today more than ever, to consider the people as a shifting and problematic reality, and thus as a subject

to be constructed, rather than as an already fully formed social phenomenon.

The 1 percent

The 1 percent also constitute a heterogeneous world, even more diversified than the 99 percent. The wealthiest 0.9 percent do not live in the same world as the 0.1 percent and even less so than in that of the 0.01 percent. In the French case, in 2015 it took a net annual income of €106,210 ($117,893) per unit of consumption, or €8,859 ($9,833) per month, to enter the club of the 0.9 percent. For the 0.09 percent, the annual income threshold was €259,920 ($288,511) and for the 0.01 percent it was €699,230 ($774,145); the spread within this last segment is greater still in terms of income, and even greater in terms of assets.[11]

It is easy to come up with impressive statistics on the subject. But statistics do not suffice to characterize this little world adequately. The gaps in income and assets that traverse them derive from quite disparate factors. For these incomes and assets are embedded in different economies, which fall into five categories. First, an economy of unearned income, that of inherited fortunes or the returns on capital. Next, an economy of talent, that of the "winner-take-all" situation in which artists or sports figures at the top of their fields are in a position to monopolize a considerable portion of the income in their sector, income that is itself linked to the size of the market concerned (the income of a star football player is indexed on the fees paid to subscription-only television channels by hundreds of millions of fans). Third, an economy of commissions, linked to the capacity available to certain professionals (stockbrokers, for example) to tax the funds that they manage at a high percentage: they make up the universe of the "working rich," some of whose members, heads of major hedge funds, can count on earning billions of dollars a year. Fourth, an economy of profit, which can be that of traditional "management profit" or that of "profit from innovation"; the latter can produce spectacular revenues or added value (the big Silicon Valley companies are emblematic, and, more generally, a number of Internet and social media start-ups). Finally, grafted onto these various economies, we find a whole set of salaried workers who earn higher – even much higher – pay than those with equal qualifications who land in the ordinary sectors of the economy. It is only at the level of upper management or highly qualified engineers that

the trickle-down theory actually applies. For that theory also has a quantitative basis: Internet-based firms, for example, often have a relatively small number of employees in relation to their profits. One striking set of figures illustrates the phenomenon. In 1990, Detroit automobile manufacturers, at the height of their prosperity, employed 1.2 million salaried workers; in 2014, for the same global level of profits, Silicon Valley firms employed nearly a tenth as many workers with thirty times the market capitalization.[12] In that context it has been easy to offer more generous salaries, especially on the higher rungs of the ladder, to attract top talent.

While the world of the 1 percent is quite diversified, it is also characterized by the fact that the various ways wealth is acquired in that world are not judged by society as equivalent. Individuals with inherited wealth, independent incomes, or incomes that appear to derive from self-dealing[13] give rise to spontaneous disapproval, while sports stars or exceptional inventors, whose incomes may be far higher than those in the preceding categories, are often viewed in a positive light. The way the 99 percent look at the 1 percent does not simply reflect something like the antagonism of a societal war; it would appear that the two groups actually have some values in common, as attested by the admiration manifested in lower-income milieus for certain categories of the wealthy. A member of Parliament can thus be reproached for his salary of €5,000 a month (about $5,710 in 2020), while an artist or a football player who earns a hundred or a thousand times as much (much more than most CEOs) will draw far less hostility.

Populist peoples and democratic societies

The reduction of the social divide to an opposition between the mass of the 99 percent and a small group of the 1 percent thus appears caricatural. The opposition does not account for the reality or the complexity of the divisions that traverse society. Moreover, it tends to reduce to a single criterion, that of capital, or income, social distances that are also apprehended as being of a different order, such as the feeling of being forgotten or held in contempt, perceived as worthless or useless to society. Whereas "the caste," "the oligarchy," or "the establishment" are stigmatized in a simple sociology of denunciation, more broadly speaking what should be brought to light, and challenged, are the *situations* and the *practices* of domination, stigmatization, and exploitation. Social disadvantage

and injustice stem from social relations that often have a transversal dimension; they can also be provoked by the application of rules that may have been implicitly validated by the majority.

Thus it is not so much a matter of exalting an imaginary people as of constructing a *democratic society* based on accepted principles of distributive and redistributive justice, grounded in a common vision of what it means to form a society of equals. This also implies moving away from a mystical invocation of "the people" toward a recognition of the populace in its internal tensions and its diversity. Far from seeking the embodiment of a people presumed to be one in the figure of a devoted leader, we need to offer society a mirror of its own reality so that it can act upon itself and constitute itself as a political community.

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THE HORIZON OF DEMOCRATORSHIP: THE ISSUE OF IRREVERSIBILITY

The recently coined term "democratorship," fusing the words "democracy" and "dictatorship," is sometimes defined as "democracy without democrats"; it characterizes a type of profoundly illiberal regime that formally retains the trappings of a democracy.[1] If regimes of this sort are perceived in a static, purely descriptive fashion, however, the notion contributes little to our understanding of specific instances in the contemporary political world. For a long time now, many totalitarian regimes and democratorships have felt the need to be backed up, legitimized, via the ballot box. This was typical of the former communist regimes. If, with Lenin, their leaders mocked naïve belief in the legal conquest of power and "superstitious" faith in Parliaments while asserting that the dictatorship of the proletariat they boasted of embodying was "*a million times* more democratic than any bourgeois democracy,"[2] they nevertheless took great care to organize elections that would allow them to display to the world the triumphalist results with which we are familiar. And we can find examples of dictators all over the world who have been prepared to manipulate votes rather than suspend the process.[3] If the neologism "democratorship" is pertinent today, it is by virtue of its specific relation to two other exemplary developments: on the one hand, the democratic justification of authoritarian practices, and, on the other, the gradual slippage of countries toward authoritarian regimes in the very heart of a preexisting democratic institutional framework. In the latter case, it is a matter of understanding democratorship within a democracy, without any prior operation taking the form of a fracture – without, for example, a *coup d'état*, or a suspension of institutions in response to a state of emergency. This is quite different, then, from the idea of providing

democratic "dressing" for a dictatorial regime, or even from the idea of a "hybrid regime."[4]

For analyzing the conditions under which a regime originating from a populist electoral surge can turn into a democratorship, the Latin American and European examples show that three factors are pertinent: the establishment of a philosophy and a politics of irreversibility; a dynamics of institutional polarization and political radicalization; and an epistemology and a morality of radicalization.

The philosophy and politics of irreversibility

Many populist regimes have viewed their victory at the ballot box as a step beyond mere alternation, one that ought to mark the entrance into a new political era. Terms such as "the dawning era of the people," "refoundation," and "irreversibility" have appeared frequently in these contexts. The word "irreversibility" is the most significant, for it implies a break that institutes a new order. Speaking in France of the establishment of a Sixth Republic via the convening of a Constituent Assembly, Jean-Luc Mélenchon thus noted: "It is not simply a matter of changing the rules of the game but of taking power. The Constituent [Assembly] for the Sixth Republic . . . is a revolution of the political order for the purpose of instituting the power of the people."[5] The old revolutionary ideal is being recycled here, with the objective of irreversibility. Significantly, this ideal has often been invoked in the context of purportedly neoliberal counter-revolutions that had also forged worlds presumed to lack any possible alternative (the famous TINA, "there is no alternative"); only irreversibility, in such cases, is deemed capable of turning the situation around. In this way, the traditional idea of electoral victory can be linked to a break that is revolutionary in nature.[6]

In this perspective, the notion of majority changes in nature. It is no longer simply the expression of circumstantial arithmetic data, and thus reversible because it refers implicitly to the mechanism of alternation, as we have seen. It takes on a stronger substantive dimension by portraying "the people" as triumphant over its enemies, and virtue as winning out over immoral authorities. It is the outcome of a struggle between antagonistic forces, one that combines the vision of an insurmountable social divide with the fight for goodness and truth. Let us recall that populism is inseparable from the advent of societies in which political cleavages are radicalized.

Irreversibility is instituted by populist regimes with the help of two techniques: on the one hand, taking recourse to constituent assemblies that profoundly remodel existing institutions, and, on the other, ensuring the possibility of reelecting the leaders currently in place. Setting up constituent assemblies in the wake of an electoral victory or of steps toward constitutional reform is one of the most characteristic acts of populist regimes. It entails using majority votes to ratify modifications that aim above all to institute a polarized democracy, by reducing or even annihilating the role of independent authorities. Thus constitutional courts are reorganized and populated with judges faithful to the new regime, in the name of the absolute supremacy of the people's power as expressed at the ballot box. Chávez, Correa, Maduro, and Morales followed this path in Latin America, as Kaczyński and Orbán did in Europe. But they have not been the only ones to develop this rationale. Major figures in American populism had already defended the same approach. In the 1930s, Louisiana governor Huey Long exclaimed, on the strength of the votes he had won: "I'm the constitution just now."[7] George Wallace, three times governor of Alabama (1963–7, 1971–9, 1983–7), defended racist ideas and expressed the economic anger of the poor white working class during two presidential campaigns (1968, 1972); in the same spirit, he declared: "There is one thing more powerful than the Constitution. . . . That's the will of the people. What is a Constitution anyway? They're the products of the people, the people are the first source of power, and the people can abolish a Constitution if they want to."[8] Populists on the left and on the right do not differ on this point: for them, the Constitution is the simple momentary expression of a power relation. In other words, it comes down to judging that the sphere of law has no autonomy, and that everything is therefore political.[9]

Changing the conditions for reelecting the head of state is the other major technique for organizing irreversibility in populist regimes; the Latin American cases are particularly exemplary. For a full grasp of the centrality of the issue in South America, we must recall that, in the 1980s, the end of dictatorships in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Paraguay – to mention only the most striking instances of those years – led to alterations in most of those countries' constitutions, incorporating measures that made it impossible for presidents to be reelected immediately. These measures were introduced to banish the specters of the past and consolidate renascent democracies in countries that had experienced every form of authoritarianism and personal power. However, the tendency began to be reversed in the

mid-1990s, in a movement justified at the time by what was seen as a "return to normalcy" on the continent. This argument allowed Fernando Henrique Cardoso, for example, to seek and win a second mandate in Brazil, after securing the necessary modification of the Constitution. The issue was also debated in Colombia and in Peru, where the argument in favor of keeping a government in place over the long term was coupled with a weakening of the function of retrospective judgment that an election was supposed to provide, given the set of advantages available to the incumbent president, along with the paralyzing effect induced in the conduct of an election.[10] The way the issue of reelection was understood changed in nature with the populist regimes of the early twenty-first century:[11] the question was broadened from that of immediate reelection to include the more radical prospect of a potentially unlimited possibility for reelection, and new arguments were mobilized to justify that radicalization.

In Venezuela, Hugo Chávez, the figurehead of this new populist cycle, managed at the very beginning of his mandate in 1999 to have the presidential term extended from five years to six, and reelection to a consecutive term became a possibility. In 2009, the limit on consecutive reelections was removed, so reelections could continue indefinitely. Chávez thus remained in power for fourteen years; only illness prevented him from pursuing a fourth term (which would have brought him to 2019). Nicolás Maduro, elected in 2013, currently holds a mandate lasting until 2025. A parallel process was followed in Bolivia. Elected in 2005, Evo Morales succeeded during his first mandate in getting legislation passed that permitted the possibility of reelection for a one-time consecutive term, but he simultaneously got the Constitutional Court – whose members were among his loyalists – to decree that mandates already served would not be taken into account; this allowed him to remain in office until 2020. While he lost a 2016 referendum that would have authorized him to run for a fourth term after that date, in 2017 the Constitutional Court made a contrary ruling, judging that setting constitutional barriers to reelection to public office would amount to undermining the "political rights" of the people. In Ecuador, Rafael Correa similarly put through legislation allowing consecutive reelection to a second term, and then got the National Assembly (which was in the hands of his majority party) to approve a constitutional reform authorizing indefinite reelection for all positions subject to the popular vote, including the presidency.[12]

The possibility of unlimited reelection was adopted in another large stronghold of Latin American populism, Nicaragua. This,

then, has been one of the key avenues for implementing a dimension of irreversibility in populist regimes, facilitated in most cases by manipulations of the electoral process. The major role played by the constitutional courts of the countries involved must also be emphasized. By falling into step, they helped consolidate the shift toward irreversibility, even making it possible in some cases to thwart unfavorable electoral results, thus instituting law as a purely political instrument. The Bolivian example is especially clarifying in this regard. During his first mandate, Evo Morales began to put pressure on the country's Constitutional Court by relentlessly bullying its members (reducing the salaries of its judges, for example), or by putting physical pressure on the institution (in 2007, pro-government miners dynamited the seat of one of its provincial outposts to try to force the hand of judges by threatening them). The new Constitution of 2009 then overcame the obstacle by determining that it was necessary to "democratize" all the high courts by having their members chosen through universal suffrage – with the selection of candidates to be handled by Parliament, in which the presidential party held the majority.

The Latin American examples are emblematic of the process of gradual slippage from democracies toward democratorships. On other continents, Putin's Russia or Erdoğan's Turkey could be analyzed from the same standpoint, without being confused with the slide into traditional dictatorships that has recently been seen, for example, in Egypt, where in spring 2019 Field Marshal al-Sisi, already exercising a purely dictatorial power, was able to reinforce his iron grip on the country by obtaining the right to remain in office until 2030. Nor could the cases of democratorship in question be confused with the many instances in Africa in which heads of state have remained in power with the help of almost totally manipulated elections.

The arrangements for reelection just evoked put in place a sort of slippery slope leading to democratorship. It is worth emphasizing that these arrangements have routinely been supported from a vantage point intended to appear democratic. The preeminence granted to the "will of the people" has thus been foregrounded by the partisans of unlimited reelection. "Prohibiting reelection is not democratic," as we read in one of the first works devoted to the question in Latin America; it should be up to the citizen to decide.[13] As we have seen, this was also the argument used by the Constitutional Court in Bolivia. Ernesto Laclau himself, the intellectual reference for all the left-wing populist governments on the South American continent,

insisted forcefully that "a real democracy in Latin America must be based on indefinite reelection."[14] Here what is problematic is the identification of democracy with elections alone; this reduces "the people" to its arithmetic expression at a given moment while at the same time depleting the legal system. This is what I have called elsewhere the dynamics of polarization proper to populism.

Polarization and politicization of institutions

As we have already seen, polarization is one of the hallmarks of a populist regime. It is characteristic of such regimes that they move vigorously toward polarization, although this may occur in quite different ways. Thus we can distinguish between processes of *direct assaults* on institutions and strategies of *gradual devitalization*. Latin American populisms and the Hungarian regime offer illustrations of these two variants. In each case, the domestication of constitutional courts comes to the fore as the key element of a shift intended to suppress the various safeguards that had been in place to constrain the power of the executive branch. Hugo Chávez's Venezuela is a good example of direct assault on institutions (Evo Morales's Bolivia is the other archetypical case in Latin America). As soon as he rose to power in 1999, Chávez succeeded in getting a Constituent Assembly elected – in an unconstitutional way, since the existing Constitution contained no provision for such an institution. This Assembly, violating a ruling by the Supreme Court, awarded itself the power to dissolve all extant institutions and to set up new ones. Feeling threatened in its very existence, the Court decided to "commit suicide to avoid being assassinated," according to its president, who resigned in protest against this power grab. The Court was in fact abolished and replaced by a Supreme Tribunal of Justice; the government increased the number of its members in order to include its loyalists and to ensure that the institution would no longer be an obstacle to its actions.[15] In Hungary, Viktor Orbán used a less direct method. While he too undertook constitutional reform in 2012, he did it according to the rules. But he reduced certain of the Court's essential attributes: for example, he forbade it to refer to its own jurisprudence during the years following the fall of communism. At the same time, he introduced a whole set of public policy elements into the text – elements that usually have no place in a constitution – so as to hamper the actions of a future government that might not be in the hands of his party.[16] The Polish regime, too, in the hands of the Law

and Justice Party, took similar steps to free itself from the controls of constitutional jurisprudence.

A parallel politicization of the state has characterized the recent populist regimes. Recalcitrant public employees have been ousted in various ways and replaced by loyalists. The politicization of functions and the polarization of institutions have thus been combined so that all power would be in the hands of an executive branch that also had legislative power under its control.[17] In this case, we can speak of a veritable privatization of the state, in which the very notion of public service is emptied of all substance – not to mention the related development of forms of clientelism that have had dramatic consequences for some state-owned enterprises (for example the Venezuelan oil company PDVSA). In countries where these developments have occurred, we have seen the emergence of a new capitalist class in thrall to power, left free to enrich itself in exchange for absolute political servility (the Russian case is the most exemplary here, but the phenomenon is widespread).

Beyond this polarization of the state, populist regimes have also organized their control over the media in a variety of ways. They have acted, for example, to reduce the advertising income of the opposition press by forbidding public enterprises to place notices there and putting pressure on private companies to do likewise. (The newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza*, the chief media organ of the opposition in Poland, has examined measures of this sort in detail.) Since financial difficulties can result from such restrictions, business milieus close to power have often bought back shares, knowing that their "investment" would be rewarded by the granting of various advantages. In addition, the opposition press may find itself deprived of information, unable to access a whole set of sources. Without there being any censorship in the legal sense of the term, media in the service of power end up colonizing the public space and exerting decisive influence on public opinion. To stay with the Hungarian case, 78 percent of the total sales figures of the media in 2019 were generated by companies controlled by or close to Fidesz (Orbán's party).[18] The transformations of public and political life produced by the advent of populist regimes need not be measured solely by the yardstick of these various arrangements, however. They are also manifested in the gradual disappearance of the implicit rules governing public and political life, those bound up with the "spirit of institutions," known more specifically as "constitutional norms," or, more broadly, as stemming from "democratic civility."[19] They are accompanied, moreover, by a powerful tendency toward intensified

partisan polarization, along with a hardening of social oppositions in general.

In the United States, Donald Trump's presidency offers an exemplary illustration of this double evolution, even though the country's institutions have formally remained unchanged.[20] His language, woven of outbursts, insults, and personal attacks, is striking not just for its vulgarity (which his supporters appreciate); above all, it stirs up partisan divisions in an unprecedented, systematic way, reiterating that the country is divided between good and bad Americans, between the "real" country and an America that takes on all the guises of what Trump deems profoundly contemptible. While he is certainly not a reader of Carl Schmitt, he behaves instinctively as though the country were divided between humans and subhumans, friends and enemies, supporters and opponents cast as constituting antithetical worlds, and he hammers away endlessly at this message. The very notions of tolerance, political community, and democratic civility are rejected and swept away. At the same time, Trump has a purely utilitarian view of institutions. His way of firing public figures such as the head of the FBI and his approach to filling government positions also make it clear that he has freed himself from all the standard rules of political behavior. He remains within the framework of the law, but he pushes political life to extremes.[21] And the fact is that on this level he has had a formidable ability to energize his base while silencing hostile voices within the Republican world, with all the consequences that have ensued in the processes of hearings and confirmations of candidates for key public offices. If America were to topple one day, it would be the result not of a coup, but rather of the country's acquiescence to repeated attacks against democratic norms. *It Can't Happen Here*: by giving this title to one of his novels in 1935, Sinclair Lewis sought to sound the alarm about the democratic fragility of his country at the moment when Hitler was rising to power.[22] These days, books raising the specter of the consequences that would follow the reelection of Donald Trump to a second mandate are beginning to proliferate. They need to be taken seriously.

Epistemology and morality of generalized politicization

For populist leaders, it is not simply a matter of defending their opinions or their projects. They present themselves as zealous servants of truth besieged by the lies of their opponents. This displacement of the terrain of confrontation with their adversaries

leads them to put on stage a universe dominated by hidden powers that manipulate public opinion; the facts thus fade away behind intentions and suspicions. This vision structures the language and the arguments of populist movements; their rise to power is tied to their ability to persuade the public that a shadow government, a "deep state," in Trump's terms, is deceiving citizens and hiding disturbing realities from them (immigration issues lend themselves especially well to this exercise). Conflicts of interest are thus embedded in what is described as the truly decisive struggle, the one between truth and falsehood, which establishes a dividing line in public opinion. Facts and arguments thus tend to be blotted out behind something like a belief that organizes judgments, making any rational exchange difficult. This is the mode in which the polarization of confrontations is gradually radicalized in the age of populism.

When a populist leader assumes power, what began as an electoral strategy can become state policy. In a characteristic move, Viktor Orbán thus set up an institute called "Veritas" that was charged with "reinforcing Hungarian identity" by establishing an official "truth" about the troubled history of the country (especially between the two world wars). In a fuzzier but even more spectacular fashion, Donald Trump has made the utterance of falsehoods a standard element of his political pronouncements. *The Washington Post* thus determined with precision that during the first year of his mandate, Trump proffered more than 2,000 lies or deceptive assertions.[23] By introducing more and more confusion about the nature of the problems facing a country, such practices poison and severely impair political debate. Associated with a purportedly salutary hatred of the media, these lies contribute to a real "cognitive corruption" of the democratic debate. There is in fact no democratic life possible in the absence of a common language and the presumption that opposing arguments can be based on a shareable description of the facts. Populist movements and regimes prosper wherever one finds this worrying tendency of contemporary societies to dissolve the distinction between facts and opinions under the banner of a generalized and extreme politicization.[24]

Populist regimes also radicalize the perception of political opponents, casting them as immoral and corrupt, in the pay of foreign interests. In this way they oppose the "authentic" and "virtuous" people with whom they identify themselves to an adversary-enemy rejected as outsiders, foreign to the national community. The legitimacy they claim is exclusionary, in both political and moral terms. Above and beyond the facts, here again, populist regimes cloak themselves in the

claim to embody the good in order to justify their actions and their lack of respect for the rule of law, dissolving in that very process what constitutes the essence of democracy as a type of open and pluralistic community.

CONCLUSION: THE SPIRIT OF AN ALTERNATIVE

If the populist critique of the world in its present state echoes the disarray, anger, and impatience of a growing number of the planet's inhabitants, the projects and propositions this critique conveys appear at once reductive, problematic, and even threatening. My goal in writing the current book was to investigate the history and status of today's populism. But readers of these pages would be frustrated to find themselves left with an insistent question: what could be the alternative? For readers are well aware that clinging to a defense of the existing order cannot produce a satisfactory response to the questions and demands that are feeding contemporary populism. To approach the question of an alternative, I shall stay within my own area of expertise – which happens to be located at the heart of the problem. The books and articles I have devoted to the history and theory of democracy up to now contribute some elements toward an answer. And through ongoing projects I expect to expand the conceptualization and elucidation of new paths that may be helpful for rethinking the question and even for reestablishing both citizen activity and democratic institutions on a new foundation. I shall not attempt to synthesize here what I have already set forth (in texts mentioned in scattered notes in the present book), nor can I flesh out in detail what I have in mind for publications to come. The more modest purpose of these concluding remarks is to identify some general principles around which it should be possible to structure an effort at democratic refoundation that could constitute a strong alternative to populism.

The guiding principle would run counter to all three of the extreme types of democracies identified here (minimalist, essentialist, and polarized), all of which simplify and radicalize the democratic

project by ignoring the fact that the failure to achieve democracy is tied to its inherent internal contradictions. In the end, if these contradictions are not taken into account, they mutilate democracy and empty it of any substance (although to incomparably different degrees). The aim must lie at the opposite extreme: the goal must be to enlarge democracy in order to give it body, to multiply its modes of expression, its procedures, and its institutions. The truth of democracy does not lie in the supposed perfection of any one of its modes, but rather in the recognition of the fact that one can approach democracy only by superimposing all its approximations, adding together all the separately imperfect modes that can be envisioned to give it form. Democracy is the derivative of all its possibilities, as one might say by analogy with the language of mathematics.[1] Understood this way, democracy cannot be construed as a fixed model that can be adequately grasped in normative terms. It is by nature experimental. It can thus be characterized as the horizon traced by ongoing exploration and institutionalization, always subject to reevaluation of the various components of its attempts at self-definition. This proposition, which may be hard to visualize when formulated in abstract terms, can be illustrated by starting from the principle of representation, a component of the democratic idea universally recognized as essential – as attested by the charges of "poor representation" that are being brought everywhere. Historically, this is the first function that has been privileged: election has been the procedure used to designate the spokesperson for a group, the individual who will take a seat in an assembly to speak in the group's name. But the need for this assembly to reflect the image of the country involved has also made itself felt – hence the development of parties expressing the interests of specific groups (the world of workers, most notably, with socialist and then communist parties). Hence, too, the demand for representation of minorities, and the establishment of guarantees for that representation through the adoption of proportional elections: here again, elections are the privileged instrument. The problem is that this dual democratic function of the election process has had decreasing returns. There are many reasons for this. The notion of a program for governance, inseparable from the notion of a mandate, has lost its self-evidence in a more uncertain world; trust in elected officials has declined at the same time, owing to the way such officials are increasingly hemmed in by their tasks and correspondingly less representative; the advent of a society that is no longer divided into clearly identifiable classes – and in which the specificity of life experiences has

become as important as the impact of social conditions – has made representation of that society more difficult. So what is to be done? It would be illusory and dangerous to believe that invoking a leader embodying the people, or a people's party, could suffice to solve the problem. We cannot conclude from this analysis that there are no possible margins for maneuver that could improve the democratic performance of the election process. The adoption of the principle of gender parity, for example, has made significant contributions in countries where it has been adopted. But at the same time it would be risky to expect that implementing new electoral procedures would be enough to fulfill the two functions of representation, whether this would mean adopting the principle of removing elected officials from office under certain conditions, limiting the length of terms and establishing term limits, or reforming the way electoral campaign expenses are financed so as to regulate the role of money in politics (even if such procedures have undeniable functional utility and deserve to be implemented for that reason alone).

The most appropriate way to resolve the crisis of representation is to multiply the ways it is depicted and carried out, beyond the indispensable but limited role of elections themselves. This can be done in various ways. First, by reinforcing, via intermittent constructions, the bond between the represented and their representatives, through what might be called *interactive democracy*, putting in place standing arrangements for consulting, sharing information, and settling differences that may arise between them. Second, by giving full scope to the figurative sense of the term "representation": bringing the realities experienced by citizens to the fore on the public stage. "Democracy" does not mean simply sovereignty of the people, public deliberation, the designation of elected officials. It also means paying attention to everyone; it means explicitly taking all social conditions and situations into account. This implies developing a *narrative representation* alongside the classic representation as delegation. To be unrepresented is to be in effect invisible; it means not seeing one's own problems acknowledged and discussed. In this sense representation has a cognitive and expressive dimension.[2] This way of looking at representation is necessary, moreover, in the constitution of a democratic society. Such a society presupposes that individuals are in a sound relationship of mutual acquaintance. A society with a deficit in information oscillates mechanically between passivity and fear. It tends to be dominated by resentment, which combines anger and impotence and thus cannot conceive of acting constructively on itself in concrete terms. It must constantly simplify reality, reduce it

to caricatures, in the hope of making it malleable. Society then ends up erecting scapegoats as the sole causes of all ills; it can no longer grasp itself except in the form of an indistinct bloc prey to radically foreign evil forces. When individuals are strangers to one another, social life is diminished, made abstract, and the mechanisms of withdrawal and ghettoization proliferate, allowing the phantom of the people as one body to dominate minds – and by the same token to limit the acceptance of taxes and the implementation of mechanisms for redistribution.

A third way of making sure that people feel they are represented depends on the observation that every single individual counts for something in society: everyone can have a say, directly. This is the principle behind the procedure of drawing lots, evoked earlier. Drawing lots is one of the perceptible forms that the power of anyone at all can take, and that is why a place must be made for it, a place yet to be determined, alongside elections: it might mean constituting citizens' councils, for example, or setting up procedures for challenging the existing authorities.

The sovereignty of the people can be grasped, similarly, by being understood in a more complex way, broadened beyond its narrowly electoral formulation. In the foregoing pages we have already explored the notions of the "power of no one" and the "power of anyone at all" as complementary modalities for the expression of the general will. But the *eye of the people* might also be given an increased role. Democracies have historically given the people a *voice*, by inviting them to the ballot box, first of all, but also by recognizing the role of petitions and political demonstrations. The eye of the people could play an increased role in the future, broadening the scope of citizen action. Moreover, from the beginning of the French Revolution, the people's eye was omnipresent, on printed placards or in newspapers, even as the term "surveillance" was being imposed to define a specific modality of the exercise of popular sovereignty. "Friends of liberty, may eternal surveillance shelter us from the dangers we would face if our fate were wholly entrusted to our ministers," one could read in a famous newspaper of the period. Vigilance on the part of the people was understood to be necessary for bringing to life the ideal of a government guided by concern for the general will. Surveillance – today we would call it oversight – was viewed as a means for limiting governmental disfunction and as a remedy for what I have called "democratic entropy," defined as a process of degradation in the relation between voters and elected officials, between the governed and their governors.[3]

Multiplying democratic procedures and institutions also implies not settling for a democracy of authorization – in other words, not simply using elections to deliver a license to govern. The conditions under which power is exercised must also obey democratic criteria. If political life is organized around institutions that define a type of regime, political life too is then a form of government action: responsible for everyday management of public life, it is an agency of decision and command. It is the place where power – what is called executive power, in constitutional terms – is exercised. This is the power with which citizens have to interact on an immediate and daily basis. The center of gravity of the democratic imperative is by the same token imperceptibly displaced when the executive sphere increases in power: beyond the determination of a close link between representatives and those they represent, the relation between governors and those they govern must also play a role in democracy when it is viewed as the quality of a practice. For citizens, a deficit in democracy signifies that they are not being heard, not being included in the decision-making process; it signifies that ministers are not assuming their responsibilities, that leaders are telling lies with impunity; it signifies that corruption reigns, that there is a political class living in a bubble and failing to account adequately for its actions, that the administrative function remains opaque. Hence the notion of *democracy as an exercise*, a notion that now needs to be fleshed out.[4]

Democracy as an exercise could be envisioned along two paths. First, there is the exercise of formulating the principles that are to preside over the relations between governors and the governed. Three of these principles can be considered essential: legibility (a broader and more active notion than transparency); responsibility (with everything the word implies in terms of fiscal accountability and policy assessment, beyond the act of resigning); and responsiveness. These principles trace the contours of a *democracy of appropriation*; their implementation allows citizens to take on democratic functions that have long been monopolized by parliamentary power alone. They also give full meaning to the fact that power is not a thing but a relation, and that the characteristics of this relation are what define the difference between a situation of domination and a simple functional distinction within which a form of citizen appropriation of power can be developed. Second, there is the exercise of determining what personal qualities are required to be a "good governor." These qualities need to be understood not in order to draw up an idealized archetypical portrait, but rather in order to consider in a

more operational sense the qualities that are needed to establish a *democracy of trust*, a bond of trust between the governed and the governors – trust being one of the "invisible institutions" whose vitality has taken on a decisive importance in the age of personalized democracies. Two others come to mind at once: *integrity*, and *candor* (the *parrhesia*, or "free speech," of whose importance in ancient Greece Michel Foucault reminded us). These principles of good government must not be applied solely to executive power in its various manifestations; they should also preside over all the unelected institutions – independent authorities – that have a regulatory function, judicial authorities of all types, and ultimately all public employees. In one way or another, all these persons and institutions play a commanding role with respect to others, and thus participate in the organs of government.

Describing the advent of the democratic world he was witnessing, Tocqueville noted that "the notion of government has been simplified: numbers alone determine laws and rights. All politics is reduced to a question of arithmetic."[5] Today, we should say just the opposite. From this point on, democratic progress implies making democracy more complex, multiplying its forms. This does not mean sketching out a model democracy; rather, it indicates work to be done on a continuing basis, principles to bring to life in new ways. We must keep in mind that democracy is above all the regime that never stops questioning itself. It is at the price of this effort and lucidity that the populist project can lose its appeal. It is at the price of such continued vigilance that authentically democratic emotions can emerge, referring to ideals of solidarity and benevolence that will constitute a fulcrum for the effort to assemble a generalized and augmented democracy.

ANNEX: HISTORY OF THE WORD "POPULISM"

Russian populism

Narodnichestvo, populism; *Narodnik*, populist. These terms, derived from *narod* (people), made their appearance in Russian political language during the 1870s.[1] A "Populist-Revolutionary Group" was created in 1876, and some intellectuals defined themselves a few years later as "populist-socialists." At the time, these labels did not correspond to any clearly established theoretical definition. But they did fall within a vision of socialism and a conception of political action that were highly original in relation to the theoretical underpinnings that defined the European socialisms of the day, and also in relation to what would later become the Leninist conception of socialism.

Russian populism first took root through an identification of the peasant world with an image of the ideal Russia: a peasant people was construed as the expression and guardian of the Russian soul (at a time when the peasantry constituted 90 percent of the population). First associated with a religious version of orthodoxy, this messianic vision also had an autonomous cultural dimension. The abolition of serfdom in 1861 gave greater coherence to this way of grasping a source-people: a people who embodied the identity and truth of the nation owing to its ties to the land; a fertile people, as well, mirroring the seeds with which it nourished the soil; a giant people, finally, measuring up to Russia's vast landscapes. Thus populism was inscribed in the Slavophile tradition, but in an active manner that was in no way backward-looking: this people also played a redemptive role. Its designated function was to oversee the birth of an authentic and therefore new society.

Second, this populism was identified with a rejection of the rationalism that was dominant in the West: the intelligentsia (the term is of Russian origin), lacking the moral legitimacy to claim to be the people's guide, was to be schooled by the peasantry. Russian populism was thus at a vast remove from the conception associated with the Enlightenment philosophers whom Russian autocrats, from Catherine II to Nicholas II, had celebrated while envisioning the construction of a rational state designed to govern the masses. Alexander Herzen, the tutelary figure of the movement, had developed its philosophy and invented its language even before the term "populism" arose; he launched the intellectual and moral slogan "going to the people" in the early 1860s in his journal *Kolokol* (*The Bell*).[2] When the Czarist authorities closed the universities to stifle student protest at the outset, one of Herzen's friends called for the development of a "free science" to be worked out through fraternization between young intellectuals and the people. It was essential to "go down to the people," according to a watchword coming from more than one direction. These invitations were heard, and journeys characterized as "apostolic" proliferated for several years.[3] The movement culminated in the summer of 1874 with a big "march toward the people" involving several thousand poorly dressed young people who spread throughout the countryside seeking to meet peasants. Many settled in villages as doctors, elementary school teachers, or even farmers, blacksmiths, or butchers. They hoped to learn from the villagers how the masses envisioned a better society.

In this undertaking, one can see a desire on the part of young people from the privileged classes to pay their debt to the people and to experience simple happiness. Some were commoners, but there were also many from the ranks of the aristocracy who had been marked by the ideas of the French Revolution. Eager to break with their privileged past, they aspired to live fraternally with the peasants; they were known as "noble penitents."[4] In his memoirs, Kropotkin, who had been a young prince in his state at the time, retraced the movement of these young men who had broken with their fathers and sought simply to go to the people and become one with them.[5] When a friend asked him why he was leaving for the countryside, one student imbued with revolutionary literature responded characteristically: "We speak so much of the people, but we do not know them. I want to live the life of the people, and suffer for them."[6]

These moral and sociological elements expressed the populist ideal of the time. Vera Zasulitch, also from a noble family, became a major

figure in Marxism and in the Russian revolutionary movement; she spoke in a more critical spirit of the role that the "invisible peasant" played in the inner world of a young generation that dreamed of being "children of the people."[7] In this context we find what might be called a populism from above.

This populism was ultimately tied to a specific conception of socialism that attributed the central role to the peasantry. "The future of Russia lies with the *moujik*, just as the regeneration of France lies with the worker," Herzen prophesied in a letter to Jules Michelet at the time of the 1848 revolution.[8] And the Russian populist understanding of socialism was distinctive in yet another way. In Europe, salvation was expected from the proletariat, whose increase in numbers was indexed to the development of capitalism. The Russian populists, for their part, thought Russia could follow a different path, one leading directly from the feudal type of serfdom that still prevailed in the mid-nineteenth century to the communism of the future, without passing through the stage of an industrial revolution and a bourgeois regime. Here again, Herzen set the tone. In his letter to Michelet, he exclaimed: "What a blessing it is for Russia that the rural commune has never been broken up, that private ownership has never replaced the property of the commune."[9] He even went so far as to introduce the expression "moujik communism."

Populists celebrated the agrarian community (*obscina*) and village assemblies (*mir*) that the first-generation Slavophiles had already foregrounded in carrying out their return to Russia after they had been disappointed by the West. Just as the Americans had had a Tocqueville to interpret their democratic world in depth, the Russians relied on the work of a Prussian traveler, August von Haxthausen,[10] to give full scope to their perception of the *obscina* and the *mir* as the basis for the history and the hoped-for future of Russian. We need not dwell here on the presumably mythological depiction of rural life; what matters is that the idealized picture counted enough for Marx that he responded at length in 1881 to the questions raised by Vera Zasulitch and several of her friends about the development of Russia and the future of its peasantry.[11] These questions were being raised not only in populist circles but by all the Russian revolutionaries. The author of *Capital* stressed that his theory was "restricted . . . '*to the countries of Western Europe*'" and that, concerning Russia, his studies had persuaded him that the rural community constituted "the fulcrum for social regeneration."[12] On the condition, he added, that its development be freed from the constraints weighing on it.

Lenin adopted a radically opposite position in his 1899 study, *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*.[13] But it was much earlier and for more directly political reasons that the "populist movement," with all that it carried in its wake, had spread into Russia. It initially was swamped by the shock of the failure of its efforts to "go down to the people." Indeed, the students and repentant *boyars* (aristocrats) were often met with suspicion or even rejection in the rural areas they visited in the 1870s; many were atheists, which was also alarming to the locals. The idealized people were a disappointment; in some cases, they even denounced the outsiders to the police and had them arrested. Long before Brecht came along to suggest changing one's ideals in such cases, the populists had dispersed, or turned themselves into guides for an urban people deemed more open to change. Those who had proposed to rejoin the people aspired to become its masters once again, in a new way; they saw themselves as the avant-garde. The feeling that it was henceforth necessary to prioritize action to arouse the people and embark on direct attacks on the individuals and structures that embodied the absolutist state became widespread in the late 1870s. The emphasis was now on the offensive merits of terrorist action, which mobilized militant energies and led to striking actions; the spectacular assassination of Alexander II in March 1881 marked a decisive turning point in the struggle against a state accused of being an obstacle to an authentic encounter with the people. The Russian revolutionaries did not change their orientation until after the 1905 Revolution, when they broke into two camps, Mensheviks and Bolsheviks.

Russian populism, reduced in the strict sense to the movement directed toward the rural population in the 1870s, had only a brief existence, in the end. But the sense of authenticity it conveyed, the rejection of all forms of hypocrisy that it implied, the critique of the state and the preeminence granted to individuals and to the communities in which they were immersed, were moral, psychological, and political features that profoundly marked what became the anarchist doctrine. Its two great figures, Mikhail Bakunin and Peter Kropotkin, were Russians who belonged to the populist generation: they shared its enthusiasms and impatience along with the imperative of radicality and the attachment to a flesh-and-blood people constituted in communities capable of autonomy – at a vast remove, then, from the twentieth- and twenty-first-century populisms based on identification with the figure of a leader.

American populism in the 1890s

The members and sympathizers of the People's Party, founded in 1892 in Omaha, Nebraska, called themselves populists. But unlike what had transpired in Russia twenty years earlier, this was a case of populism from below, expressing the concerns and demands of a whole milieu consisting principally of small farmers, who felt threatened. The People's Party was the outcome of a movement begun some ten years earlier with the formation of several Farmers' Alliances. Everything had started with the new conditions created in the Midwest and the Great Plains areas by the spread of railroads after the Civil War. Hundreds of thousands of people flowed into the new territories, which were opening up to economic activity; many of the newcomers took on heavy debt so they could buy land and equipment and start a new life in states such as Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas, the Dakotas, or Minnesota. We should also recall that the same period saw the beginning of the great wave of immigration that brought millions of potential workers to American soil. The exceptionally heavy rains and then the droughts that afflicted the region during the 1880s brought an end to many hopes. The mode of agricultural production of the southeastern part of the country had undergone a similar upheaval owing to the dismantling of the great slaveholding estates. This era saw a proliferation of small property owners who rented out their lands; the region continued to be dominated by the monoculture of cotton. Free workers, both black and white, settled in, but they remained totally dependent on their bosses, to whom they were bound by a whole system of credits indexed to the anticipated harvests. Agricultural prices were falling, adding to the difficulties in both of these vast regions of the country, each with its own distinctive social characteristics.

This, then, was the context in which a potential agrarian revolt began to stir and the Farmers' Alliances were created. In the North and the South alike, these groups strove to set up cooperatives, to fight off the power of the banks, and to loosen the grip of the monopolistic agricultural supply business (the term "plutocrats" was forged during this struggle). The cost of railroad transport – railroads being indispensable for getting the harvests to the sites of transformation and consumption – also became an essential stake. This led to a connection with one of the historical entities in the American labor movement, the Knights of Labor, which organized the first major strike of railroad workers in 1886. Political candidates emerging

from this multipronged movement won local offices in the 1890 elections; the feeling was that the two major parties, Democratic and Republican, were too far removed from the concerns on the ground. An idea that had never before been envisioned on a broad scale in American history began to take shape among these leaders, that of creating a third party. Thus the People's Party, which its own members often called "The Populist Party," held its first national convention on the symbolic date of July 4, 1892.[14]

In the fall 1892 presidential election campaign, the party presented General James Weaver from Iowa as its candidate; he won a million votes, or 8 percent of the national total. It was an unprecedented success, even if his votes came essentially from the territories in which the third-party movement originated – hence the expression "prairie populism," which quickly came into common usage. The success was confirmed in the local elections that followed, in 1894. The populists won six seats in the Senate, seven in the House of Representatives, and one governorship (in Nebraska), collecting a total of 1.5 million votes. They had great hopes for the presidential election of 1896, with the prospect of seeing American democracy moving ahead on a new path.[15] But the party leaders did not want to settle for a new advance at the ballot box; they wanted to win. To that end, they made an alliance with the Democratic candidate James Bryan, who had declared that he shared their concerns and was ready to support their demands. This was a choice to support the expected winner, for the Democrats had won the presidency without exception since the beginning of the Reconstruction period following the Civil War. It was a disastrous decision. While the populist votes went largely to James Bryan in the rural zones west of the Mississippi (despite the reservations expressed by many party leaders about the strategy adopted), there was a reversal of historic dimensions in the industrial zones and in New England, despite the predominance of Democratic voters in those regions. This brought the Republicans back to power with William McKinley. The populist momentum ground to a halt, and the People's Party was not on the ballot for the 1900 presidential election. The American populist moment had lasted only about ten years.

The factors behind the surge of populism are not difficult to grasp. They were economic in origin, to begin with, although they played out differently in the North and in the South, given the divergent economic conditions in those regions. In both cases, the prospects for building new lives had collapsed: in the South, the promise of emancipation had been betrayed by the return of masters in other

forms, while in the North, the project of settlement had succumbed under the weight of adverse climate conditions, the pressures exerted by the banks, and a downturn in the markets. In all cases, there were the powerful to blame, implacable mechanisms to denounce, blind modernization to stigmatize. This was a clash between "little" people and prominent figures, between "the people" and the monopolies – the railroads, the big banks, the unyielding owner class. Disenchantment with democracy also played a major role in the emergence of the movement. It was a time when corruption prevailed in politics, when the big institutions had turned inward and the two parties had become clientelist machines farther and farther removed from the everyday life of the voters, while the latter felt that they had been robbed of their democratic sovereignty.

The People's Party program sought to respond to both sets of problems.[16] In the political sphere, the party proposed to limit the president and vice president to a single term; it also proposed to reform the way senators were elected, and to introduce a system of referendums and popular initiatives. These themes were emerging more or less everywhere in the territory, moreover, well beyond populist circles. But the populists placed the greatest emphasis on economic and financial issues. They called in particular for nationalization of the railroads, which were at the heart of their concerns;[17] they also sought to have the postal, telegraph, and telephone services considered public agencies managed by the federal government. Their most essential proposal, however, addressed a monetary issue. The idea was to combat the effects, thought to be deleterious, of indexing the dollar on the basis of gold, and to introduce a coinage based on silver, a metal available in much larger quantities – a coinage that every citizen would have the right to produce. This was the demand that had the most popular support, and the one with which populism was most widely identified in public opinion. The "free silver movement" was all the rage. From today's perspective, this may be hard to understand; a brief explanation may be helpful.

To grasp the essence of this demand, we must first resituate it in the social and economic context of the emerging Farmers' Alliances and the People's Party: that of small farmers over their heads in debt, at the mercy of the banks and, in the South, of the big landowners. Moreover, in the 1880s and early 1890s, a deflationist policy imposed by the federal government had led to a significant increase in the value of the dollar.[18] The gold-standard dollar was, by the same token, viewed as both the symbol and the cause of all the misfortunes afflicting the farmers: lowered property values, declining

prices of their agricultural products, and increased pressure from the banks, along with the indifference of the political system and the federal government to their difficulties. Denunciations of the banks, the established parties, and all forms of domination and exploitation had converged in people's minds, resulting in the attribution of all their woes to the monetary system. Free silver was seen – in inseparably economic and political terms – as the key instrument of emancipation, while gold was correspondingly demonized. It was under popular pressure that free silver was viewed as a real panacea; this was an idea that had truly come from below, one that had not been advanced by party leaders or cooperatives.[19] The proposal to introduce "free money" in this form had offered a simple outlet for generalized criticism of the monopolies and for the idea of a "direct economy" in harmony with the spirit of autonomy on which the American experience was based.

The collapse of the People's Party after 1896 was linked in part to the fact that the watchword "free silver" had brutally lost its luster after the 1896 electoral rout. The balloon had burst; the miracle solution had faded away like a mirage. The improvement of the economic situation after 1896 also played a role. But if populism ended up as merely a short parenthesis in US history, it was also for structural reasons. First, populism failed to be "nationalized": it remained the expression of a regional movement and a specific population.[20] Some historians have compared the movement to a "frontier" situation;[21] it seems more appropriate, however, to stress the relative isolation of the sectors in which the populist vote was concentrated. A comparison between the counties in Texas in which the populist vote predominated and those in which Democrats came out ahead has shed clear light on this factor. It was not so much the level of prosperity as the homogeneity of the populations and their peripheral locations that made the difference.[22] The counties with a strong populist leaning included a smaller proportion of foreigners than found elsewhere; the spirit of neighborliness and mutual aid was strong among people who had the feeling that they were living "on the sidelines." By the same token, they were less exposed to adverse ideas, more locked into their own convictions. In sociological terms, the populist movement did not succeed in spreading to other social categories. Despite certain connections with the Knights of Labor, the populists did not manage to win over large numbers of working-class voters, nor did they draw many urban votes.

The spectacular drop in the populist vote in 1896 can also be explained by a shift in the spirit that had animated populism in other

forms, along the lines of certain embryonic socialist movements in the North. This slippage took place in a murkier way in the South, most notably in the adherence to segregationist theses and practices of a whole segment of the populist electorate. Hatred of the plutocrats gave way in this case to rejection of the world of Blacks, a development that had immediate effects, for poor Whites found in the affirmation of white supremacy a way of getting revenge for their situation as objects of domination.[23]

At the turn of the century, it was especially what was known as the Progressive Movement, as we have seen, that successfully recycled some of the political proposals that had been formulated by the populists (although in many cases the ideas did not originate with them).

These contradictory legacies underline the fact that the American populism of the 1890s was the symptom of something amiss, an expression of anger; however, the movement failed to define the terms of a new political culture or offer a coherent vision of economics or society. It was an authentic movement from below, but it did not articulate a conception or a project that could have established it as a lasting phenomenon. Even if the term "populism" is, in the American case, less inappropriate than it was for the Russians who sought to "go to the people," it still cannot be viewed as the first manifestation of what appears to be flourishing in our day.

Populism in literature

The term *populisme* made its way into the French language via literature. The period between the two world wars was rife with manifestos of all sorts. The one launching the surrealist movement caused a sensation in 1924. A little later, in the summer of 1929, a "Manifesto of the Populist Novel" was published in a left-wing periodical.[24] Its author, Léon Lemonnier, had published several books that had been favorably reviewed but had not sold very well. His works were in the lineage of the naturalism illustrated in the nineteenth century by Émile Zola, Joris-Karl Huysmans, and Guy de Maupassant, with references to the picaresque novel. Lemonnier invited readers to rediscover and explore these legacies in depth at a time when literature had, as he saw it, retreated into introspection, worldliness, or exoticism as a way of exorcising the painful memories of the Great War.

The term "populism" had in fact been created twenty years earlier, by an obscure inspector general of the university system who had

called for "a regeneration of literature by the people" and simultaneously for "a possible elevation of the people through literature."[25] Lemonnier belonged to the milieu of popular education under the Third Republic, a period when leaders typically sought to link social issues to moral issues and thus to educational and cultural actions. Lemonnier deplored the fact that the culture of his day, in his view, had "not yet made democracy," and he appealed for a literature that would belong "to the manifestations of the *Genius of populism*"[26] – a literature that should both "go to the people" and "come from the people." The word "populism," which this writer claimed was "widely used in America," was thereby launched. But, spoken and written by someone who addressed himself only to militant audiences in his region, the term did not receive any attention. The first occurrence of a term is not always the one that ensures its irruption into the language; the first use that is recognized and has an impact is the one that counts, as numerous examples attest. Thus the 1929 "Manifesto of the Populist Novel" must be taken as the starting point, for it stirred up a good deal of commentary and debate.

The author of the manifesto developed his proposals further and responded to his detractors in the spring of 1931 with a book titled *Populisme*.[27] Railing against "novelists from the elegant circles" (he also mentioned "pretentious literature" addressed to "snobs"), against what he saw as the tendency of a certain literature to "present only chic personalities and perverse idle figures," and against narratives bogged down in the triteness of bourgeois society, Lemonnier – quickly associated in this project with André Thérive – called for starting a "populist school." For him, the term referred first of all to a rejection. "We have chosen the word 'populist' because it seemed to express the most violent antithesis to what is most repugnant to us: snobbism," he wrote. "Like the people themselves, we are horrified by any posturing."[28] But Lemonnier and his cohort had no militant ambitions. There was no question of going toward the people in the manner of the nineteenth-century Russian intellectuals, or even of writing for the people. The goal was purely literary: "We have called ourselves populists because we believe that the people offer a very rich and essentially new novelistic subject matter."[29] There was sympathy in their enterprise. They reproached the naturalists for having too often viewed the people as a bestial herd prey to its instincts and appetites. What they wanted was to "paint [the people] differently, by showing not only its qualities but also the picturesque harshness of their lives."[30] "We want to go to the ordinary people, the mediocre people who are the mass of society," the manifesto said,

and, summing it up: "The populist novel is the people plus style." In this case we might speak of *an object-oriented populism*.

What were the works they deemed exemplary in this undertaking? They cited Marcel Pagnol, thanks to whom "populism had triumphed in films" in 1931 with *Marius*, then *Fanny* in 1932, and *César* in 1936. The novels of Louis Guilloux were mentioned as well; these took off in 1927 with *La maison du peuple*,[31] and made an even deeper impression on readers with *Le sang noir* in 1935. The works of Lucien Descaves also came up, and those of Jules Romains. The creation of a Prize for the Populist Novel in 1931 distinguished a whole series of authors in this vein.[32] Eugene Dabit was the first recipient, for *L'Hôtel du Nord*, a book that met with great public success and was brought to the screen by Marcel Carné, with Arletty and Louis Jouvet. Subsequent winners included Jean-Paul Sartre for *Le Mur*, Louis Guilloux for *Le pain des rêves*, and René Fallet for *Banlieue sud-est*. The prize has been awarded without interruption since its inception, and names such as Gérard Mordillat, Didier Daeninckx, Sylvie Caster, and Daniel Picouly appear on the list of winners.

The idea was not at all to advocate politically engaged writing; in other words, the manifesto was by no means a call for the development of a left-wing literature. "Novels are made to give concrete images of life; they are not made to answer all the questions that life raises," Lemonnier noted.[33] He considered that "those who [had] most poisoned the novel [were] the essayists."[34] Hence the lukewarm reception of his movement in left-wing and far-left spheres. In fact, in reaction to Lemonnier's call for apoliticism, a group of "proletarian writers" was formed, determined for their part to serve the cause with their pens and to distinguish themselves from the populists by virtue of their social origins as well.[35] But they were not interested in the same people, either. The "populists" were thinking primarily of the people on the bottom, the silent, anonymous masses, those who would be characterized today as invisible, whereas the "proletarians" were interested in the condition of those who were also fighters and militants aspiring to change the world; they wanted to feature positive heroes, to highlight the capacity for manual labor and workers' pride. The latter group was led by Henri Poulaille, a tireless promoter of a literature written by people who had remained in their condition as workers or peasants.[36] To this editor and creator of journals we owe, most notably, *Le pain quotidien* (1931) and *Les damnés de la terre* (1935). It was from this perspective that writers close to anarchist circles or the Communist Party came together

under the banner of what would later be called "the proletarian school." The opposition between the two tendencies helped to dim the light of literary populism until its very existence faded from memory.

NOTES

Introduction

1 I should emphasize that the same thing happened earlier to the word "democracy," especially in the United States. At the turn of the nineteenth century, it was an insult to be called a "democrat" in that country. The term was equivalent to "demagogue," and "democracy" at that time meant "mob rule" or "reign of the passions of the populace," in the words of the founding fathers and their descendants. It was a provocative move when the Republicans of the day (Jefferson's party) renamed their organization "Democratic Party" in the late 1820s. On this point, see Bertlinde Laniel's documented history, *Le mot "democracy" et son histoire aux États-Unis de 1780 à 1856* (Saint-Étienne: Publications de l'Université de Saint-Étienne, 1995).

2 Interview in *L'Express*, September 16, 2010. Mélenchon had said the same thing in his book *Qu'ils s'en aillent tous! Vite, la révolution citoyenne* (Paris: Flammarion, 2010): "The fine folk, the satisfied folk, their story-tellers and all the sermonizers who take the high ground can choke on their indignation. Let them brandish their pathetic red cards: 'Populism!' 'Out of control!' Bring it on!" (pp. 11–12).

3 I myself have taken that reductive approach in the past, by considering populism as a caricature of the counter-democratic principle; see my *Counter-Democracy: Politics in an Age of Distrust*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [2006] 2008).

4 Dossier "Les 36 familles du populisme," *Éléments*, no. 177 (April–May 2019): https://www.revue-elements.com/produit/familles-du-populisme-2/.

5 Nevertheless, we must salute the effort of conceptualization made by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, on the left. These authors have no counterparts on the right.

6 This ungainly term, translating the French *démocrature*, appears to have been adopted in English in recent years to label a democracy that has features in common with a dictatorship, or a dictatorship that purports to be a democracy. –*Translator's note*.

7 In *La démocratie inachevée: Histoire de la souveraineté du peuple en France* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000).

8 In an interview in the *Financial Times*, June 27, 2019: https://www.ft.com/content/878d2344-98f0-11e9-9573-ee5cbb98ed36.
9 See the programmatic speech he delivered at Băile Tuşnad in Romania, 24 July 2017: https://visegradpost.com/en/2017/07/24/full-speech-of-v-orban-will-europe-belong-to-europeans/.
10 Moreover, this regime had restored universal suffrage, which the republicans in charge had eviscerated in 1849.
11 This is where the weakness lies in approaches that treat the problem as a "pathology" of democracies. They imply that the existing democracies constitute successful embodiments of the democratic project, a referential norm from which populisms would constitute deviations. This is to neglect the structural character of democratic indeterminacy and the fact that democracy is consequently an unstable regime that is constantly exploring its own aporias. I myself used that terminology in the earliest writings I devoted to the question: see "Penser le populisme," *Le Monde*, July 22, 2011.

I Anatomy

1 A Conception of "The People"

1 On this point, see the developments in my 2018 seminar at the Collège de France, "Les années 1968–2018: Une histoire intellectuelle et politique (suite et fin)": https://www.college-de-france.fr/site/pierre-rosanvallon/course-2017-2018.htm.
2 I address this issue in my book *Le peuple introuvable: Histoire de la représentation démocratique en France* (Paris: Gallimard, 1998).
3 Chantal Mouffe, *For a Left Populism* (London: Verso, 2018), pp. 5–6.
4 Ernesto Laclau, "Logiques de la construction politique et identités populaires," in Jean-Louis Laville and José Luis Coraggio, eds., *Les gauches du XXIe siècle: Un dialogue Nord–Sud* (Lormont: Le Bord de l'eau, 2016), p. 151. This essay consists in excerpts from Laclau's *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso, 2005) and offers a good summary of that volume.
5 Laclau, "Logiques de la construction politique et identités populaires," pp. 152ff.
6 See Benoist's article "Ernesto Laclau: Le seul et vrai théoricien du populisme de gauche," *Eléments*, no. 160 (May–June 2016): https://www.breizh-info.com/2016/05/15/43439/sortie-magazine-elements-n160-suis-guerre/.
7 See Mélenchon's dialogue with Marcel Gauchet in Marcel Gauchet and Jean-Luc Mélenchon, "Robespierre, le retour?" *Philosophie Magazine*, no. 124 (October 2018): https://www.philomag.com/archives/124-novembre-2018 (Gauchet had just published *Robespierre, l'homme qui nous divise le plus* [Paris: Gallimard, 2018].) See also Jean-Luc Mélenchon and Cécile Amar, *De la vertu* (Paris: Éditions de l'Observatoire, 2017).
8 The defense of the dignity of one's identity can be expressed, for example, through a rejection of religions deemed "foreign" (as Islam is rejected in today's France).
9 *Construire un peuple* is the title given by Chantal Mouffe to a book written in French in collaboration with Íñigo Errejón, the leader of Podemos in

Spain. It has been published in English as *Podemos: In the Name of the People*, trans. Sirio Canós Donnay (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2016).

10 Hence the minimal attention paid to unions by populist movements.

2 A Theory of Democracy

1 Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso, 2000), p. 5.

2 Jean-Marie Le Pen, "Pour une vraie révolution française," *National Hebdo*, September 26, 1985. Le Pen was marking his difference from the Maurrassian counter-revolutionary extreme right that jeered at the idea of democracy. His article also marked a turning point with respect to his own previous skepticism about "Churchillian democracy": see his earlier manifesto, *Les Français d'abord* (Paris: Carrère-Lafon, 1984).

3 Le Pen, "Pour une vraie révolution française."

4 See chapter 4, "Rendre le pouvoir au peuple," in the programmatic text *Le grand changement*, with a preface by Jean-Marie Le Pen: Marcos-Antonio Cantolla-Iradi, *Le grand changement: Et si on essayait le Front national?* (Saint-Cloud: Front National, 1997).

5 See for example Yvan Blot, *Les racines de la liberté* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1985), chapter 8, "Le modèle Suisse," and chapter 9, "Le recours: La démocratie authentique"; and Yvan Blot, *La démocratie directe: Une chance pour la France* (Paris: Economica, 2012).

6 Speech delivered February 26, 2017, at the Zénith, a large concert venue in Nantes; see https://www.leparisien.fr/elections/presidentielle/presidentielle-meeting-de-marine-le-pen-sous-tension-a-nantes-26-02-2017-6713349.php. At the time, Marine Le Pen was the target of several judicial investigations into the operations of her party, the Front National, focusing on the fact that individuals working for her within the party had been remunerated by the European Parliament.

7 See the emblematic article by Alain de Benoist, "Vers une juridictature," *Éléments*, no. 178 (May–June 2019). In the same issue, see also the dossier titled "Les juges contre la démocratie: Pour en finir avec la dictature du droit": https://www.breizh-info.com/2019/05/16/119033/les-juges-contre-la-democratie-elements-n-178/.

8 On this point, see my discussion in "The Election of Judges: Some Historical Facts," in *Democratic Legitimacy: Impartiality, Reflexivity, Proximity*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, [2008] 2011), pp. 155–9.

9 The formula comes from Vladislav Surkov, a Russian businessman and politician who played the role of organic intellectual and spin doctor for Putin in the 2000s.

10 Carl Schmitt (1888–1985) was one of the great German legal scholars of the twentieth century. With his well-buttressed critiques of liberalism and the parliamentary system, he championed a realist vision of politics (defined as conflict between friends and enemies) and of a racist and unanimist conception of "the people." His evolution toward National Socialism helped discredit his thought, but he was "rediscovered" in the 1980s by a far right seeking intellectual forerunners and by a far left fascinated by his anti-liberal radicality and his cult of force.

11 On this point, see Philippe Urfalino, "Un nouveau décisionnisme politique: La philosophie du populisme de gauche," *Archives de philosophie* 82, no. 2 (2019): 291–312. We need to recall here that the critique of the "debating classes" has been a red thread running through the type of anti-liberal thought (which would be called far-rightist today) that went from Donoso Cortés through Maurice Barrès and Charles Maurras to Carl Schmitt. It is also the root of the anti-intellectualism that animated all these authors. For them, the logic of intellectuals had to defer to the instinct of the humble, the only force that expressed the proper relation to reality.
12 This definition is proffered explicitly by Alain de Benoist in *The Problem of Democracy*, translated from the French (London: Arktos, [1985] 2011).
13 Hugo Chávez, inaugural address, 2007, cited in Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 17. (I have modified the translation slightly based on the original Spanish. Chávez cited these two sentences verbatim from an official communication sent by Simón Bolívar to the governing council in Magdalena, Colombia, on April 27, 1826. See Simón Bolívar, *Doctrina del Libertador*, prologue Augusto Mijares, ed. Manuel Perez Vila, 2nd edn. [Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1979], p. 224. –*Translator's note*)

3 A Mode of Representation

1 Jean-Luc Mélenchon notes about La France Insoumise, significantly: "We do not want to be a party. A party is a tool of a class. A movement is the organized form of the people." *L'Hebdo*, no. 174 (October 18, 2017).
2 On this point, see my book *Le peuple introuvable: Histoire de la représentation démocratique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1998).
3 See Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, *Escritos politicos* (Bogotá: El Ancore Editores, 1985).
4 Juan Domingo Perón, *El modelo argentino* (Gualeguychú: Tolemia, 2011), p. 11.
5 Hugo Chávez, in a speech delivered 12 July 2012; the same formulas were repeated verbatim September 9 and 24, 2012.
6 Let us note that Subcomandante Marcos adopted the same approach, from his refuge in Chiapas, Mexico, to justify wearing a face-covering hood at all times. When anyone asked him what was hiding under the mask, he would answer: "If you want to know who Marcos is, get a mirror; the face you'll see is Marcos's. Because Marcos is you, a woman; he is you, a man; he is you, an indigenous person, a farmer, a soldier, a student . . . *We are all Marcos, a whole insurgent people*" (cited by Ignacio Ramonet in *Marcos, la dignité rebelle: Conversations avec le sous-commandant Marcos* [Paris: Galilée, 2001]; emphasis added).
7 Hugo Chávez, *Seis discorsos del Presidente constitutional de Venezuela* (Caracas: Ediciones de la Presidencia de la República, 2000), p. 47.
8 Ernesto Laclau, "Logiques de la construction politique et identités populaires," in Jean-Louis Laville and José Luis Coraggio, eds., *Les gauches du XXIe siècle: Un dialogue Nord–Sud* (Lormont: Le Bord de l'eau, 2016), p. 153.
9 Ibid., p. 156.

10 Chantal Mouffe and Íñigo Errejón, *Podemos: In the Name of the People*, trans. Sirio Canós Donnay (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2016), p. 109.
11 On the issue of the introduction of a leader into left-wing political thought, see for example the work of Jean-Claude Monod, *Qu'est-ce qu'un chef en démocratie? Politiques du charisme* (Paris: Seuil, 2012). See also the postface written for the second edition of that work in the "Points" series (Paris: Seuil, 2017).
12 To pursue this notion further, one can turn to Raymond Carré de Malberg, who presents the organ theory in German public law in the late nineteenth century in his comprehensive *Contribution à la théorie générale de l'Etat*, 2 vols. (Paris: Recueil Sirey, 1920–2). In populism, then, there is an implicit transposition of the theory of the organ into the figure of the leader (whereas Carré de Malberg made Parliament the organ of a nation, an entity that was unrepresentable in itself).
13 Jean-Luc Mélenchon, citing Robespierre, in *L'ère du peuple* (Paris: Fayard, 2014), p. 31.
14 Remarks reported in Lilian Alemagna and Stéphane Alliés, *Mélenchon à la conquête du peuple* (Paris: Robert Laffont, [2012] 2018), p. 410. The citations that follow are from the same text.
15 Interview in *Le 1 Hebdo*, no. 174 (October 18, 2017). Let us also recall that during the contested search of the France Insoumise headquarters on October 16, 2018, he did not hesitate to say "I am the Republic" (tweaking a formula attributed to Louis XIV), "My person is sacred," and "I am more than Jean-Luc Mélenchon, I am 7 million persons" (remarks reported in *Le Monde*, October 19, 2018).
16 Donald J. Trump, near the end of his acceptance speech at the Republican National Convention on 22 July 2016. Transcript published by *The New York Times*: https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/22/us/politics/trump-transcript-rnc-address.html.

4 A Politics and a Philosophy of Economics

1 François Guizot, speech delivered April 1, 1846 (in a discussion of a trade agreement with Belgium), in François Guizot, *Histoire parlementaire de France* (Paris: Michel-Lévy frères, 1864), vol. 5, p. 120.
2 See Friedrich List, *National System of Political Economy*, trans. George-Auguste Matile, Henri Richelot, and Stephen Colwell (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1856 [1841]); citation from p. 77. List's stance was different from that of Johann Gottlieb Fichte, who advocated an autarchic protectionism along political lines.
3 As reflected in the familiar watchword "There is no alternative" (TINA).
4 See the emblematic work of Alain Supiot, *Governance by Numbers: The Making of a Legal Model of Allegiance*, translated from the French (Portland, OR: Hart, [2015] 2017). Let us note that the question of the comparative virtues of management through fixed rules as opposed to an approach that privileges political decision-making has been addressed in numerous works in economic theory. See the seminal article of Finn E. Kydland and Edward C. Prescott, "Rules Rather than Discretion: The Inconsistency of Optimal Plans," *Journal of Political Economy* 85, no. 3 (1977): 473–91.

5 Marine Le Pen, *Pour que vive la France* (Paris: Grancher, 2012); the book was her manifesto in the 2012 presidential campaign.
6 Jacques Généreux, *Nous, on peut! Manuel anticrise à l'usage du citoyen*, 2nd edn. (Paris: Seuil, 2012).
7 "The irreversible character of the installation of immigrant populations," Marcel Gauchet notes, characteristically, "… presents the interesting feature of having totally avoided, from beginning to end, all debate and democratic decision-making." Gauchet also speaks in this connection of a "wounded popular feeling of sovereignty," emphasizing moreover that "xenophobia is not racism," that it is rather a "feeling that one can contain within the circle of democracy" (*La démocratie contre elle-même* [Paris: Gallimard, 2002], pp. 220–2).
8 On this point, see my analysis in *The Society of Equals*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, [2011] 2013).
9 Let us recall that the original name of this political party (in 1989) was "Northern League for the Independence of Padania."
10 This party stressed from the start the greater expenses of the welfare state in Wallonia.
11 Let us note that various social scientists have emphasized the connection between the homogeneity of populations and the willingness to accept redistributive activities: see for example Robert Putnam, "*E Pluribus Unum:* Diversity and Community in the Twenty-First Century," *Scandinavian Political Studies* 30, no. 2 (2007): 137–74, or Alberto Alesina and Edward L. Glaeser, *Fighting Poverty in the US and Europe: A World of Difference* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

5 A Regime of Passions and Emotions

1 See for example the collection of essays in Alain Faure and Emmanuel Négrier, eds., *La politique à l'épreuve des émotions* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2017).
2 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed. Alan D. Schrift and Duncan Large, trans. Adrian Del Caro (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2019), vol. 16, p. 276.
3 See Albert Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism Before Its Triumph* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, [1977] 1981). Hirschman finds the key to eighteenth-century thought in an assertion by Montesquieu: "Happy is it for men that they are in a situation in which, though their passions prompt them to be wicked, it is, nevertheless, to their interest to be humane and virtuous." (Baron de Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, trans. Thomas Nugent, rev. J. V. Prichard (New York: D. Appleton, 1900), vol. 1, p. 437 (book 21, section 20).
4 See Norbert Elias, "On Human Beings and Their Emotions: A Process-Sociological Essay," *Theory, Culture & Society* 4, nos. 2–3 (June 1987): 339–61.
5 Ibid., p. 346; italics in the original.
6 See William M. Reddy, "The Unavoidable Intentionality of Affect: The History of Emotions and the Neurosciences of the Present Day," *Emotion Review* 12, no. 3 (July 2020): 168–78; Alain Ehrenberg, *The Mechanics*

of Passions: Brain, Behaviour, and Society, trans. Craig Lund (Montreal: Kingston, [2018] 2020); and Antonio Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1994).

7 Stanislas Dehaene, Yann Le Cun, and Jacques Girardon, *La plus belle histoire de l'intelligence* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2018), p. 250. We can analyze fear in these terms, for example, as being triggered by a whole set of perceived signals and by references to accumulated experiences or testimonies (which leads us in certain cases to judge that the fact of not being afraid in a given circumstance can be very dangerous, a sign of insufficient experience).

8 On this point, see the suggestive developments in certain episodes of the French Revolution brought out by Déborah Cohen in *La nature du peuple: Les formes de l'imaginaire social (XVIIIe–XXIe siècle)* (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 2010).

9 See Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011).

10 See Braud's groundbreaking work *L'émotion en politique: Problèmes d'analyse* (Paris: Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 1996). "Since the advent of mass political parties in the late nineteenth century," he has written more recently, "political debates have long been dominated by arguments of an ideological order. Confrontations have involved heavily substantiated collective categories: the upper or lower bourgeoisie, the middle classes, the proletariat, all entities whose historical roles have been praised or whose supposedly evil intentions have been stigmatized. Similarly, icons such as the Fatherland, the Republic, and the Nation have been idealized or relentlessly condemned as political labels. This structuring of emotional intensities around ultimately abstract concepts left little room for taking an interest in the feelings of 'the people'" (Philippe Braud, "L'expression émotionnelle dans le discours politique," in Faure and Négrier, *La politique à l'épreuve des émotions*, p. 228).

11 Dialogue in *Philosophie Magazine*, no. 124 (October 2018): https://www.philomag.com/archives/124-novembre-2018.

12 Interview in *Le Point*, September 27, 2018.

13 Chantal Mouffe and Íñigo Errejón, *Podemos: In the Name of the People*, trans. Sirio Canós Donnay (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2016), pp. 60–1.

14 See Errejón's developments on this point in ibid., pp. 61–2.

15 See my discussion of the politics of proximity in *Democratic Legitimacy: Impartiality, Reflexivity, Proximity*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, [2008] 2011), pp. 169–218.

16 The "yellow vest" movement in France illustrates this point in an exemplary fashion.

17 This is the spirit in which I published the manifesto *Le parlement des invisibles* (Paris: Seuil, 2014) and launched the experimental "Raconter la vie" as a website and a book collection.

18 Benjamin Constant, *De la responsabilité des ministres* (Paris: Nicolle, 1815), p. 3.

19 Let us recall that Nobel laureate in economics Kenneth Arrow has identified the three "invisible institutions" he deems necessary for a state to function properly: authority, trust, and legitimacy. See Kenneth Arrow, *The Limits of Organization* (New York: Norton, 1974), p. 26, and see an excerpt from my contribution to "La justice du XXIe siècle," a colloquium organized by

UNESCO in Paris in January 2014: "La question de la légitimité démocratique: L'exemple de la justice," *Après-demain* 30, no. 2 (2014): 5–6: https://doi.org/10.3917/apdem.030.0005.

20 There is a great deal of literature on this subject. For Europe, see the numerous works by Pierre-André Taguieff; see also Emmanuelle Danblon and Loïc Nicolas, eds., *Les rhétoriques de la conspiration* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2010); for the United States, see Peter Knight, ed., *Conspiracy Theories in American History: An Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara, CA: BC-CLIO, 2003), and Joseph E. Uscinski and Joseph M. Parent, *American Conspiracy Theories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); for the Arab world, see Matthew Gray, *Conspiracy Theories in the Arab World* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

21 The term "conspirationnisme" has been proposed in French "as an attempt to designate the real power behind the empty space of democratic power": see Emmanuel Taïeb, "Logiques politiques du conspirationnisme," *Sociologie et sociétés* 42, no. 2 (2010): 277.

22 Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. Eduardo Nolla, trans. James T. Schleifer (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, [1835] 2012), vol. 1, p. 265.

23 On this point, see Pierre Rosanvallon, ed., *Science et démocratie: Actes du colloque de rentrée du Collège de France*, held in Paris in 2013 (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2014), and Gérald Bronner, *La démocratie des crédules* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2013).

24 Uscinski and Parent, *American Conspiracy Theories*, pp. 130–53.

25 Mélenchon, *Qu'ils s'en aillent tous! Vite, la révolution citoyenne* (Paris: Flammarion, 2010).

26 Here let me refer to my analyses in *Counter-Democracy: Politics in an Age of Distrust*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [2006] 2008). "As I see it," notes Jean-Luc Mélenchon, "rejectionism characterizes the absolutely fundamental and instinctive opposition of the French people to a model that is the profound negation of its values" (cited in *Marianne*, September 15, 2017).

27 The term *dégoût* (disgust) was tested in various surveys in France as a term characterizing the way citizens judged the governing authorities during the yellow vest crisis in the winter of 2018–19. This descriptor was selected by a significant percentage of those surveyed.

28 Here I am borrowing a category from Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca in *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation*, trans. John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, [1958] 1969). "We are going to apply the term *persuasive* to argumentation that only claims validity for a particular audience, and the term *convincing* to argumentation that presumes to gain the adherence of every rational being" (p. 28).

29 Theodor W. Adorno, *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York: Harper, 1950).

6 The Unity and Diversity of Populisms

1 Interview, *Le 1 Hebdo*, no. 174 (October 18, 2017).

2 Surveys have nevertheless shown that a majority of yellow vest participants had voted for Marine Le Pen's party in the European elections of May 2019.

3 Cited in the pages devoted to the "Podemos turn" and its impact in France in Lilian Alemagna and Stéphane Alliès, *Mélenchon à la conquête du peuple* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2018) (expanded version of *Mélenchon le plébéien* [Paris: Robert Laffont, 2012]).
4 Cited in *Libération*, September 12, 2012. This position marked a break with the one Mélenchon had defended during the spring 2012 presidential campaign. His program then had emphasized that the "Left Front was born out of the necessity of reinventing the left" and that it was a matter of "restacking the deck on the left" (*L'humain d'abord: Le programme du Front de gauche et de son candidat commun Jean-Luc Mélenchon* [Paris: Librio, 2011], pp. 10–11).
5 *Le Journal du Dimanche*, April 2, 2017. In 2016, Jean-Luc Mélenchon had ended the Front de Gauche (Left Front) coalition and launched La France Insoumise. He had also talked about setting up "a physical force that polarizes society" (*Le choix de l'insoumission* [Paris: Seuil, 2016], p. 299).
6 The OAS (Organisation de l'Armée Secrète) was a right-wing paramilitary organization active during the war in Algeria. Jean-Marie Le Pen was the director of Jean-Louis Tixier Vignancour's presidential campaign in 1965.
7 The four principal parties on the right and the left were represented in Parliament at the time.
8 See Valérie Igounet, *Les Français d'abord: Slogans et virilité du discours Front national (1972–2017)* (Paris: Inculte/Dernière Marge, 2016), p. 51. This illustrated work offers invaluable insight into both the continuity of the Front National and its evolution.
9 See *Droite et démocratie économique: Doctrine économique et sociale du Front national*, preface Jean-Marie Le Pen, 2nd edn. (Limoges: Le National, 1984), and Jean-Marie Le Pen, "Pour une vraie révolution française," *National Hebdo*, September 26, 1985.
10 The document is reproduced in Igounet, *Les Français d'abord*, p. 139. Let us note that Steeve Briois, the Front National mayor of Hénin-Beaumont, had placed a bust of Jaurès in his office at the time. Marine Le Pen, for her part, cited Jaurès often.
11 The manifesto, signed by four French economists on September 24, 2010, was published in English as "The Manifesto of the Appalled Economists," trans. Giles Raveaud and Dany Lang, *Real-World Economics Review*, no. 54 (September 27, 2010), pp. 19–31: http://www.paecon.net/PAEReview/issue54/Manifesto54.pdf. –*Translator's note*.
12 See his presentation of *Pour la France: Programme du Front national* (Paris: Albatros, 1985).
13 In the areas of national independence or sovereignty, the conception of the strategist state, and the conception of referendums.
14 On this point, see Grégoire Kauffmann, *Le nouveau FN: Les vieux habits du populisme* (Paris: Seuil, coll. La République des idées, 2016).
15 On this point, see the exemplary case of the journal *Éléments* edited by Alain de Benoist (author most notably of *Le moment populiste: Droite-gauche, c'est fini!* [Paris: Pierre-Guillaume de Roux, 2017]). If this journal constitutes a central pole of reflection on populism, it continues insistently to maintain the flame of the most radical thinking on the extreme right, honoring neo-Nazi and neo-fascist authors along with the sources of their inspiration.
16 Even if there still remains a clear differentiation at this level in France. On

this point, see the data presented by Yann Algan, Elizabeth Beasley, Daniel Cohen, and Martial Foucault in *Les origines du populisme: Enquête sur un schisme politique et social* (Paris: Seuil, coll. La République des idées, 2019).

17 On the logic of these affiliations and reclassifications, see the lengthy developments I devoted to the "theory of grafts and gateways," to the "great reversal," and to the "history of equivocations," in *Notre histoire intellectuelle et politique* (Paris: Seuil, 2018), pp. 263–6 and 321–50.

18 She gave up that role in spring 2019 to pursue a career in the media.

19 The Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions and for Citizens' Action was a movement founded in 1998 to promote the establishment of a tax on short-term financial transactions. –*Translator's note*.

20 Interview in *Éléments*, no. 177 (April–May 2019): https://www.revue-elements.com/produit/familles-du-populisme-2/.

II History

1 History of Populist Moments I

1 For a more fully developed analysis of Napoleon III's political doctrine, see "La démocratie illibérale, le césarisme," the chapter I devoted to him in *La démocratie inachevée: Histoire de la souveraineté du peuple en France* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), pp. 181–221.

2 Letter to his tutor Narcisse Vieillard, dated January 29, 1836, cited in Philippe Séguin, *Louis Napoléon le Grand* (Paris: Grasset, 1990), p. 59.

3 See Robert Pimienta, *La propagande bonapartiste en 1848* (Paris: E. Cornély, 1911), pp. 58–9.

4 Ibid., p. 59.

5 Louis Napoleon, address preceding the adoption of the constitution of January 14, 1852, in *Bulletin des lois de la République française*, no. 479, p. 53: https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k486128d/f102.item.r=Louis%20Napol%C3%A9on.

6 Ibid.

7 Jean Gilbert Victor Fialin de Persigny, "Discours sur les principes politiques de l'Empire" (Saint-Étienne, August 12, 1863), in *Le Duc de Persigny et les doctrines de l'Empire* (Paris: H. Plon, 1865), p. 164. The formula *homme-peuple* appeared for the first time, to my knowledge, in the title of a short Saint-Simonian pamphlet, *Napoléon ou l'Homme-Peuple* (Paris, March 1832, repr. Paris: Hachette Livre/BNF, 2018): "I am the people, as the little corporal used to say, and the little corporal was right. He meant that he knew the people better than anyone else, that his life was theirs" (ibid., p. 1).

8 Here he was picking up on a formula from Adolphe Thiers: see *Des idées napoléoniennes*, in *Oeuvres de Napoléon III* (Paris: H. Plon, 1869), vol. 1, p. 37, n. 1.

9 Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, *Histoire de Jules César* (Paris: H. Plon, 1865–6), vol. 1, p. 280. On this subject, see the useful information brought together by Juliette Glikman, "L'*Histoire de Jules César* de Napoléon III," Masters thesis, University of Paris I, 1994.

10 See André Laurence, "Le voyage impérial et sa mise en scène sous le Second Empire," Masters thesis, University of Paris I, 1990.

11 Pierre-Louis Roederer, *Des voyages des chefs de gouvernement* (1804), repr. in *Oeuvres du comte Pierre-Louis Roederer* (Paris: Firmin-Didot frères, 1853–9), vol. 6, p. 460.
12 Maurice Deslandres, *Histoire constitutionnelle de la France de 1789 à 1870* (Paris: A. Colin, 1933), vol. 2, p. 509.
13 Appeal made April 23, 1870, repr. in Émile Ollivier, *L'Empire libéral* (Paris: Garnier frères, 1895–1918), vol. 13, p. 335.
14 See Patrick Lagoueyte, "Candidature officielle et pratiques électorales sous le Second Empire (1952–1870)," PhD thesis, University of Paris I, 1990, vol. 3, p. 1104. The author describes these villages as "bastions of unanimity" (p. 1097). On the superimposition of the two cultures, see the pertinent remarks of Christine Guionnet, *L'apprentissage de la politique moderne: Les élections municipales sous la monarchie de Juillet* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997).
15 *Idées napoléoniennes*, p. 21. On his vision of a strong state, see also "Discours de Bordeaux, 9 octobre 1852," in *Oeuvres de Napoléon III*, vol. 3, pp. 341–4.
16 The Decentralization Commission he set up defined the major principles behind all the significant projects of the following decades.
17 Émile Ollivier, *Commentaire de la loi du 25 mai 1864 sur les coalitions* (Paris: Marescq aîné, 1864), p. 52.
18 *Archives parlementaires* (*A. P.*), first series, vol. 31, p. 617. The decree of September 30, 1791, stipulated: "No society, club, or citizens' association may have a political existence, in any form." Le Chapelier commented: "Societies, peaceful meetings of citizens, clubs, are imperceptible in the State. If they depart from the private situation in which the Constitution places them, they are rising against the Constitution, destroying it instead of defending it."
19 Bourdon (de l'Oise), *A. P.*, vol. 99, p. 210. See also the exemplary article by Pierre-Louis Roederer, "Des sociétés populaires," published in *Le Républicain*, 30 Brumaire Year III (November 20, 1794), repr. in *Oeuvres du comte Pierre-Louis Roederer*, vol. 7, pp. 17–22. In June 1793, the Convention energetically rejected the project of a democracy that would be animated by such societies and not organized by the orderly operation of the established powers. Cf. the reception of Boissel's proposal to have "popular societies and their brother tribunes replace the primary assemblies" (*Les entretiens du Père Gérard sur la Constitution*, reproduced in *A. P.*, vol. 66, p. 635.
20 "While the revolution lasted," Le Chapelier said, for example, "that order of things was almost always more useful than harmful" (*A. P.*, first series, vol. 31, p. 617). In that framework, popular societies did in fact have a militant and pedagogical utility. But whereas Le Chapelier thought that their dissolution had been made possible by the fact that "the revolution [was] over," we should note that Robespierre himself considered them still only *circumstantially* indispensable ("I do not believe that the revolution is over," he argued [ibid., p. 620]).
21 The first electoral committees organized in France were established in connection with the 1828 elections (through the network of the liberal society "Aide-toi, le ciel t'aidera" [Help yourself, and heaven will help you]). Whereas the right to associate and hold meetings was quite severely restricted

by a law passed in 1834, electoral committees continued to be set up unhindered (they played an especially important role in the 1846 elections). But we should recall that censitary suffrage – weighted voting according to one's tax status – prevailed at the time.

22 The great debate of the period concerned whether electoral committees should be quasi-public institutions, grouping all voters together to designate candidates, or whether it was acceptable to have a plurality of committees.

23 The statement is from a memorandum dated January 20, 1852, that was distributed to the prefects and published in *Le Moniteur universel* the same day.

24 A "very confidential memorandum" addressed to the prefects by Minister of the Interior Adolphe Billault, dated June 1, 1857, published in Lagoueyte, "Candidature officielle," vol. 1, Annexes, p. 11.

25 Louis-Antoine Garnier-Pagès et al., *Le procès des treize en appel* (Paris: A. Lacroix, Verboeckhoven, [1864] 1865), p. 335. "The law," the prosecutor added, "does not want an administration within the administration."

26 Borrowed from Montesquieu, the terms "small men" and "principals" were used awkwardly by François Arago, one of the lawyers for the accused.

27 This criticism led to the publication in 1864 of the "Manifeste des soixante" (Manifesto of the Sixty), in which militant workers (of Proudhonian leanings) called for workers to become candidates so that workers would be represented in society and Parliament would reflect something more than the diversity of opinions.

28 This proposal was reported by Garnier-Pagès during the initial trial of thirteen prominent figures, including two deputies, accused of holding an illegal political meeting in 1864; see *Le procès des treize*, p. 17.

29 On this point, see my discussion in *Le peuple introuvable: Histoire de la représentation démocratique en France* (Paris: Gallimard, 1998).

30 Napoleon III, speech at the opening session of the legislative body, March 29, 1852, *Oeuvres de Napoléon III*, vol. 3, pp. 321–2.

31 Émile Ollivier, in a formula repeated in his *Solutions politiques et sociales* (Paris: Société des écrivains français, 1894), pp. 113–14.

32 Adophe Granier de Cassagnac, speech delivered March 16, 1866, published in *Annales du Sénat et du Corps législatif* (Paris: Administrateur du Moniteur universel, 1862–71), p. 138.

33 Ibid., p. 139. "Is good sense not revolted by the idea of creating, without reward or necessity, alongside the Emperor, the Senate, and the legislative Body, an immense new political power that would henceforth be independent in its sphere and whose delimited and defined authority would stand as a rival to the regular administration established by all?"

34 Adolphe Granier de Cassagnac, *L'Empereur et la démocratie moderne* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1860), p. 21.

35 Ibid.

36 Cassagnac went on to ask: "Where, in the customary constitution of the periodical press, is the country's political right and consent? Where, for these capitalists or these writers, who have no bonds but their own interests or their own convenience, where is the investiture that would make them the directors, the controllers of political bodies, the judges of the government? Where is this priesthood some journalists talk about from time to time? Can someone explain how the periodical press could dominate all the public

powers, without possessing the prerogatives of the least of these?" (ibid., p. 22). This was already the central argument used under the Restoration by opponents of freedom of the press. "To be a deputy," they claimed, "one must be elected by the voters; journalists invest themselves with their formidable ministry" (cited in Ollivier, *Solutions politiques et sociales*, p. 114).

37 *L'Empereur et la démocratie moderne*, p. 22.

38 The author violently denounces "the right that opposition newspapers abusively arrogate for themselves to control universal suffrage" (p. 5). "The exercise of freedom of the press," Cassagnac continued to insist, "is an eminently aristocratic faculty, in the sense that it presupposes the always difficult and rare combination of certain capital and certain talents" (*L'Empereur et la démocratie moderne*, p. 24).

39 Ibid., p. 23.

40 Ollivier, *L'Empire libéral*, vol. 5, p. 100.

2 History of Populist Moments II

1 By this I mean the first globalization of the industrial period, of course; many other stages in the opening of the world could be identified, from Antiquity to the decisive turning point in the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries analyzed by Fernand Braudel.

2 See Stanley K. Schultz, "The Morality of Politics: The Muckrakers' Vision of Democracy," *The Journal of American History* 52, no. 3 (December 1965): 527–47.

3 Cited in ibid., pp. 529–30. In the same vein, Louis D. Brandeis of *Harper's Weekly*, reputed to be "the people's lawyer," noted that "publicity is justly commended as a remedy for social and industrial diseases. Sunlight is said to be the best of disinfectants; electric light the most efficient policeman. And publicity has already played an important part in the struggle against the Money Trust" (Louis D. Brandeis, *Other People's Money and How the Bankers Use It* [New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1914], p. 92).

4 An ephemeral Progressive Party even saw the light of day in 1924, around a former Republican, Robert La Follette (he won some five million votes).

5 French general and politician Georges Boulanger upset the political chessboard in the late 1880s. He made a spectacular breakthrough in 1889 when he won a series of elections, bringing in his wake a mix of Bonapartists, monarchists, and left-wing or far-left militants on the basis of a nationalist and anti-parliamentary ideology bound up with a virulent anti-Semitism. This last element was explicitly viewed as capable of surmounting the various social divides of the period: as Maurice Barrès wrote in *L'appel au soldat*, "Boulangism . . . must be anti-Semitic, precisely as a party of national reconciliation" (Paris: F. Juven, [1900] 1911), p. 476.

6 A scandal around a French company's failed attempt to build a Panama Canal: it was discovered that a number of deputies had been paid by the promoters to vote for a law allowing the issuing of a major bond that drew nearly a million subscribers.

7 See the articles devoted to the question in *L'antiparlementarisme en France*, special issue, *Parlement(s)* 9 (December 2013).

8 This point is highlighted by Zeev Sternhell in *Maurice Barrès et le nationalisme*

français (Paris: Armand Colin, 1972). See also the more recent study by Sarah Al-Matary, *La haine des clercs: L'anti-intellectualisme en France* (Paris: Seuil, 2019).

9 For a sense of the nature and scope of this phenomenon, see Suzanne Berger, *Notre première mondialisation: Leçons d'un échec oublié* (Paris: Seuil, coll. La République des idées, 2003). The numerical data presented in this paragraph come from Berger's book.

10 As Cecil Rhodes, the great symbolic figure of British imperialism at the time, is reputed to have declared: "If you want to avoid civil war, you must become imperialists."

11 In France, small savers proved particularly fond of foreign investments (as attested by the shock provoked by the loss of Russian loans). It is noteworthy that investments in the colonial empires were relatively secondary: while Great Britain directed 30 percent of its foreign investments to its colonies, only 13 percent were similarly directed in France.

12 *Annales de la Chambre des députés*, session of June 4, 1888, *Journal officiel de la République française: Débats parlementaires* (June 5, 1888): 1631.

13 In *Le culte du moi 1: Sous l'oeil des barbares* (Paris: Plon, [1888] 1966), Maurice Barrès spoke of politicians as being nothing but "stupid, verbose, vulgar barbarians." In *L'appel au soldat* he declared that "parliamentarism is a poison affecting the brain, like alcoholism, lead poisoning, and syphilis" (p. 105).

14 Moritz Carl Rittinghausen, *Die direkte Gesetzbegung durch das Volk*. The book was translated into several European languages, including English: *Direct Legislation by the People*, trans. Alexander Harvey (New York: Humboldt Library, [1851] 1897), and went through many re-editions. On the impact of this conception of direct democracy, see the chapter I devoted to it in *La démocratie inachevée: Histoire de la souveraineté du peuple en France* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), pp. 155–79.

15 See Albert Venn Dicey, "Ought the Referendum to Be Introduced into England?" *The Contemporary Review* 57 (April 1890): 489–511, and "The Referendum," *The National Review* 23 (March–August 1894): 65–72.

16 See Ian Bullock and Siân Reynolds, "Direct Legislation and Socialism: How British and French Socialists Viewed the Referendum in the 1890s," *History Workshop*, no. 24 (Autumn 1987): 62–81.

17 See "Maurice Balfour on the Referendum," *The Spectator* (February 10, 1894): 188–9.

18 "We must insist on this: nationalism is protectionism," Barrès said, in "Les ambitions du prolétariat sont-elles incompatibles avec les nécessités d'un grand État dans l'Europe moderne?" *Le Peuple*, February 4, 1897, repr. in *L'oeuvre de Maurice Barrès* (Paris: Club de l'honnête homme, 1966), vol. 5, citation from p. 400. We should note that, when the Action Française party commented on Barrès's electoral platform in 1898, it placed great emphasis on the link between nationalism and protectionism, and it rejoiced that he "had brought together the three ideas of nationalism, protectionism, and socialism in a very appealing system" (cited in *L'oeuvre de Maurice Barrès*, p. 384).

19 See Marc Crapez, *La gauche réactionnaire: Mythes de la plèbe et de la race dans le sillage des Lumières* (Paris: Berg International, 1997), especially pp. 221–4.

20 Their virulent anti-Semitism has to be interpreted in the same light.
21 See Maurice Hollande, *La défense ouvrière contre le travail étranger: Vers un protectionnisme ouvrier* (Paris: Bloud, 1913), and also Giuseppe Prato, *Le protectionnisme (L'exclusion de travailleurs étrangers*), trans. Georges Bourgin (Paris: M. Rivière, 1912).
22 In the United States, "nativism" referred to the sense of cohesiveness and superiority felt by the oldest and most qualified groups of workers; it was expressed in the form of contempt for and rejection of new immigrants. Marx and Engels were the first to underscore the capacity of this feeling to give qualified workers the aristocratic sense that they belonged to a society of equals, more with respect to their distance from the rest of the working world than with reference to the class separation that differentiated them from the owners.
23 See the data presented in *Chinese and Japanese in America*, special issue of *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 34, no. 2 (September 1909).
24 See John P. Young, "The Support of the Anti-Oriental Movement," in *Chinese and Japanese in America*, p. 12.
25 Cited by Mary R. Coolidge, *Chinese Immigration* (New York: Holt, 1909), p. 109.
26 In France, this can be attributed to the memory of the Second Empire, and more broadly to the specter of absolutism that is still present in public memory today, the overall idea being that the democratic project needed to keep its distance from exceptional personalities in order to succeed.
27 "Direct Legislation Leagues" were very effective in mobilizing public opinion on these issues. In addition to reforms at the state level, the Progressive Movement gave rise to what has been called the Progressive Era, symbolized by the figure of Theodore Roosevelt, president from 1901 to 1909. It was during this period that income taxes were introduced (1913), women won the right to vote (1920), direct election of senators was initiated, and the system of national parks was created (1916).
28 The introduction of primaries broadened and democratized the old system of caucuses that had been used by each party to choose candidates (in most cases, caucuses were controlled by a small group of party militants).
29 On this point, see the important book by Frank Trentmann, *Free Trade Nation: Commerce, Consumption, and Civil Society in Modern Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
30 See Macdonald's programmatic work *The Zollverein and British Industry* (London: G. Richards, 1903).
31 See the emblematic work of John A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, [1903] 1965), especially the chapter titled "Imperialism Based on Protection" (part I, chapter 5, pp. 64–70).
32 Whereas it was precisely the German menace that was foregrounded by the English partisans of protectionism.
33 The issue had come up several times at meetings of the Second International in the 1890s.
34 See the important works by their leaders: Karl Kautsky, *Parlamentarismus und Demokratie*, 2nd edn. ([1893] 1911), available in English in *Karl Kautsky on Democracy and Republicanism*, trans. Ben Lewis (Leiden: Brill, 2019), pp. 43–153; and Ramsay Macdonald, *Socialism and Government*

(London: Independent Labor Party, 1909), vol. 2, and *Parliament and Democracy* (London: National Labor Press, 1920).

35 They were pragmatic on this point, moreover; they did not reject the idea of referendums to "correct and renew the traditional conception of parliamentarianism" (this formula is repeated several times in the platforms of the French Section of the Workers' International).

3 History of Populist Moments III

1 The army was one of the rare means of social advancement in these countries; the children of the privileged classes tended to avoid military service. This factor explains the socio-political role that the army sought to play, claiming a sense of the general interest based as much on its members' own social origins as on their function.

2 It is also important to note the specific effects induced by the presence of large indigenous populations living on the margins of development in many countries (especially in the Andean region), and the long persistence of slavery in Brazil.

3 On Gaitán's political itinerary, see especially W. John Green, *Gaitanismo, Left Liberalism, and Popular Mobilization in Colombia* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003); Daniel Pécaut, *L'ordre et la violence: Évolution socio-politique de la Colombie entre 1930 et 1953* (Paris: Éditions de l'EHESS, 1987); and Alberto Zalamea, *Gaitán, autobiografia de un pueblo* (Bogotá: Zalamea Fajardo Editores, 1999).

4 His supporters also used labels charged with popular religiosity, calling him a "new messiah," an "apostle of social justice," "Colombia's redeemer."

5 The quotations from Gaitán that follow are excerpted from Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, *Gaitán: Antologia de su pensamiento social y económico*, ed. Luis Emiro Valencia (Bogotá: Ediciones Suramérica, 1968); Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, *Escritos politicos* (Bogotá: El Ancor Editores, 1985); and David Moreno, *Trayectoria del pensamiento politico de Gaitán* (Bogotá: Centro Cultural Gaitán, 1983).

6 Gaitán thus always strove to denigrate the trade unionists who claimed to represent the objective world of labor adequately. He understood himself to be the expression of a people that embodied a social totality.

7 He often ended his speeches with the injunction "*Pueblo . . . a la carga!*" (People . . . Charge!).

8 Juan Domingo Perón, "What Is Peronism?" (speech delivered August 20, 1948). The citation and those that follow are excerpted from Juan Domingo Perón, *El modelo argentino* (Gualeguaychú: Tolemia, 2011).

9 Literally "shirtless" – the expression was often used by the regime to give a perceptible dimension to its concern for the poorest citizens.

10 Juan Domingo Perón, "El concepto justicialista," *Doctrina* 1, no. 1 (January [1965] 1966), p. 3.

11 Speech announcing his candidacy for the presidency, *La Nación*, February 13, 1946.

12 Some were warned, for example, that they had to replace their rotary presses because the noise bothered their neighbors; others found it impossible to renew their paper supply because trucks were prohibited from entering their

streets; with still others, it so happened that no print shop "wanted" to print them any longer.

13 It is worth citing a presidential memorandum dated October 22, 1948, which set forth the following prescription: "Loyalty must be understood to mean complete agreement with the political, social, and economic principles that guide the action of the government. If they are not convinced, government workers introduce obstructions, consciously or unconsciously, into their work. Our government is encouraging and implementing a social policy that goes in the direction of a popular revolution; now, a bureaucracy formed by the capitalist oligarchy to defend the interests of that class cannot include a politics at the service of the collectivity. This is why I am reminding the honorable ministers that they must clean up the agencies in their charge by eliminating incompetent workers and those who, voluntarily or involuntarily, act against the principles of the revolution. To achieve this two-fold clean-up, I shall sign all the decrees of suspension and dismissal that the ministers deem justified" (Perón, cited in Georges Béarn, ed., *La décade péroniste* [Paris: Gallimard-Julliard, 1975], p. 119).

14 Alain Rouquié, *Le siècle de Péron: Essai sur les démocraties hégémoniques* (Paris: Seuil, 2016), p. 349.

15 See the pioneering book by Ghiţa Ionescu and Ernest Gellner, eds., *Populism: Its Meanings and National Characteristics* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969). See also the analyses that have attracted the most commentary in Latin America, those by Gino Germani or Torcuato Di Tella (in Argentina), Fernando Enrique Cardoso and Francisco Weffort (in Brazil); these indispensable works must be taken into account in any effort to retrace the intellectual history of populism in Latin America.

16 Perón emphasized on many occasions how attracted he had been by the idea of the third way. See his preface to Raúl Mendé, *Justicialism: The Peronist Doctrine and Reality*, translated from the Spanish (Buenos Aires: Impr. Lopez, [1951] 1952).

17 The formula comes from Rouquié, *Le siècle de Perón*, p. 12.

18 In his great classic work *Política y sociedad en una época de transición* (Buenos Aires: Paidos, 1968), Gino Germani proposed to interpret populism as an expression of the difficult transition from a traditional society to a modern one. We should note that the recent field of subaltern studies, in its distancing from Marxism, has proved better suited to grasping the social and cultural essence of these populist movements.

4 Conceptual History

1 For a more conceptually developed approach to this notion, see my discussion in "Bref retour sur mon travail," in Sarah Al-Matary and Florent Guénard, eds., *La démocratie à l'oeuvre: Autour de Pierre Rosanvallon* (Paris: Seuil, 2015), pp. 229–50.

2 See my discussion in *Le peuple introuvable: Histoire de la représentation démocratique en France* (Paris: Gallimard, 1998).

3 A collective good, according to economist Roger Guesnerie's definition (inspired by what Victor Hugo said about the love of a mother for her children), is characterized by the fact that "everyone has a share in it and all

nevertheless have all of it." In this sense it is a *non-competitive* good, and thus radically collective (Roger Guesnerie, personal communication).

4 For individuals to be discriminated against is for them to be unrecognized in the various dimensions of their singularity, and thus not to be considered as *someone*. But it also entails being denied the possibility of being seen as just any individual at all, because these individuals are locked into a category. The person singled out is in this way doubly excluded: from the society of equals as well as from the society of singularities. On this point, see my discussion in *The Society of Equals*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, [2011] 2013).

5 Speaking of the task of producing laws that had been entrusted by citizens to representatives, Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès expressed the widespread idea that the latter ought to be considered "much more capable than [the former] of knowing the general interest" (*Dire de l'Abbé Sieyès sur la question du veto royal à la séance du 7 septembre 1789* [Paris: Baudoin, 1789], p. 14). The American founding fathers used the same language in *The Federalist Papers* (Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008]).

6 Honoré Gabriel Riqueti, Comte de Mirabeau, "Discours devant les états de Provence," January 30, 1789, in *Oeuvres de Mirabeau* (Paris: Brissot-Thivars, 1825–7), vol. 7, p. 7.

7 Published in 1793 as an annex to his *Révolution française*; cited here from *Oeuvres complètes de M. Necker*, vol. 10 (Paris: Treuttel et Wurtz, [1793] 1821), p. 435.

8 On this revealing rumor, see Bronislaw Baczko, "Robespierre-roi ou comment sortir de la Terreur," *Le Débat*, no. 39 (March–May 1986): 104–22. Robespierre had not hesitated, moreover, to declare: "I myself am the people," indicating his claim to embody it (cited in Marcel Gauchet, *Robespierre, l'homme qui nous divise le plus* [Paris: Gallimard, 2018], p. 82).

9 Cited by Patrice Gueniffey, *Bonaparte* (Paris: Gallimard, 2013), p. 517.

10 Madame de Staël, *Considérations sur les principaux événements de la Révolution française* (1818), in *Oeuvres posthumes* (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1838), p. 204 (lines written in the early 1810s).

11 Daniel Stern, *Histoire de la Révolution de 1848* (Paris: Sandré, 1850–3), vol. 3, p. 342.

12 Edgar Quinet, in the 1835 preface to his poem "Napoléon," in *Oeuvres complètes d'Edgar Quinet*, ed. Alfred Dumesnil (Paris: Pagnerre, 1857), vol. 8.

13 Ibid., p. 296. Quinet later disavowed his early enthusiasm for Bonaparte.

14 De Staël, *Considérations sur les principaux événements*, p. 237.

15 Jules Michelet, preface to *Histoire romaine* (1839), in Jules Michelet, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 3: *1832–1839* (Paris: Flammarion, 1973), p. 335.

16 Jules Michelet, *Histoire de la Révolution française* (Paris: Gallimard, coll. Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, [1847] 1952).

17 On this point, see my discussion in *Le bon gouvernement* (Paris: Seuil, 2015).

18 Hence the fact that certain publicists of the period could say that France was already a democracy whereas it was not yet a republic, owing to the practice of censitary suffrage. See Pierre Rosanvallon, "L'histoire du mot 'démocratie' à l'époque moderne," *La Pensée politique*, no. 1 (1993): 11–29.

19 I have developed this point further in *The Society of Equals*.
20 See Rosanvallon, "L'histoire du mot 'démocratie.'"
21 François Guizot, *De la démocratie en France (5 janvier 1849)* (Paris: V. Masson, 1849), p. 9. "This is the sovereign, universal word," he went on to say. "All the parties invoke it and want to appropriate it as a talisman . . . The word 'democracy' has infinite perspectives and promises. It pushes in all directions, it speaks to all the passions" (pp. 9, 12).
22 With the exception of groups on the far right, such as Action Française, or traditionalist Catholic circles that saw democracy as one of the most detestable expressions of godless modernity.
23 On this point, see my discussion in *Le sacre du citoyen: Histoire du suffrage universel en France* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992).
24 Karl Popper, *The Lesson of This Century*, trans. Patrick Camiller (London: Routledge, [1992] 1997), p. 43. I am citing this collection because it contains a set of texts that are very representative of Popper's conception of democracy. See also Karl Popper, "Sur la théorie de la démocratie," *Médiaspouvoirs*, no. 10 (April–June 1988): 7–11.
25 Popper, *Lesson*, pp. 43, 83–5.
26 The will of the people "must be something more than an indeterminate bundle of vague impulses loosely playing about given slogans and mistaken impressions" (Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism. Socialism. Democracy* [New York: Harper & Brothers, 1942], p. 253).
27 Hence his well-known definition: "The democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote" (ibid., p. 269). See chapter 22 in its entirety, "Another Theory of Democracy," and also the conclusion of the book.
28 Ibid., pp. 284–5.
29 Winston Churchill, speech delivered to Parliament, November 11, 1947, in Winston Churchill, *Europe Unite: Speeches 1947 and 1948* (London: Cassell, 1950), p. 200.
30 Étienne Cabet, *Credo communiste*, 3rd edn. (Paris: Prévot, 1841); he had already published *Comment je suis communiste* (Paris: C. Bajat, 1840), and he developed his idea further in *Douze lettres d'un communiste à un réformiste sur la communauté* (Paris: Prévôt, 1841–2).
31 Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel's "Philosophy of Right,"* trans. Annette Jolin and Joseph O'Malley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1843] 1970), p. 83: "As long as the organization of civil society remained political, and the political state and civil society were one, . . . the estates did not signify one thing in the civil world and something other in the political world. They acquired no [additional] significance in the political world, but signified only themselves." Consequently, he also speaks of the Middle Ages as a "democracy of unfreedom" (ibid., p. 32), since the social order of the period was regulated internally by its orders and corps without any need for recourse to a political or state-like sphere.
32 See the passages Claude Lefort devotes to the figure of the egocrat in *Un homme en trop: Réflexions sur "L'archipel du Goulag"* (Paris: Seuil, 1976).
33 Other members of this category may include political cultures of insurrection and theories of simple or direct government that received a great deal of attention in the nineteenth century. On this point, see my discussion in *La*

démocratie inachevée: Histoire de la souveraineté du peuple en France (Paris: Gallimard, 2000).

34 On this point, see Louis Favoreu, "De Gaulle et le Conseil constitutionnel," in Institut Charles de Gaulle, ed., *De Gaulle en son siècle*, vol. 2, *La République* (Paris: Plon/La Documentation française, 1992), p. 500.

III Critique

1 The Issue of Referendums

1 Earlier, the term was used solely in a diplomatic sense. To give one's agreement *ad referendum* meant that the agreement had to be validated by consultation with one's mandators, after the matter was "referred back" to them.

2 Such a vacuum of responsibility does not exist when a Parliament passes a motion of no confidence in the government. In a parliamentary system, a vote of censure of this sort automatically leads to the fall of the government, simultaneously obliging the opposition to constitute an alternative.

3 Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès, *What Is the Third Estate?* ed. S. E. Finer, trans. M. Blondel (London: Pall Mall, [1789] 1963), p. 130.

4 Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès, *Quelques idées de constitution, applicables à la ville de Paris en juillet 1789* (Versailles: Chez Baudouin, 1789), p. 30. "The constitutive power," he wrote elsewhere, "can do anything of this sort" (*Préliminaires de la Constitution française* [Paris: Chez Baudouin, 1789], p. 35).

5 The formula is from a jurist, Ulrich Preuss, cited by Claude Klein, *Théorie et pratique du pouvoir constituent* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1996), p. 4.

6 Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1922] 2005); cf. Carl Schmitt, *Constitutional Theory*, trans. Jeffrey Seitzer (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, [1928] 2008): "The Constitution-Making Power," part I, chapter 8.

7 On this point, see the convincing commentary by Bruno Bernardi in *Qu'est-ce qu'une décision politique?* (Paris: Vrin, 2003), pp. 86–100.

8 See Schmitt, *Constitutional Theory*, p. 125.

9 Cf. Jean-Guy Collignon, *La theórie de l'État du peuple tout entier en Union soviétique* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1967). See also Achille Mestre and Philippe Guttinger, *Constitutionnalisme jacobin et constitutionnalisme soviétique* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1971).

10 Marcel Cachin, "Démocratie et soviétisme," *L'Humanité*, August 17, 1920; emphasis added.

11 Let us note that, in matters of taxation, parliamentary majorities in many cases see themselves as prohibited from suppressing certain taxes without creating equivalent new revenue streams.

12 Even though there is also a procedure known as a "shared" initiative.

13 Constitutional arrangements and the rules governing assemblies everywhere spell out the framework for such a process in great detail, whether at the level of specialized parliamentary commissions or in plenary assemblies.

14 On this point, see the helpful remarks in Élie Cohen, Gérard Grunberg, and Bernard Manin, "Le référendum, un instrument défectueux," *Le Débat*, no. 193 (January–February 2017): 137–40.
15 See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, book 2, chapter 3, "Whether the General Will is Fallible," and book 4, chapter 1, "That the General Will is Indestructible," in *The Social Contract* and *The Discourses*, trans. G. D. H. Cole, rev. J. H. Brumfitt and John C. Hall (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, [1762] 1993); the citation is from book 4, chapter 1, p. 23.
16 At the time, the presumption was that laws would be few in number.
17 *Seconde motion de M. l'abbé Fauchet, sur les droits des représentants et du peuple, faite à l'assemblée générale des représentants de la commune de Paris, le 25 novembre 1789*, place of publication unknown, p. 15.
18 In a formulation by François-Xavier Lanthenas, in *Motifs de faire du 10 août un jubilé fraternel* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1793), p. 19.
19 When referendums are much more frequent, their banalization is also tied to the fact that they often treat questions of local interest. Examples can be found in the local referendums held at the cantonal level in Switzerland or in the numerous referendums organized each year in most states in the West and Midwest of the United States.
20 Voters who consider that they have shifted from left to right in order to remain faithful to their own ideas typify this attitude.
21 During periods of identity politics, the evolution of votes and thus of majorities is in large measure indexed to the major evolutions of society.
22 This particular quality is translated by the fact the laws passed by the electorate – the people – through the referendum procedure cannot be the object of a posteriori judgments on their constitutionality (as France's Constitutional Council has acknowledged), because those laws are direct expressions of the sovereign power. The question of a priori control, however, remains open.
23 On this point, see my discussion of the question of unanimity in historical terms in *Democratic Legitimacy: Impartiality, Reflexivity, Proximity*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, [2008] 2011), pp. 17–21.
24 See in particular all the debates in 1791 over the "democratic" conditions for revising the Constitution.
25 On this point, we may take as exemplary the referendum on self-determination in New Caledonia; it had been anticipated in 1988 that the vote would be preceded by thirty years of reflection on the part of the various communities involved.
26 With the sole restriction of international obligations (those contained in the European Declaration of Human Rights, for example).
27 In this analysis I am following Dominique Rousseau's enlightening remarks in "L'équivoque référendaire," April 22, 2014: https://laviedesidees.fr, a reprise of a presentation made in my 2014 seminar at the Collège de France devoted to the theories and practices of referendums.
28 This function of substitution was particularly evident in France in the early years of the Fifth Republic. As many constitutionalists have observed, the four referendums organized from 1958 to 1962, which amounted to bypassing Parliament, served as substitutes for direct election of the president

of the Republic by universal suffrage. See for example Laurence Morel, "La Ve République, le référendum et la démocratie plébiscitaire de Max Weber," *Jus Politicum*, no. 4 (2010): 203–47.

29 See below, chapter III.3, "From an Imaginary People to a Constructable Democratic Society."

30 Citizens' initiatives may be limited, for example, to requiring that a given question be submitted to the Parliament. A referendum, for its part, may stem from a public initiative.

31 In many countries, the right to petition existed before universal suffrage This right was constitutional not because it was assimilated to a mode of freedom of expression but because the petitions had to be examined by the Parliament and be presented for public debate.

32 We shall return to these points in the concluding pages of this work.

2 Polarized Democracy vs. Pluralized Democracy

1 There is an abundant literature on the long history of the conditions under which the principle of majority has been detached from the horizon of unanimity. On this point, see my *Democratic Legitimacy: Impartiality, Reflexivity, Proximity*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, [2008] 2011).

2 Let us recall that, in the legal realm, a fiction has the goal of countering or simplifying a given reality in order to make that reality governable.

3 Even John Locke belonged in part to this ancient world: the distinction between tacit and explicit consent remained quite vague in his work, as if it were of secondary importance.

4 *Dictionnaire politique* (Paris: Pagnerre, 1842), article "majorité."

5 Francis Wey, *Manuel des droits et des devoirs: Dictionnaire démocratique* (Paris: Paulin et Le Chevalier, 1848).

6 This was the problematics developed in the article "minorité" in Pagnerre's *Dictionnaire politique*. In the article "majorité" in the same dictionary, we find, significantly, that "the majority is a social idea, a social faith manifested by the voice of the greatest number." According to this definition, then, the term did not have a precise arithmetical meaning.

7 On the recognition of the division between opportunists and radicals, see the well-known speeches by Jules Ferry and Pierre Waldeck-Rousseau, cited in Pierre Rosanvallon, *Le peuple introuvable: Histoire de la représentation démocratique en France* (Paris: Gallimard, 1998), pp. 179–80.

8 We must not forget that the American and French Revolutions erupted in a precapitalist world, at a time when the future was being conceived in terms of a relatively egalitarian society of small independent producers.

9 The end of exploitation was supposed to open the way to a society of equals, of which totalitarianism embodies the pathological figure.

10 This impoverishment is connected with what might be called a "desociologization" of politics.

11 *Opinion de Sieyès sur les attributions du jury constitutionnaire*, August 5, 1795 (18 Thermidor Year III).

12 Dominique Rousseau, "Constitutionnalisme et démocratie," September 19, 2008, p. 12: https://laviedesidees.fr.

13 Letter to James Madison, March 15, 1789, in Thomas Jefferson, *Writings* (New York: Library of America, 1984), p. 944.
14 Frank Michelman prompts us to grasp constitutionalism in an interesting way by considering the superimposition of *law-rule* and *self-rule* ("Law's Republic," *Yale Law Journal* 97, no. 8 [July 1988]: 1499–1503.
15 The formula comes from Hérault de Séchelles, the author of the final draft of the 1793 Constitution.
16 The first such authority, the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC), was created in 1887 in the United States to regulate the railroads. It was strengthened a short time later: the federal government was suspected of partiality in the matter, for the president elected in 1889, Benjamin Harrison, had earlier served as an attorney representing the big railroad companies.
17 See especially Claude Lefort, "Le pouvoir" (2000), in Claude Lefort, *Le temps présent: Écrits (1945–2005)* (Paris: Belin 2007), pp. 981–92.
18 This conception has led many American states to deem that the election of judges, along with other categories of public servants, was necessary to give the selection process a democratic character.
19 The various elements that share in the constitution of a democratic quality can also be applied to governmental action itself, and to any public administration. I developed this point in *Le bon gouvernement* (Paris: Seuil, 2015), and it was on this basis that I distinguished, in that book, between *democracies of authorization* (based on elections) and *democracies of exercise* (defined by a set of practices).

3 From an Imaginary People to a Constructable Democratic Society

1 Dated March 26, 1848, the text was published in *Solution du problème social* (1848). It is cited here from Proudhon's *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Lacroix, 1968).
2 Ibid., p. 44.
3 Speech delivered October 8, 1905, cited in the proceedings of the colloquium *Jaurès et la classe ouvrière* (Paris: Éditions ouvrières, 1981), p. 197.
4 "To the workers of France," an appeal made in April 1898 in relation to the legislative elections, reprinted in *Onze ans d'histoire socialiste: Aux travailleurs de France, le conseil national du Parti ouvrier français (1889–1900)* (Paris: G. Jacques, 1901), p. 73. "The Workers' Party, that is, the Party of Work . . . has never made distinctions among the exploited . . . It calls for freeing ourselves by unifying ourselves, the workers of the fields as well as those of the cities, the wage-earners in stores and offices as well as those in workshops, intellectual and scientific work as well as more specifically manual work. The party addresses not only those *without property today* but also those *without property tomorrow*" (Manifesto of the national council of the POF [Workers' Party of France], July 1893, reproduced in ibid., p. 42).
5 See Pierre Birnbaum, *Le peuple et les gros: Histoire d'un mythe* (Paris: Hachette, coll. Pluriel, new edn., 1995).
6 See Jean-Paul Fitoussi and Pierre Rosanvallon, *Le nouvel âge des inégalités* (Paris: Seuil, 1996).

7 In the United States, this factor is linked to a reformulation of the racist sentiment toward Blacks; the welfare state is accused of being at the service of minorities of color rather than white people. On the new tripartite division of social consciousness in France, see in particular Pierre Gilbert, "Rénovation urbaine et fragmentation des classes populaires," in Nicolas Duvoux and Cédric Lomba, eds., *Où va la France populaire?* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2019); Marie Cartier, Isabelle Coutant, et al., *La France des "petits-moyens": Enquête sur la banlieue pavillonnaire* (Paris: La Découverte, 2008); Olivier Schwartz and Annie Collovald, "Haut, bas, fragile: Sociologies du populaire," *Vacarme*, no. 37 (2006): 50–5.
8 See the foundational analyses of Éric Maurin, *Le ghetto français: Enquête sur le séparatisme social* (Paris: Seuil, coll. La République des idées, 2004).
9 For the French case, see especially Yann Algan, Elizabeth Beasley, Daniel Cohen, and Martial Foucault, *Les origines du populisme: Enquête sur un schisme politique et social* (Paris: Seuil, coll. La République des idées, 2019).
10 See Nicolas Duvoux and Adrien Papuchon, "Qui se sent pauvre en France? Pauvreté subjective et insécurité sociale," *Revue française de sociologie* 59, no. 4 (2018): 607–47.
11 See the study *Les revenus et le patrimoine de ménages: Édition 2018* published by the Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques (Paris: INSEE, 2018); it includes a specific study on the 1 percent. The income gap within the 1 percent runs from 1 to 200.
12 Data reported by Pierre-Michel Menger in his account of his 2017 seminar, "Sociologie du travail créateur," in *Annuaire du Collège de France (2016–2017)* (Paris: Collège de France, 2018), pp. 483–502.
13 Such cases include, for example, those in which certain CEOs are remunerated at a level set by special committees or administrative councils run by their peers: a small circle decides what is best for the company head in question, with market criteria being secondary concerns.

4 The Horizon of Democratorship

1 The corresponding French term *démocrature* made its entry into the authoritative French dictionary *Le Petit Robert* in 2019, where it was defined as "a political regime combining democratic appearances with an authoritarian exercise of power." To my knowledge, Pierre Hassner was the first to use the term after the fall of the Berlin Wall, in *Vents d'Est* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1990). See *Les démocratures*, special issue of *Pouvoirs*, no. 169 (April 2019).
2 "Bourgeois and Proletarian Democracy," in Vladimir Il'ich Lenin, *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, [1918] 1965), p. 27 (italics in original).
3 On this point, see the documentation collected in Guy Hermet, Alain Rouquié, and Juan Linz, *Des élections pas comme les autres* (Paris: Presses de la ENS, 1978).
4 On this point, see the pioneering article by Larry Diamond, "Thinking About Hybrid Regimes," *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2 (2002): 21–35.
5 Jean-Luc Mélenchon, *L'ère du peuple* (Paris: Fayard, 2014), p. 98.
6 Marking his discomfort on this point, one of the Podemos leaders has

advanced the notion of "relative irreversibility" (Íñigo Errejón in his dialogue with Chantal Mouffe, in Chantal Mouffe and Íñigo Errejón, *Podemos: In the Name of the People*, trans. Sirio Canós Donnay [London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2016], p. 111).

7 Cited by Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die* (New York: Crown, 2018), p. 35.

8 Ibid., p. 36.

9 We may recall in this regard the famous retort made by French socialist André Laignel to his adversaries in 1981: "You are wrong legally because you are in the minority politically."

10 See John M. Carey, "The Reelection Debate in Latin America," *Latin American Politics and Society* 45, no. 1 (2003): 119–33. The debate led countries such as Colombia and Paraguay ultimately to give up the possibility of presidential reelection after they had experienced the practice for a time.

11 See José Fernando Flórez Ruiz, "Voter sans élire: Le caractère antidémocratique de la réélection présidentielle immédiate en Amérique latine (1994–2018)," PhD thesis, Bayonne, Institut universitaire Varenne, 2018.

12 His successor, Lenin Moreno, one of his loyalists charged with holding a transitional presidency before Correa could return to power thanks to that reform, nevertheless turned things around in 2018 by organizing a victorious referendum (with 64 percent of the votes) that made unlimited reelection to the presidency once again impossible.

13 Fernando Cepeda, cited in José Obdulio Gaviria, *Reelección: Que el pueblo decida* (Bogotá: Planeta, 2004), p. 176.

14 Interview in *Pagine 12*, Buenos Aires, October 2, 2011.

15 For a synthetic overview, see Allan Brewer-Carías, *Dismantling Democracy in Venezuela: The Chávez Authoritarian Experiment* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

16 Orbán's relative prudence can only be understood if we recall that European aid represented 3 percent of the country's GDP, financing most of its infrastructures. For an overview of the steps involved in Hungary's backing away from democratic structures, see János Kornai, "Hungary's U-Turn: Retreating from Democracy," *Journal of Democracy* 26, no. 3 (July 2015): 34–48.

17 This is not a distinguishing feature of populist regimes: legislatures have been reduced to secondary status as part of a general rise in power of the executive branch (on this point, see my analysis in *Le bon gouvernement* [Paris: Seuil, 2015]).

18 According to a study by the NGO Mérték Media Monitor, a Hungarian think tank.

19 For the French context, see especially Pierre Avril's indispensable work *Les conventions de la Constitution: Normes non écrites du droit politique* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1997).

20 At the time of this writing (2018–19), President Donald Trump was halfway through his four-year term. *–Translator's note.*

21 On the hardening of political polarization in the United States, see Levitsky and Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*, and also Michael Tomasky, *If We Can Keep It: How the Republic Collapsed and How It Might Be Saved* (New York: Liveright, 2019).

22 Sinclair Lewis, *It Can't Happen Here* (Garden City, NY: Sun Dial Press, 1935). The book, inspired by the story of Huey Long, Louisiana governor and then senator, depicted an American senator, Buzz Windrip, who set up a totalitarian regime.
23 Glenn Kessler and Meg Kelly, "President Trump Has Made More than 2,000 False or Misleading Claims over 355 Days," *The Washington Post*, January 10, 2018.
24 There is now a considerable literature on the question; see, for example, the colloquium "La démocratie à l'âge de la post-vérité," organized under my auspices at the Collège de France, February 27, 2018; see especially my contribution and that of Dominique Cardon: https://www.college-de-france.fr/site/pierre-rosanvallon/symposium-2018-02-27-09h00.htm.

Conclusion

1 This approach echoes, in the political realm, the revolution brought about by quantum mechanics in the approach to reality. As Alain Connes has emphasized, this branch of physics shows that all the possibilities that can be imagined play a role in the constitution of reality and that reality must be understood as the sum of possible movements (Alain Connes, personal communication).
2 It was on this basis that I developed the project titled "Raconter la vie" (Telling the Story) whose goals and means are presented in my essay *Le parlement des invisibles* (Paris: Seuil, 2014).
3 On the democratic function of surveillance and skepticism, see my *Counter-Democracy: Politics in an Age of Distrust*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [2006] 2008).
4 I developed this approach in *Le bon gouvernement* (Paris: Seuil, 2015).
5 Alexis de Tocqueville, "Considérations sur la Révolution," in Alexis de Tocqueville, *Oeuvres*, vol. 3 (Paris: Gallimard, coll. Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 2004), p. 492.

Annex

1 The definitive work by Franco Venturi, *Roots of Revolution: A History of the Populist and Socialist Movements in Nineteenth Century Russia*, trans. Francis Haskell (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, [1952] 1966), is still essential for the history of Russian populism, even though it introduces a certain bias by seeking to view that instance of populism as a "stage" in the history of socialism and communism in Russia (an approach that allowed the book to be well received in the USSR).
2 A philosopher associated with the Hegelian left, Herzen established ties with Proudhon during his 1847–8 sojourn in Paris. In Russia, Herzen became known as the theoretician of a socialism irrigated by Slavophile ideals. His articles in the two journals he founded in the 1850s and 1860s, *The Polar Star* and *The Bell*, had a considerable intellectual and political impact in the country. Peter Kropotkin emphasized his debt to Herzen in his memoirs.

3 These forays were not unlike the Saint-Simonian missions that had taken place in France in 1831–2.
4 On this world, see Jean Lothe, *Gleb Ivanovič Uspenskij et le populisme russe* (Leiden: Brill, 1963).
5 Peter Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, translated from the Russian (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1899).
6 Recounted in Venturi, *Roots of Revolution*, p. 476.
7 See the excerpts from her memoirs that were published in Christine Fauré, ed., *Vera Zassoulich, Olga Lubatovitch, Elisabeth Kowalskaïa et Vera Figner: Quatre femmes terroristes contre le tsar* (Paris: Maspero, 1978), esp. pp. 60–1.
8 Alexander Herzen, *From the Other Shore* and *The Russian People and Socialism, An Open Letter to Jules Michelet*, ed. Isaiah Berlin, Stuart Hampshire, and Richard Wollheim, trans. Richard Wollheim (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, [1851] 1956), p. 190.
9 Ibid., p. 189.
10 August von Haxthausen, *The Russian Empire, Its People, Institutions and Resources*, trans. Robert Farie (London: Chapman and Hall, [1847–53] 1856).
11 Marx's letter dated March 8, 1881, and its three drafts are available in Theodor Shanin, ed., *Late Marx and the Russian Road: Marx and the "Peripheries" of Capitalism*, trans. David Riazanov (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), pp. 99–122.
12 Ibid., pp. 100, 123.
13 Vladimir Il'ich Lenin, *The Development of Capitalism in Russia: The Process of the Formation of a Home Market for Large-Scale Industry*, translated from the Russian (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, [1899] 1956).
14 Preliminary meetings had been organized starting in 1889.
15 On this election, see Robert F. Durden, *The Climax of Populism: The Election of 1896* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1965).
16 I am summarizing here on the basis of the platform spelled out for the 1892 presidential election, reproduced in George McKenna, ed., *American Populism* (New York: Capricorn Books,1974), pp. 88–94. On the policies put forth by the movement, see also George Brown Tindall, ed., *A Populist Reader: Selections from the Words of American Populist Leaders* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966).
17 "We believe that the time has come when the railroad corporations will either own the people or the people must own the railroads" (article 3 of the 1892 platform, cited in McKenna, *American Populism*, p. 92).
18 This policy led to the depression of 1893.
19 For an approach to the question in French, see Edward Castleton, "Une 'armée d'hérétiques' face à une 'croix d'or': Le premier populisme américain et l'hétérodoxie monétaire," *Critique* 68, nos. 776–7 (January–February 2012): 24–35. Getting a grip on "silverism" was the issue behind a considerable American literature devoted to populism in the late nineteenth century. See the three major works on the topic, written from different perspectives: John D. Hicks, *The Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers Alliance and the People's Party*, new edn. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, [1931] 1955); Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Movement in*

America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976); and Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

20 Even though farmers still represented half the American population at the time.

21 See Hicks, *The Populist Revolt*.

22 On this point, see James Turner, "Understanding the Populists," *The Journal of American History* 67, no. 2 (September 1, 1980): 354–73. The populists were thus reproducing the old opposition between town and country, "cosmopolitans" and "localists," that had dominated the political scene in the late eighteenth century in the form of conflicts between federalists and anti-federalists.

23 On this point, see my discussion in *The Society of Equals*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, [2011] 2013), especially on "constituent racism," pp. 149–64.

24 Léon Lemonnier, "Manifeste du roman populiste," appeared in the periodical *L'Oeuvre* on August 27, 1929, a few months before André Breton's *Seconde Manifeste du surréalisme*. Lemonnier's text was reprinted in book form by the Éditions de La Centaine in January 1930. In the authoritative dictionary *Larousse du XXe siècle*, Lemonnier's was the only literary movement mentioned under the heading "populism," in a reference inserted in volume 5 of the 1932 edition.

25 Paul Crouzet, *Littérature et conférences populaires* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1897), p. 6.

26 Ibid., pp. 77, 88.

27 Léon Lemonnier, *Populisme* (Paris: La Renaissance du livre, 1931). The manifesto, the essential chapters of *Populisme*, and several articles on the literary movement that crystallized around this project are reprinted in Léon Lemonnier, *Manifeste du roman populiste et autres textes*, ed. François Ouellet (Le Rancy: La Thébaïde, 2017).

28 Lemonnier, *Manifeste*, p. 89. "In early August 1929," he specified, "Thérive and I had an interview during which we agreed on the name to give the movement. The word *humilisme* came up first, but *humilisme* has an unfortunate resemblance to *humoriste*, and it had the disadvantage, according to Thérive, of evoking the bleating, sniveling works of Charles-Louis Philippe. We then considered *démotisme*, but that word struck me as too scholarly, too obscure for most people. So the term *populisme* won out: it was clear and striking" (p. 99). Charles-Louis Philippe was the author of a contemporary best-seller, *Bubu de Montparnasse* (1901).

29 Lemonnier, *Manifeste*, p. 86.

30 Ibid.

31 In a preface to a new edition of this novel, Albert Camus praised a work "that neither flatters nor scorns the people of whom it speaks, and that restores to the people the only greatness that cannot be taken from it, that of truth" ("Avant-propos," in Louis Guilloux, *La maison du peuple* [Paris: Grasset, 1953], p. 10).

32 According to its promoters, the prize was intended to reward works that "prefer ordinary people as characters and popular milieus as décors, as long as the works are imbued with authentic humanity." On this prize and its history, see the website devoted to it: www.prixeugenedabit.fr (the prize has taken on the name of its first laureate).

33 Lemonnier, *Manifeste*, p. 69.
34 Ibid., p. 68.
35 On the opposition between "populists" and "proletarians," see Marie-Anne Paveau, "Le 'roman populiste': Enjeux d'une étiquette littéraire," *Mots: Les langages du politique*, no. 55 (June 1998): 45–59.
36 In July 1930, Henri Poulaille published a "counter-manifesto" titled *Nouvel âge littéraire* (Bassac: Plein chant, [1930] 1986). On Poulaille and his proletarian school, see Arthur Greenspan, "Le *Nouvel âge* de Poulaille et la littérature prolétarienne," *Revue des sciences humaines*, no. 190 (1983): 69–76; see also Thierry Maricourt, *Dictionnaire des auteurs prolétariens de langue française, de la Révolution à nos jours* (Amiens: Ancrage, 1994); Michel Ragon, *Histoire de la littérature prolétarienne en France* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1974); and the passages Sarah Al-Matary devoted to the topic in *La haine des clercs: L'anti-intellectualisme en France* (Paris: Seuil, 2019), esp. p. 201.

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