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## Sociological Perspectives on Xeno-Populism: An Introduction

**This is a pre print version of the following article:**

*Original Citation:*

*Availability:*

This version is available <http://hdl.handle.net/2318/1766971> since 2021-01-15T15:27:56Z

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**CLOCKWORK ENEMY**

Xenophobia and Racism  
in the Era of Neo-populism

Edited by  
Alfredo Alietti and Dario Padovan



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Isbn: 9788869772696  
Book series: *Politics*, n. 13

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P.I. C.F. 02419370305

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Alfredo Alietti, Dario Padovan</i> SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON XENO-POPULISM: AN INTRODUCTION	7
<i>Jack Jacobs</i> ANTISEMITISM, ISLAMOPHOBIA, AND RACISM IN THE ERA OF DONALD TRUMP: THE RELEVANCE OF CRITICAL THEORY	47
<i>Richard Chapman</i> A WINDRUSH TO THE BOTTOM?	69
<i>Stephen Pogany</i> REINVENTING THE PROTOCOLS OF THE ELDERS OF ZION: ANTI-SEMITISM IN ORBÁN'S HUNGARY	97
<i>Zbyněk Tarant</i> BE CAREFUL WHO YOUR FRIENDS ARE – ANTI-SEMITISM OF THE CZECH “PRO-ISRAEL” FAR-RIGHT AND ITS SECURITY IMPLICATIONS	137
<i>Ireneusz Krzemiński</i> POLITICS – THE SOURCE OF NATIONALISM AND HOSTILITY TO OTHERS	165
<i>Matt Bolton, Frederick Harry Pitts</i> THE RIGGED SYSTEM AND THE REAL ECONOMY: CORBYNISM, ANTISEMITISM AND PRODUCTIVIST CRITIQUES OF CAPITALISM	187
<i>Claudia Gina Hassan</i> POPULISM, RACISM AND THE SCAPEGOAT	221
AUTHORS	241



ALFREDO ALIETTI, DARIO PADOVAN

## SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON XENO-POPULISM: AN INTRODUCTION

### *Introduction*

In recent years, the vast production on populism and the political earthquake that democracies on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean are experiencing begins with the usual long list of political parties and movements that refer to this ideology, their electoral success and the growing consensus in public opinion.<sup>1</sup> The strength of the neo-nationalist populist discourse appears to be inexorable and so do the various parties linked to it, extreme right, far right, populist radical right, which show the lack of clear definition and unitary definition of this ideological and political patchwork.<sup>2</sup>

Trump's election, the success of Brexit, the victories in the recent elections of the Lega party in Italy, the AFD in Germany, the Front National in France, Orban's authoritarian government, in Hungary, the Law and Justice party in Poland, and the approval in the Netherlands and Denmark of the neo-nationalist parties are some of the empirical evidence on which an increasingly

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- 1 Ulrike M. Vieten, Scott Poynting, 'Contemporary Far-Right Racist Populism in Europe', *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 37:6 (2016), 533-540.
  - 2 Manuela Caiani, Patricia Kröll, 'Nationalism and Populism in Radical Right Discourses in Italy and Germany', *Javnost – The Public*, 24:4 (2017), 336-354; see also Cas Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Joost van Spanje, 'The Wrong and the Right: A Comparative Analysis of "Anti-Immigration" and "Far Right" Parties', *Government and Opposition*, 46: 3 (2011), 293-320; Jasper Muis, Tim Immerzel, 'Causes and Consequences of the Rise of Populist Radical Right Parties and Movements in Europe', *Current Sociology Review*, 67: 6 (2017), 909-939.

important debate is being built.<sup>3</sup> Although there are differences between these national experiences regarding electoral importance and influence on the political system as a whole, it is very clear that their ideological substratum tends to show multiple common points. The ones that are most discussed in the literature concern the strong xenophobic and anti-immigration policy, the law and order orientation, an anti-establishment and anti-globalization vision and a nativist ideology.<sup>4</sup> The comparative interpretations of the new configuration of radical right-wing parties highlight a shared “core of ethno-nationalist xenophobia and anti-establishment populism”, which is flanked by “a general sociocultural authoritarianism that stresses issues such as law and order and family values”.<sup>5</sup>

It could be said with an oxymoron that we are witnessing a sort of internalization of populist nationalism.<sup>6</sup> In other words,

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- 3 Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*; Jans Rydgren, ‘Immigration Sceptics, Xenophobes or Racists? Radical Right-wing Voting in Six West European Countries’, *European Journal of Political Research*, 47 (2008), 737-765; Vieten, Poynting, ‘Contemporary Far-Right Racist Populism in Europe’; Muis, Immerzel, ‘Causes and Consequences of the Rise of Populist Radical Right Parties and Movements in Europe’.
  - 4 Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*; Kris Dunn, ‘Preference for Radical Right-wing Populist Parties Among Exclusive-nationalists and Authoritarians’, *Party Politics*, 21:3 (2015), 367-380; Yannis Stavrakakis and others, ‘Extreme Right-wing Populism in Europe: Revisiting a Reified Association’, *Critical Discourse Studies* 14:4 (2017), 420–439; Roger Brubaker, ‘Populism and Nationalism’, *Nations and Nationalism*, 26:1 (2020), 44-66.
  - 5 Rydgren, ‘Immigration Sceptics, Xenophobes or Racists?’, p. 241; see also Jackie Hogan, Kristin Haltinner, ‘Floods, Invaders, and Parasites: Immigration Threat Narratives and Right-Wing Populism in the USA, UK and Australia’, *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 36:5 (2015), 520-543; Thomas Greven, ‘The Rise of Right-Wing Populism in Europe and the United States’, Perspectives Report Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Berlin, 2016.
  - 6 Roger Brubaker, ‘Why populism?’, *Theory and Society*, 46 (2017), 357-385; Brubaker, ‘Between Nationalism and Civilizationism. The European Populist Moment in Comparative Perspective’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 40:8 (2017), 1196-1226.

economic, social and multicultural globalization, considered as a negative factor, is contrasted by the globalization of populist and nationalist politics, which tends to reaffirm new identity closures and new borders. However, this political trend cannot be limited exclusively to the last decade. In the time span between the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the same dynamics were present in the single Western societies. If, on the one hand, the acceleration towards this logic of government was achieved on the basis of the economic crisis and the so-called refugee emergency, in a sort of negative continuum, within the Western democracies there has always been the temptation of an authoritarian turnabout. In other words, the popularity of populism, to quote Taguieff,<sup>7</sup> is a social and sociological phenomenon whose roots are well planted in the ground of the changes occurred. We consider it futile to search for a valid and exhaustive definition of a populist model, or a model of national-populism able to recompose the different fragments with which the political declinations of this universe are expressed.<sup>8</sup> The effort to understand the historical, empirical, theoretical and ideological variety of populisms, in a useful and valid typology, is very complicated.<sup>9</sup> Our interest is not to retrace this wide and articulated debate, which is beyond our objective, but to highlight how xenophobic and exclusionary rhetoric is the central feature of this political dynamic called “populism”. We agree with Taguieff’s statement that “the only way to conceptualize populism is to designate a particular type of social and political mobilization, which means that the term can indicate only one dimension of political action and/or discourse [...] It is a political style suitable for various ideological contexts”.<sup>10</sup> From

7 Taguieff Pierre-André, ‘La scienza politica di fronte al populismo: da miraggio concettuale e problema reale’, *Trasgressioni*, 3 (2000), 43-76.

8 Brubaker, ‘Populism and Nationalism’; Paul Taggart, *Populism* (Buckingham, UK: Open University Press, 2000); Margaret Donovan, *Populism* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981).

9 Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (New York: Verso, 2005); Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*; Nadia Urbinati, ‘The Populist Phenomenon’, *Raisons Politiques*, 51 (2013), 137-154.

10 Taguieff Pierre-André, ‘La scienza politica di fronte al populismo’, p. 43.



the extensive literature we can draw a series of analyses aimed at defining the analytical boundaries of this concept, although it is controversial and slippery becoming a “catch-all word”.<sup>11</sup>

### *Populism as mobilization of xenophobic feelings*

In the face of the evident difficulties of an ideal-typical generalization, it is indisputable that there are essential features that historically characterize populism, be it right or left. As far as we are concerned, we wonder whether one of these traits that distinguishes populism in its right-wing variant from other populist forms is racism in its different versions. On this point, the answer is not unambiguous. There are more exclusionary populist experiences, or more inclusive of ethnic minorities or immigrant communities. An example might be the political style of some leftist party, which expresses a populist style in its political discourse whereas at the same time it asks for a very inclusive politics for ethnic minorities. In this perspective it is a stretch to define it xeno-populist when compared with extreme right-wing positions. It seems quite clear to us that the renewed far-right populism is fundamentally nourished by a racist and xenophobic discursive strategy and administrative practice.<sup>12</sup> This is the reason why we have decided to call this political model “xeno-populism” in order

11 Alberto Martinelli, ‘Populism and the Crisis of Representative Democracy, in Martinelli’, in *Populism on the Rise. A Challenge for Democracy?*, ed. by Alberto Martinelli, ISPI, Milan, 2016, pp. 13-32; see also Taggart, *Populism*; Noam Gidron, Bart Bonikowski, ‘Varieties of Populism: Literature Review and Research Agenda’, Working Paper no. 13-0004. (Cambridge: Harvard University, Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, 2013); Cas Mudde, ‘The Populist Zeitgeist’, *Government and Opposition*, 39:4 (2004), 542-563; Cas Mudde, Kaltwasser Cristóbal Rovira, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). As Stanley affirms ‘populism is a thin ideology; it is diffuse in its lack of a programmatic centre of gravity, and open in its ability to cohabit with other, more comprehensive, ideologies’ (Ben Stanley, ‘The Thin Ideology of Populism’, *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 13:1 (2008), 95-110., pp. 99-100).

12 Vieten, Poynting, ‘Contemporary Far-Right Racist Populism in Europe’.

to capture more cogently its political and expressive strategies. In this sense, we are in line both with the Sivanandan definition of xeno-racism<sup>13</sup> and the idea of xenophobic populism suggested by Inglehardt and Norris.<sup>14</sup> This anti-foreignness sentiment, this fear of strangers means at the same time defending and preserving “our people”, our way of life, our standard of living, and our “race”.<sup>15</sup> This xenophobia is a way to denigrate people before segregating or expelling them, “a feature of the Manichaeic world of global capitalism, where there are only the rich and the poor [...] The rhetoric of demonization is racist, but the politics of exclusion is economic: a prelude to creating a peripatetic underclass of international *Untermenschen*”.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, this rhetoric of demonization is used to support, as suggested by Heitmeyer and Zick,<sup>17</sup> forms of group-oriented enmity and a general attitude of rejection of strangers and all cultural or religious symbols and rituals that stem from them. This construction of the enemy implies not only their demonization, but also their dehumanization. Here “phobia” becomes racism because it transforms the bearer of a perceived threat into a racialized “Other”, where there is a strong continuity between ethnic characters and moral behaviour, where cultural differences are crystallized once for all.

The claim of primacy of the national community in the recognition and access of individuals to their rights clearly

13 Ambalavaner Sivanandan, ‘Poverty is the New Black’, *Race & Class*, 43:2 (2001), 1-6; see also Lia Fekete, ‘The Emergence of Xeno-racism’, *Race & Class*, 43:2 (2001), 23-40.

14 Ronald F. Inglehart, Pippa Norris, ‘Trump and the Xenophobic Populist Parties: The Silent Revolution in Reverse’, *Perspectives on Politics*, 15:2 (2017), 443-54.

15 In the xeno-populism, analogously to the ethnopopulism outlined by Laclau, there is a tendency to set limits on the community; the ‘other’ is outside the community and in this sense minorities can survive within a defined territory, but marginality must remain their constant attribute, once the ‘ethnic principle’ has defined the limits of the community space (Laclau, *On Populist Reason*).

16 Sivanandan, ‘Poverty is the New Black’.

17 Wilhelm Heitmeyer, Andreas Zick, ‘Anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and Group-focused Enmity in Germany’, Research Note, Institute for Interdisciplinary Research on Conflict and Violence. University of Bielefeld May 2004.

underlines that xeno-populism is a tool to achieve consensus by denouncing “illegal privileges unduly enjoyed by certain individuals”. In this frame, xenophobic rhetoric indiscriminately affects those people who do not “stay in their place” because they receive more than regular people – the honest working national citizens – regardless of whether they are migrants, criminals, bureaucrats, drug addicts or members of the financial élite, often represented by the figure of the Jew.<sup>18</sup>

Here we see the chaotic discursive mix that characterizes populism, i.e. the fact that different subjects who have nothing to do with each other, and who are often at odds with each other, become the target of hostility and denigration. The logic of populism does not discern the different social subjects, but it groups them all in the same hotchpotch. As Mudde highlights, the success of xeno-populist parties “was enabled by the pre-existence of a fertile breeding ground of popular resentment around immigration, crime and party politics across Western Europe”.<sup>19</sup> But this discursive strategy that unifies a kaleidoscope of discriminatory meanings in the figure of the migrant has long been widely recognized. Traverso describes it very well: “the unifying element of this new extreme right resides in xenophobia, actualized in the rejection of immigrants”, where “the immigrant in our days is the heir to the ‘dangerous classes’ of the 19th century, represented by the positive social sciences of the time as a receptacle for all social pathologies, from alcoholism to crime and prostitution, up to epidemics such as cholera” or, we can add, coronavirus.<sup>20</sup>

The same discourse against the progressive and globalized élite tends to focus on the injustice represented by the alleged illegitimate aid given to the foreigner (immigrant and refugee)

18 Yannis Papadopulos, ‘Il nazionalpopulismo nell’Europa Occidentale: un fenomeno ambivalente’, *Trasgressioni*, 25:3 (2000), 109-137.

19 Cas Mudde, ‘The 2012 Stein Rokkan Lecture. Three Decades of Populist Radical Right Parties in Western Europe: So What?’, *European Journal of Political Research*, 52 (2012), 1-19.

20 Traverso Enzo, ‘La fabrique de la haine: xénophobie et racisme en Europe’, *Contretemps*, 9 (2011) <<https://www.contretemps.eu/la-fabrique-de-la-haine-xenophobie-et-racisme-en-europe/>>; Alfredo Alietti, Dario Padovan, *Sociologia del razzismo* (Rome: Carocci, 1999).

rather than to the national citizen.<sup>21</sup> However, in the literature it is possible to find examples of this new populism that identify the passage from a discriminatory and exclusionist will to a declared nationalist and nativist inclusion strategy. We move, as we have observed on other occasions<sup>22</sup> from heterophobic racism to homophile racism, where the emphasis is on strengthening the ethno-national community and its borders at the expense of policies of hatred and exclusion that are less acceptable. In reading the political manifestos promoted by the main European extreme right parties, it emerges that “the essentialist ascriptions of race are unambiguously tractable in relation to the legal norms of citizenship”.<sup>23</sup> Here the national or ethno-racial dimension tends to assume a renewed centrality in citizenship policies. As others scholars have highlighted,

the radical right has increasingly gone beyond exclusionary populism to adopt a new form of cultural nativism, which, rather than promoting traditional right-wing extremist notions of ethnic and ethno-cultural superiority, aims at the protection of the indigenous culture, customs and way of life.<sup>24</sup>

“Cultural nativism” feeds a racial dimension that is based on well-known forms of differentialist racism understood in its meaning of irreconcilability between different cultures. The lack of phenotypic racial characters of people targeted by differential

21 Brubaker, ‘Populism and Nationalism’; see also Stavrakakis, and others, ‘Extreme Right-Wing Populism in Europe’.

22 Alfredo Alietti, Dario Padovan, *Metamorfosi del razzismo*, (Milano: FrancoAngeli, 2005); see also Pierre-André Taguieff, *La forza del pregiudizio*, (Bologna: il Mulino, 1994).

23 Suman Gupta, Satnam Virdee, ‘Introduction. European Crises: Contemporary Nationalisms and the Language of “Race”’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 41:10 (2018), 1747-1764, p. 1758.

24 Hans-George Betz, ‘Xenophobia, Identity Politics and Exclusionary Populism in Western Europe’, *Socialisti Register*, 39 (2003) <<https://socialistregister.com/index.php/srv/issue/view/440>>, p. 195. For a discussion on “nativism”, its genealogy and relation with xenophobia see Anita Guia, ‘The Concept of Nativism and Anti-Immigrant Sentiments in Europe’, European University Institute Max Weber 2016/20, 2016.

racism makes this racism approach anti-Semitism. As suggested by Balibar,<sup>25</sup> all the contemporary differential racisms can be understood from the formal point of view as generalized anti-Semitism. For this reason, it is possible to understand the figure of the fanatic and intolerant Muslim as analogous to the dreadful, conspirator, outrageous Jew. Hence the further definition of “differentialist nativism”<sup>26</sup> which highlights how xeno-populist parties and movements build their identities on the foundations of civic values that justify the exclusion of the foreigner considered culturally incompatible with the liberal freedoms of the Western societies.<sup>27</sup>

A further rhetorical element concerns the claim of the risk of a progressive ‘ethnic replacement’ linked to migratory flows and, more recently, to flows of asylum seekers.<sup>28</sup> Most of the times, this threat is represented in the statements of the various xeno-populist leaders with references to Islamic communities, alien to our model of civilisation. Islamophobia, in fact, is one of the fundamental points of the xeno-populist imagination, capable of arousing a broad consensus among the different strata of Western societies, also following the tragic events that have occurred in recent years.<sup>29</sup> A very important consequence of the growing electoral and xeno-populist political force is the normalization of these exclusionary features and of the “Western supremacy” within public opinion. The

25 Etienne Balibar, Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race Nation Classe* (Paris: Edition La Découverte, 1988).

26 Betz, ‘Xenophobia, Identity Politics and Exclusionary Populism’.

27 Pietro Gattinara Castelli, ‘Mobilizing Against “the Invasion”’: Far Right Protest and the “Refugees Crisis” in Italy’, *Mondi Migranti*, 3 (2017), 74-95.

28 About the relationship between “crisis” of refugees in Europe and the increase of xeno-populism see Elżbieta M. Goździak, Izabella Main, Brigitte Suter, eds, *Europe and the Refugee Response A Crisis of Values?* (London, New York: Routledge Studies in Development, Mobilities and Migration, 2020).

29 Enes Bayrakli, Farif Hafez, eds, *European Islamophobia Report 2017* (Seta Washington/Istanbul, 2018); Abdeslam Marfouk, ‘I’Am Neither Racist nor Xenophobic, But: Dissecting Attitudes Towards a Ban on Muslim’s Immigration’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 42:10 (2019), 1747-1765.

“good reasons” for racism and the direct discrimination against all foreigners weaken the democratic structures that emerged after the IIWW, opening up to scenarios in which the authoritarian systems of government of uncertainty acquire legitimacy. Our attempt to highlight the racist component of populism as a strategic aspect of its success is also confirmed by the data that can be extrapolated from different international surveys.

As we have previously reported, the racist anti-immigration issues are the core message of the xeno-populist parties and radical right movements, framing immigrants as national and cultural threats, abusers of the generosity of welfare states of Western democracies, main cause of criminality, unemployment and so on.<sup>30</sup> Various sources clearly show how an attitude of diffidence towards foreigners, especially Muslims, is widespread in Europe.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, it is very clear how the voters of the xeno-populist parties absolutely opposed to the presence of ethnic minorities, Muslims, Jewish communities, refugees and asylum seekers. Here a sort of xenophobic continuum is evident in the opinion expressed by those subjects who are oriented to electorally support xeno-populist parties and movements. For example, the research carried out by the PEW in 2016 shows a close relationship between voting for xeno-populist parties and the aversion to immigrants and multi-ethnic society:

In the UK fully 64% of people who support the right-wing UK Independence Party (UKIP) say that a more racially, ethnically and nationally diverse society makes the UK a worse place to live. Only 32% of Conservative Party adherents and 19% of Labour Party supporters share that view. In France, 51%, of those who feel closest

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30 Jans Rydgren, ‘The Sociology of the Radical Right’, *Annual Review of Sociology*, 33 (2007), 241-262.

31 Richard Wike, Bruce Stokes, Katie Simmons, ‘Europeans Fear Wave of Refugees Will Mean More Terrorism, Fewer Jobs’, Pew Research Center, 2016 <<https://www.pewresearch.org/global/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2016/07/Pew-Research-Center-EU-Refugees-and-National-Identity-Report-FINAL-July-11-2016.pdf>>; FRA (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights), *EU-Midis Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey* (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2017).

to the anti-immigrant National Front say increasing diversity is bad for France. Just 34% of supporters of the Republicans and 11% of Socialist Party adherents agree. In Germany 62% of people who have a favourable opinion of the right-wing party Alternative for Germany (AfD) believe Germany is worse off because of growing numbers of people with different racial, ethnic, and national identities. And in Sweden, 65% of the public that holds a favourable view of the anti-immigrant Swedish Democrats voices the opinion that more diversity is making Sweden a worse place to live.<sup>32</sup>

With reference to this survey, the trend is confirmed by the identification of the attitude against the Islamic communities, which shows how the ideologically right-oriented voters are in a clear majority against them and, in particular, there is a substantial percentage difference with the left-oriented voters, which goes from a minimum of 15% in the UK and 18% in France to a maximum of 30% in Greece and Germany.<sup>33</sup>

This set of empirical evidence shows a clear trend on the political demand which finds its answer in xeno-populism.<sup>34</sup> If we look at the political offer, in fact, it is equally clear that immigration and Muslim communities are dominant issues to gain electoral consensus. Among the many possible examples, Italy certainly represents a paradigm. The report “Barometer of Hate” published by Amnesty International has monitored the hate speech in the social profiles (Facebook and Twitter) of the candidates in the last electoral campaign in Italy. Most of the hate speech analysed came from Lega Nord (51% of statements) and Fratelli d’Italia (27%). Migration was the key issue of the collected data (91%), followed by the Islamophobic attitudes (11%). The main topics concern the typical stereotypes attributed to Islam and the figure of the Muslim: their invasion, too many mosques in the national context, the subordination/inferiorization of women and, most importantly, “the perception of Islam not as a religion, but as an imposition of its ‘own’ law and justice”.<sup>35</sup>

32 Wike, Stokes, Simmons, ‘Europeans Fear Wave of Refugees’.

33 Ibid.

34 Rydgren, ‘Immigration Sceptics, Xenophobes or Racists?’.

35 Amnesty International 2018, *Conta fino a 10. Barometro dell’odio in campagna elettorale* <<https://www.amnesty.it/barometro-odio/>>.

The research carried out by VOX Italian Observatory for Human Rights on online hate speech, on the basis of the analysis of 215,377 tweets, shows that one negative tweet out of 3 is against immigrants and highlights its increase compared to previous surveys on tweets against Muslims and Jews.<sup>36</sup> As Censis, an independent centre of social research, highlighted in its last annual report, the Italian society is experiencing a sort of “psychic sovereignism” defined by a closure, a retreat, and an intolerance towards diversity, especially Muslim communities. We can affirm that this condition is widespread inside the European societies, and it can feed a structural racism and discrimination at every level of collective life. From a report of FRA, published in 2017, it emerges that one out four (24 %) respondents felt discriminated against because of their ethnic or immigrant background in the 12 months preceding the survey, and looking at the past five years, four out of 10 respondents (38 %) felt discriminated against because of their ethnic or immigrant background, skin colour or religion in daily life.<sup>37</sup>

### *Socio-economic crisis and crisis of the multicultural model*

Generally speaking, the reasons for the return to national primacy and the rejection of the foreigner appear to be closely linked to the deep economic crisis of the last decade that has affected Europe, and to the sterile response of the European Union to the growing demands for inclusion, particularly of the working classes, which are most exposed to the effects of social polarisation. As it has been pointed out, the dominant public and political discourse about the financial crisis has been superseded by an “immigration crisis” and coevally an “EU crisis” and “disaffection has gradually come to be focused more on migration and immigrants than on neoliberalism and

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36 Vox, Osservatorio Italiano per i Diritti, *La mappa dell'intolleranza. 4° anno, 2019* <[http://www.voxdiritti.it/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/190610\\_VOX-Comunicato-mappa-2019\\_-completo-compresso.pdf](http://www.voxdiritti.it/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/190610_VOX-Comunicato-mappa-2019_-completo-compresso.pdf)>.

37 FRA, *EU-Midis Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey*.



austerity”.<sup>38</sup> Undoubtedly, in this analysis we can find useful elements to understand the current situation. Specifically, it is evident how the most vulnerable fringes in certain national contexts – Italy is a significant example – have widely accepted the slogans of the xeno-populist parties. The reduction of welfare resources, the progressive decay of citizenship rights, and job insecurity are the main factors that have opened the way to the social and electoral consensus of right-wing populism. Nevertheless, this interpretation may be largely reductive of the current situation. In fact, it should also be evaluated how in other nations less affected by the generalized crisis, there has been a growing consensus among extreme right-wing parties and movements: Germany, Holland, Denmark, Hungary, Poland are contexts in which the impact of the socio-economic crisis has been minor, or at least better absorbed, and, nevertheless, they too have had, at different levels, an incessant growth of populist and neo-nationalist ideologies. With reference to the typology proposed by Kitschel, this type of xeno-populism can be identified as “welfare chauvinism”, in which the resources of social protection and inclusion must function according to the principle of national preference.<sup>39</sup>

This means that we are facing a crisis of Western societies in their multicultural prerogatives which amplifies the possible repercussions of economic fragility in a negative way. It must be acknowledged that the current socio-political dynamics should not surprise us too much. For some time now, Europe has been plagued by xeno-populist tendencies that have been analysed and debated at least since the end of the 1970s, coinciding, first of all, with the decline of ideologies linked to workers’ and trade union struggles, and the social-democratic experiences that marked the post-war period or the famous “glorious thirty” and with the end of the so-called multicultural integration model.

The neoliberal turning point promoted by Thatcher and Reagan during the 1980s represents the point of no return of a policy marked by authoritarian populism, as defined and analysed by Stuart Hall in

38 Gupta, SVirdee, ‘Introduction. European Crises’, p. 1750.

39 Herbert Kitschelt, *The Radical Right in Western Europe: A Comparative Analysis* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1995), cit. in Papadopoulos, ‘Il nazionalpopulismo nell’Europa Occidentale’.

reference to the success of Thatcherism and its incarnation as a law and order society.<sup>40</sup> In a previous work, *Policing the crisis*, edited by Stuart Hall himself and published in 1978, as Mellino correctly points out, it is clear that “in a historical context marked by national decline and economic stagnation, ‘governing the crisis’ becomes ‘governing migration’, through a criminalizing construction of black populations as elements alien to cultural homogeneity and social order”.<sup>41</sup> In this historical phase, a new long-term cultural hegemony is imposed, shifting the balance of social classes to the right, in other words “a reactionary common sense put at the service of practices and solutions of the radical right”.<sup>42</sup>

Subsequently, between the late 1980s and early 1990s, the advent of populist politicians, such as Berlusconi and Bossi in Italy, leaders of Forza Italia and Lega Nord respectively, or the electoral successes of Haider in Austria and Le Pen in France, shows very clearly how long the process that has contributed to the current reality has been. According to Marco Tarchi, at the end of the 20th century the radical right embraced populism, creating the basis for a relatively cohesive political family on common programmatic bases, including a persistence on the fight against immigration, an emphasis on localism and territorial identities, and a claim against the partyocracy.<sup>43</sup>

The 2008 crisis aggravated the situation, functioning as a detonator of movements already present and widespread in European and North American societies. The growing insecurity connected to the presence of immigrant populations and the disruptive force of the flows of refugees and asylum seekers has favoured a shift towards a policy of law and order and a return to an “imagined community” that excludes ethnic diversity. The immigrant, often seen as a Muslim, becomes the central figure

40 Stuart Hall, *Politiche del quotidiano. Culture, identità e senso comune* (Milano: Il Saggiatore, 2006).

41 Miguel Mellino, *Governare la crisi dei rifugiati. Sovranismo, neoliberalismo, razzismo e accoglienza in Europa* (Rome: DeriveApprodi, 2019), p. 19.

42 Hall, *Politiche del quotidiano*.

43 Tarchi Marco, ‘L’ascesa del neopopulismo in Europa’, *Trasgressioni*, XV:29 (2000), 3-22.

of a social, political and economic drift which must necessarily be responded to with the closure and the putting on hold of the plural society.<sup>44</sup> In a context of growing uncertainty and profound transformations of social, economic and political structures, the electoral base that supports the political discourse of xeno-populist parties is often identified in the so-called “globalization losers”, in particular white male working class citizens.<sup>45</sup> As previously pointed out, “the anti-immigrant, racially tinged and anti-Muslim claims that are at the centre of most populist right platforms today are well configured to speak directly to people who felt that their social status is threatened”, a sort of “status anxiety”.<sup>46</sup> This analysis, which sees the capability of right-wing populism to emotionally capture the white working class “globalisation losers” as a fundamental strategy, could be bent towards the perspective of “productive populism”. As John Abromeit suggests

In producerist populist ideology, people are defined as virtuous producers and the enemies of the people as immoral parasites. One first notice that a friend-enemy logic is at work here, not unlike the one Carl Schmitt would later define as putatively essential to any truly political movement or ideology. This friend- enemy logic is specifically populist for two reasons. First, the “friend” is defined as the vast majority of the common and/or native members of the “people”. while the “enemy” is viewed as a minority elite who live among the people, but do not really belong to them and, in fact, exploit them and prevent them from realizing a harmonious and egalitarian community.<sup>47</sup>

44 Gupta, SVirdee, ‘Introduction. European Crises’.

45 Noam Gidron, Peter H. Hall, ‘The Politics of Social Status: Economic and Cultural Roots of the Populist Right’, *The British Journal of Sociology*, 68 (2017), pp. S57-S84; Dietmar Loch, Ov Cristian Norocel, ‘The Populist Radical Right in Europe. A Xenophobic Voice in the Global Economic Crisis’, in *Europe’s Prolonged Crisis*, ed. by Hans-Jörg Trenz, Carlo Ruzza, and Virginie Guiraudon (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 251-269.

46 Gidron, Hall, ‘The Politics of Social Status’, p. 263; see also Alfredo Alietti, Dario Padovan, *Metamorfosi del razzismo* (Milano: FrancoAngeli, 2005).

47 John Abromeit, ‘Transformations of Producerist Populism in Western Europe’, in *Transformations of Populism in Europe and Americas. History and Recent Tendencies*, ed. by John Abromeit, Bridget M. Chesterton and York Norman (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), pp. 231-264.

Moreover, the current instantiation of these oppositions shows labour as united with industrial and agrarian capital under the sign of “producers”. while the parasitic elements are identified chiefly as the agents of monetary institutions – the banker, the financier, the “money power”. and so on.<sup>48</sup> The final step is the embodiment of such powers, which become the Jew or the European autocrat. What this analysis misses here is the targeting of the non-white labour, which is seen as the instrumental hand of parasitic agents. The Black labour is not only mobilized by the global capital or the finance, but it is in itself the enemy of the white-labour for it is unskilled and prone to the power of the élite.

Inglehart and Norris, in their analysis of contemporary neo-populism, extend this producerist approach to wider living conditions, pointing out how the socioeconomic variant in the explanation of populist success is founded in the

“rising economic insecurity and social deprivation among the left-behinds has fuelled popular resentment of the political classes. This situation is believed to have made the less secure strata of society – low-waged unskilled workers, the long-term unemployed, households dependent on shrinking social benefits, residents of public housing, single-parent families, and poorer white populations living in inner-city areas with concentrations of immigrants – susceptible to the anti-establishment, nativist, and xenophobic scare-mongering exploited of populist movements, parties, and leaders, blaming ‘Them’ for stripping prosperity, job opportunities, and public services from ‘Us’.<sup>49</sup>

In addition to this socio-economic dimension – that doesn’t pay the due attention to the role that the labour status plays in the rise of populism – the authors place the cultural dimension side by side, highlighting how cultural backlash is the factor that shows the greatest connection with the propensity for xeno-populist voting, which is generally stronger among the older generation,

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48 Mark Loeffler, ‘Populists and Parasites: On Producerist Reason’, in *Transformations of Populism in Europe and Americas*.

49 Ronald F. Inglehart, Pippa Norris, ‘Trump, Brexit, and the Rise of Populism: Economic Have-Nots and Cultural Backlash’, Faculty Research Working Paper n16-026 (Cambridge: Harvard University, Kennedy School of Government, 2016), p. 2.

men, the less educated, the religious, and ethnic majorities.<sup>50</sup> However, some reflections show that the general characteristics of the voters of xeno-populist parties are quite variable and that not always those with less cultural capital, the so-called “usual suspects”, constitute the hard core of the populist electorate. The case of support for Jobbik, for example, shows how it is significant among young and higher educated people<sup>51</sup> The discussion, therefore, is differentiated and articulated in a connection between cultural elements that recall the properly ethnocentric and identity dimension, and socio-economic elements that determine a status of anxiety towards a situation of uncertainty and crisis. Basically we believe that it is right to highlight the connection of these xeno-populist vectors which seek “to exploit the anxieties and feelings of insecurity provoked by the socio-economic turmoil and ruptures associated with globalization and neoliberalism as well as the widespread *ressentiments* in response to the socio-cultural transformation of Western European societies caused by the presence of a growing resident alien population”.<sup>52</sup>

However, the theory of cultural backlash has to be compared with the fact that the attitude against immigration is not necessarily always present within a cultural frame, rather this negative feeling is associated with both cultural and economic variables, i.e. a value dimension associated with a material dimension. Consequently, it seems legitimate to observe that xeno-populist parties need “to mobilise voters concerned with the cultural as well as the economic impact of immigration, but the more numerous latter groups is pivotal in allowing the far right to extend its support beyond its secure voting base”.<sup>53</sup>

50 Ibid.; Inglehart, Norris, ‘Trump and the Xenophobic Populist Parties: The Silent Revolution in Reverse’, *Perspectives on Politics*, 15:2 (2017), 443-54.

51 Jasper Muis, Tim Immerzel, ‘Causes and Consequences of the Rise of Populist Radical Right Parties and Movements in Europe’, *Current Sociology Review*, 67:6 (2017), 909-939.

52 Hans-George Betz, ‘Xenophobia, Identity Politics and Exclusionary Populism in Western Europe’, *Socialisti Register*, 39 (2003) <https://socialistregister.com/index.php/srv/issue/view/440>, p. 205.

53 Daphne Halikiopoulou, and Tim Vlandas, ‘What Is New and What Is Nationalist about Europe’s New Nationalism? Explaining the Rise of

Essentially, as it has resulted from the analysis on the impact of the 2008–09 financial and economic crisis, the cultural backlash and economic insecurity explanations are connected with each other, in other words economic insecurity has a direct impact on values and beliefs.<sup>54</sup> Another significant empirical evidence highlights that in specific regions with an increase in unemployment are more likely *to have a negative attitude toward immigrants, mostly because of their impact on the economy and not because of their alien cultural identity*.<sup>55</sup>

Therefore, it is always appropriate to evaluate how much the culturalist reduction is able to explain in its entirety the xenophobic feeling in its version of political demand of a part of society. It is quite clear that the prevalence of one factor over another, depending on the results of the research carried out, is not so decisive. In fact, an important moment of synthesis of xeno-populism lies at the junction between the reaction to the economic crisis and its material consequences, and the production of a fictitious social and national cohesion based on the principle of the struggle between “us and them”.<sup>56</sup> In an attempt to erase the social differences present in its consensual base, the xeno-populist ideology is configured, on the political offer side, as Gino Germani outlined some time ago, as a socio-psychological mobilization, which, however, does not alter even slightly the fundamental neo-liberal economic and social structures.<sup>57</sup>

It directly addresses the psychology of individuals disillusioned with representative democracy – such as members of the productive and petit-bourgeois classes – who feel apathetic and withdrawn from public space, offering them a new opportunity for

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the Far Right in Europe?’, *Nation and Nationalism*, 25:2 (2019), 409-434, p. 425.

54 Yann Alagan, Sergei Guriev, Elias Papaioannou, Evgenia Passari, ‘The European Trust Crisis and the Rise of Populism’, *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity* (2017), 309-382; see also Gidron, Bonikowski, ‘Varieties of Populism’.

55 Ibid.

56 See Caiani, Kröll, ‘Nationalism and Populism’.

57 Pasquale Serra, *Individualismo e populismo. La destra nella crisi italiana dell’ultimo ventennio* (Rome: Datanews, 1997).

participation, albeit by other means.<sup>58</sup> In this case the various xeno-populist parties tend to emphasize the risk of the multicultural and multiethnic society both for its inability to assimilate differences and to brand the immigrant as an illegitimate subject of citizenship rights, especially when the material basis of such citizenship is challenged by the growing welfare state crisis or the economic crisis. The problem is that this psychological mobilization actually hides the impact of neoliberal policies in the production of inequalities by promoting the scapegoat policy.

In this vicious circle, a brief consideration on the role of the mass media and social networks is appropriate. On the one hand, in the past decades we have witnessed a process of “tabloidisation” of political discourse, which has intensified and nourished the properly emotional aspects of xeno-populist rhetoric, which dominated the political discourse in Europe in the past.<sup>59</sup> As it has been rightly pointed out, this dynamic does not necessarily mean changing public attitudes and policy changes, it provides at the very least a more favourable ‘discursive opportunity structure’ for xeno-populist public discourses.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, the traditional and new media discourse builds what we call the “xenophobic common sense” which normalises the resentment and racist attitudes in the public opinion.<sup>61</sup> As it has been, a “certain type of Internet communication, spread globally by far-right politicians, is effective because it can involve people emotionally”, establishing a communication style that can be defined as “emotional antagonism”.<sup>62</sup> The role of mass media and social networks is

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58 Ibid., p. 44.

59 Rydgren, ‘The Sociology of the Radical Right’.

60 Mudde, ‘The 2012 Stein Rokkan Lecture’; see also Ruud Koopmans, Paul Statham, ‘Ethnic and Civic Conceptions of Nationhood and the Differential Success of the Extreme Right in Germany and Italy’, in *How Social Movements Matter*, ed. by Charles Tilly, Doug McAdam and Marco Giugni (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), pp. 225-251.

61 Cinzia Padovani, ‘Lega Nord and Anti-Immigrationism: The Importance of Hegemony Critique for Social Media Analysis and Protest’, *International Journal of Communication*, 12 (2018), 3553-3579.

62 Giulia Evolvi, ‘Emotional Politics, Islamophobic Tweets. The Hashtags #Brexit and #chiudiamoiporti’, *Partecipazione e conflitto*, 12:3 (2019), 871-897, pp. 872-873.

fundamental in strengthening the “entrepreneurs of xenophobia”. Often, the “alchemy” consists in the transformation of normal situations of integration into risks, for example, of Islamisation of society or rhetoric of progressive “ethnic substitution” by uncontrolled migration.<sup>63</sup> In this sense, the construction of “moral panic” joins with processes of “dehumanisation” of the foreigner/migrant, particularly in the case of asylum seekers and Muslims. We are witnessing a “racist common sense” built by a strong relationship among extreme-right movements or right-wing mainstream parties, fundamentalist Catholics, newspapers and social media. In this frame, we can speak of a regime of “agnotology” promoted by these connections among political discourses, mass-media, and social networks which promote a regime of fake news in the post-truth era.<sup>64</sup> This configuration legitimizes the xeno-populist vision of society, creating a real aversive climate and, overall, a “trivialization” of negative attitudes towards ethnic minorities and migrants. This articulated relationship is an important factor for the increase of xeno-populism in our contemporary societies and it highlights, paraphrasing the statement of Mudde, the change from “normal pathology” of racism to its “pathological normalcy”.<sup>65</sup>

### *The racialized structure of global populism*

We have so far suggested that the strength of right-wing xeno-populism feeds on different strategies of mobilization that combine: on the one hand, a productivist perspective in defense of honest workers, on the other hand, a radical idea of national nativism capable of identifying an enemy consisting of an elusive alliance between money parasites and unskilled and dishonest work. This image immediately becomes racist when

63 Alfredo Alietti, Dario Padovan, ‘Islamophobia in Italy. National Report 2018’, in *European Islamophobia Report*, ed. by Enes Bayrakli, and Farif Hafez (Seta Washington/Istanbul, 2019).

64 For an interesting research on emotional antagonism by the political use of tweets in UK and Italy see *ibid.*

65 Cas Mudde, ‘The Populist Radical Right: A Pathological Normalcy’, *West European Politics*, 33:6 (2010), 1167-1186.



this enemy from an initial abstract elaboration is reduced to its concrete components: the Jew (and its poor variant: the gypsy), the African immigrant, the refugee and the Muslim. Racism, therefore, presents itself as the main competitive advantage of right-wing populism over left-wing populism, an aspect that is often forgotten. The logic of the internal enemy is connected to the logic of the external enemy ready to invade the fatigued and weak Western and European democracies. There is, as said, a polarized opposition between us and them in both horizontal and vertical terms.<sup>66</sup> From the vertical point of view, there is the opposition between the élite and the common people, declined in the notion of the “people without voice”; the horizontal dimension is expressed in the conflict between insiders and outsiders, between those who are members of a supposedly cohesive national community and those who do not share it, given their status of foreigners. Moreover, the issue of impersonal forces or institutions assessed in their threat, such as the European Union, globalization, Islamic radicalism, always applies to this dimension. The negative representations of Muslim immigrant communities and the Jew, as a typical figure of hidden global power, are part of this polarity.

This projection is associated with the conspiracy speech that accompanies much of the anti-Semitism on the basis of the classical arsenal on which the image of the Jewish conspirator was founded to the detriment of the national communities which are victims of their secret and international plots. The figure of Soros has become in the universe of neo-Nazi and neo-fascist movements and groups in Europe the symbol of the return to the traditional anti-Semitism, in its sense of threat for national white communities. In this sense, the idea that the humanitarian reasons promoted by the Hungarian magnate in favor of refugees and asylum seekers is a mean to destabilize our social order and put our civilization at risk, is a conspiracy strategy.<sup>67</sup> It is no coincidence that, for example in the Italian context, this hegemonic racist representation is connected

66 Taguieff Pierre-André, ‘La scienza politica di fronte al populismo’.

67 Reportedly understood by Tarabant Micheal chapter 4 infra; see also Brubaker, Brubaker, ‘Populism and Nationalism’.

to a continuous devaluation of democratic civil society, NGOs and part of the Catholic Church, including the figure of the Pope, involved in the integration and in interfaith dialogue.<sup>68</sup>

The racism violently expressed by xeno-populism against Jews, Gypsies, Negroes and Muslims is not only a subjective and voluntary product of current populism, but an element that has characterized the formation of geo-capitalism on a historical level.<sup>69</sup> The rhetoric of improvement and development of the human condition, that has accompanied the global expansion of capitalism, shatters against the racist cliffs that have risen in its shadow. Geo-capitalism in its formation equips itself with a global racial system.<sup>70</sup> The modern global racial system, made of a mixture of different ‘racial projects’, such as anti-Semitism and Afro-racism, arose during the building process of industrial, colonial and financial capitalism and the Western nation-states supporting it. Antisemitism was at the core of European nationalization based on the twofold process of nation-building and state-building,<sup>71</sup> whereas afro-racism – after the end of slaves trading – was at the core of Western colonial domination.<sup>72</sup> Both racisms – Afro-racism and Antisemitism – were at the core of the global process of modernization, the first one representing the bare labour-force, the second one representing the naked money; the first one having to do with the ground-rent, the second one with the money-interest, two different forms of capital. In this erratic system of production and circulation of commodities and

68 Alietti, Padovan, ‘Islamophobia in Italy. National Report 2018’; Alfredo Alietti, Dario Padovan, ‘Islamophobia in Italy. National Report 2017’, in *European Islamophobia Report*, ed. by Enes Bayrakli, and Farif Hafez (Seta Washington/Istanbul, 2018).

69 See Alietti, Padovan, ‘Islamophobia in Italy. National Report 2018’.

70 Winant Howard, *The New Politics of Race: Globalism, Difference, Justice* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

71 George Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution. A History of European Racism* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1978); Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989); Balibar, Wallerstein, *Race Nation Classe*.

72 See on this George M. Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); see also Theo D. Goldberg, *Racist Culture* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1993).

value,<sup>73</sup> racism plays again a crucial role, as a common sense marker for social and labour positions embodied in the racialized order of geo-capitalism.<sup>74</sup>

This global order is nowadays apparently shaken by blurred attempts to come back to a more nationalized and de-globalized order – this is just the aim of the current populisms – but it is clear that this process triggered by ‘white’ and ‘developed’ nation-states is in no way a challenge to global capitalism and that it has nothing to do with democracy, equality, freedom, solidarity, development. Xeno-populism, that as we have seen, has become a successful political weapon in the hands of cynic fascist minorities, can be seen as the national variant of the global racism that embraces the planet. The widespread institutional discrimination promoted by these countries ruled by xeno-populist parties are not accidental consequences of legitimate reactions to a blind and strongly unequal globalized order, but the pitiless transformation of long-time processes of exploitation and dispossession of natural and human wealth from the poorest areas of the planet. These processes, clearly footed on an old-style racial nationalism,<sup>75</sup> aim perhaps to re-establish the lost centrality of the world-system’s core countries challenged by the emerging countries, or simply to avoid the social consequences of the ecological degradation of many areas of the planet. However, the so-called ‘refugee crisis’ is hiding something more. Here, the game is changing its rules: the time of a hypocrite semi-free circulation of human labour, often coupled with raw materials and primary goods flows<sup>76</sup> is coming to an end. At the beginning, the flows of migrants were generated by a

73 Chris Harman, *Zombie Capitalism* (Chicago, Illinois: Haymarket Books, 2010).

74 See on this point for example Herbert Blumer, ‘Race Prejudice as a Sense of Group Position’, *The Pacific Sociological Review*, 1:1 (1958), 3-7; Michael Banton, *Race Relations* (London: Tavistock, 1967); Robert Miles, Malcom Brown, *Racism* (London: Routledge, 2003).

75 Balibar, Wallerstein, *Race Nation Classe*; Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended* (New York: Picador, 2003).

76 Douglas S. Massey, and others, ‘Theories of International Migration: A Review and Appraisal’, *Population and Development Review*, 19:3 (1993), 431-466.

demand of cheap labour-force to be employed in the production processes. Subsequently, the flows of people have become refugees escaping from political, economic, environmental, and social crises (often taking the form of local armed conflicts or natural disasters), which are now seen as to be destabilizing the internal order of affluent – but no more growing – countries and thus they need to be stopped. Here, racism, populism and migrations enter a lethal circularity. As noted by Miles and Brown, there is “a dialectical relationship between migration and racism [...] in the longer term, racism begets migration, which begets racism which begets migration and so on”.<sup>77</sup> Thus, Western societies are re-discovering their mythical racial origins, and the racial enemies – inside and outside – threatening them. Affluent societies begin to build concrete boundaries (walls) keeping out their enemies (or internally segregating them),<sup>78</sup> and claiming the right of the sovereign power to defend them. The figure of the climate-change migrant, for instance, expresses a set of ‘white’ anxieties having to do with an impending loss of control and disorder, and the dissolution of boundaries.<sup>79</sup> Racism is in fact a strong tool to build cleavages and walls into social bodies as stressed by Foucault. In the perspective of global xeno-populism, dynamics of racialization such as the discrimination against minorities in order to exploit their labour or to exclude them from social benefits underlined by a number of scholars,<sup>80</sup> are taking two converging dynamics: on the one hand, the global economy generates local regimes of racialization in which targets of discrimination practices change depending on the race, ethnic origin, religion, cultural descent; on the other hand, the

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77 Miles, Brown, *Racism*, p. 137.

78 Saskia Sassen, ‘A Massive Loss of Habitat’, *Sociology of Development*, 2:2 (2016), 204-233.

79 W.A. Baldwin, ‘Resilience and Race, or Climate Change and the Uninsurable Migrant: Towards an Anthroporacial Reading of “race”’, *Resilience*, 5:2 (2017), 129-143.

80 See for example Stephen Castles, ‘Racism: A Global Analysis’, Centre for Multicultural Studies, University of Wollongong, Occasional Paper 28, 1993; Miles, Brown, *Racism*; Edna Bonacich, Sabrina Alimahomed, Jack B. Wilson, ‘The Racialization of Global Labor’, *American Behavioral Scientist*, 52:3 (2008), 342-355.

global economy system reproduces a ‘global apartheid’ whereas different places are marked by the same abstract racial order.<sup>81</sup>

Racism is thus ‘a potential element of signification by which to select, and to legitimate the selection of a particular population, whose labour power will be exploited in a particular set of unfree production relations’.<sup>82</sup> The people identified as the source of unskilled exploitable labour power are also constructed and treated as an inferior race. Class formation and race formation here merge: the creation of the partially dispossessed labouring class is not only motivated by racism, but it is effected through a series of mechanisms pushing these people into an increasing segregated system.

The articulation of capitalism, by enabling and maintaining the connection between everyday reproduction processes and the global production of value, is essential to the perpetuation of global racism. This latter is thus the cruel flag of a new stage of the appropriation of resources – in the form of land grabbing and ground rent – while people must be chained to their deprived land. People left to die in these deserted lands or into the shadowy seas that they try to cross, constitute the spectral materiality of the global processes of dispossession, the material dimension of an order of inequalities.

### *The hidden components of xenophobic society*

This global racialized order and the global xeno-populism that constitutes its material and political weapon, are indicators of the fact that during the last decade societies have not moved towards a stage of profound and widespread well-being, free from conflict, hostility, exclusion, discrimination. Racism and racial local orders have re-emerged from the deep of ultramodern western societies with surprising and worrying virulence, as we have tried to show

81 Smith John, ‘Imperialism and the Law of Value’, *Global Discourse*, 2:1 (2011) <<http://global-discourse.com/contents>>.

82 Miles, Brown, *Racism*, p. 129; Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't no Black in the Union Jack': The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (London: Hutchinson, 1987).

so far. As mentioned above, forms of anti-Semitism and anti-Islamism reappear in unexpected contingencies, acquiring a new and unexpected centrality for the social mobilization of people promoted by xeno-populisms. These waves of hostility and racism that follow each other at the dawn of the 21st century testify to the many fears that crowd the horizons of advanced societies, undermining not only their internal coherence, but the democratic structures themselves.

The xeno-populism (and the racism that constitutes its filigree) we are facing is liquid, transitive, highly mobile, generically oriented against all foreigners. But notwithstanding its liquidity, this racism works as social bond for scared and isolated people. And it asks for subordinated assimilation and instantly recognizable inferiorization of Others, putting them on the last rung of an imaginary social ladder. This desire to subordinate the Other is strictly linked with the combination of forms of authoritarianism, ethnocentrism and anomie, which is embracing most of European societies and political arena. Here lies the thrust for the drive towards *coercive assimilation*, through the adoption of a number of measures, which include the recasting of citizenship laws according to security considerations.

According to these underlying assumptions, research shows that xeno-populism is the result of three large collective phenomena or conditions that mark our society.<sup>83</sup> Firstly, a widespread ethnocentrism and nationalism, which seems to feed a strong national or regional or ethnic identity, is present in a large proportion of respondents. We argue that the ethno-national identity is a circumstance that favours the occurrence of prejudice. At the same time and in a recursive or circular logic, the anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim prejudice contributes to national unity in a classical dynamic based on the identification of a threatening out-group. Secondly, a widespread authoritarianism, which is a reaction to anxieties and insecurities both individual and

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83 Alfredo Alietti, Dario Padovan, 'The Racialization of Public Discourse', *European Societies*, 14:2 (2012), 186-202; Alietti, Padovan, 'Religious Racism. Islamophobia and Antisemitism in Italian Society', *Religions*, 4 (2013), 584-602.

collective. Under conditions of particular uncertainty and social fragmentation, authoritarianism becomes a flight “from freedom” and from the individual and collective responsibility; it crystallizes in punitive attitudes and an obsessive request for compliance. In the same recursive perspective first outlined, authoritarianism enters into a relationship of “reciprocal causality” with prejudice, making this latter a functional substitute for the social and juridical covenant that should ensure social harmony and social cohesion. Racism is thus not only the source for new social ties, but also a tool to deal with the crisis of the rule of law. Here lies the thrust for the drive towards assimilation. Assimilation is being forced through by the adoption of a number of measures, which include the recasting of citizenship laws according to security considerations; the introduction of compulsory language and civics tests for citizenship applicants; codes of conduct for the trustees of mosques; a cultural code of conduct for Muslim girls and women who, in some areas of Europe, are forbidden to wear the hijab in state schools and other public institutions. Finally, a widespread situation of anomie, or social uncertainty and distrust, which feeds the prejudice and produces the conditions for racism, is the starting point for new forms of social solidarity, backed now on an aggressive but short-lived ethno-racial identity. In this case we have split up anomie in two diverging dimensions: distrust of the future and distrust of society, alluding the former to a condition of complete uncertainty toward the near upcoming individual and familiar condition; the latter referring to a contingent situation of absence of social supports and solidarity. In all three cases there is clear evidence that the lower the cultural capital and social status, the stronger the authoritarian, ethnocentric and distrust attitudes.

The current xeno-populism or the dynamic combination of racism and populism that hides behind phenomena such as social insecurity, or at the back of discourses such as the authenticity of cultures and their natural hierarchies, is very different from the explicit racism of the early twentieth century, but it is quickly becoming a common sense which is already part of the public discourse. To battle it we need subtle and insightful tools, able to deconstruct the self-evident argument as to who is racist, and to pierce the veil of ignorance that envelops the racists – “by

choice” and “by chance” – and the anti-racists who want to fight them. More appropriate then, would be a more courageous and compelling critique of the political ideologies and institutional practices that often fuel hostility.

### *The content of the book*

This collection shows different points of view regarding the issues here announced.

Jack Jacobs illustrates how the “Critical Theory” of the so-called Frankfurt school is still useful to understand current phenomena such as the xenophobic populism exhibited by Donald Trump and the greatest part of Us Republicans. Jacobs also shows that the contemporary phenomenon of antisemitism without Jews – for example, in some parts of Eastern Europe, such as Poland – suggests that the approach taken by the Critical Theorists to antisemitism on this issue is still valid. Trump is not a conscious anti-Semite, but he uses discourse techniques acquired from anti-Semite tradition. What Jacobs underlines is that the strategy used by Trump public discourses directed against Muslims, Mexicans and others, is Antisemitic in its on essence. This strategy is composed, according to Jacobs, of three different aspects: interchangeability of victims; mechanisms of agitators for propaganda: personalisation, emphasis on means, not on ends, the role of conspiracy; the negation of prejudices. What is very crucial here is the fact that Jacobs uses the tools of Critical Theory of Horkheimer, Adorno, Lowenthal, and others, to shed light not on the past antisemitism, but on the current strategies of xeno-populism here represented by Donald Trump discourses and propaganda. It is worth underlying here that many other populist leaders are using the same discourse techniques against their own enemies and victims. These are precious insights, not only to understand but also to battle against these new forms of racist populism. The chapter of Stephen Pogany focuses on the strategy of Orbán and his party Fidesz to consolidate their power over Hungarian society. Also here, xeno-populism – oriented both in religious terms, such as islamophobia and antisemitism, and



anti-immigrant claims and policies – is portrayed as one of the pillars of the new-conservative and semi-fascist Orban’s regime. The chapter of Pogany underlines the historical basis of Hungarian anti-Semitism, anti-communism and finally islamophobia. As he states, in the transition from communism, “radical right-wing elements began to assert that Jews had exercised enormous power and influence in communist Hungary. As so often, classic anti-Semitic tropes of Jewish dominance, unbridled ambition, lack of patriotism and collusion with foreign interests proved more compelling than mere facts”.

The chapter by Richard Chapman discusses the so-called Windrush Scandal. Empire Windrush is the name of the first ship that brought Afro-Caribbeans to UK from the former English colonies that landed at Tilbury Docks in 1948. The Empire Windrush soon became part of a significant historical and sociological debate, adding a substantial expressive meaning linked to connotations of mass immigration, the creation of Afro-Caribbean communities in the United Kingdom, and, by the 1990s, a largely positive association of the first ship arriving from the West Indies as the first step into what was perceived as a successful process of integration into modern British society. The article detailing describes the slow but systematic dismantling of the multi-cultural model of cohabitation between people of different origin and culture. The “Operation Vaken” is perhaps the most notorious (and revealing) example of the UK government-sponsored creation of hostile discourse against immigrants. The Windrush Scandal with its incredible “Operation Vaken” falls into what we may call a discourse of racist dishonesty. There are four main aspects to this linguistic contribution to a truly hostile environment. Firstly, the use of euphemisms is a constant in the discourses surrounding immigration. The second aspect of the racist discourse is, on the other hand, precisely the opposite: an attempt to ‘up the ante’ linguistically in order to garner support by the Conservative Party and its government. A third, and most striking, aspect is the repeated use of de-humanising vocabulary in discussion of the ‘immigration threat’. The fourth element in this hostile discourse is to be seen in the tendency to place nouns referring to immigrants in proximity to adjectives indicating their

dishonesty or criminality. At the end, Operation Vaken shows that “Windrush generation” suffered so much precisely because this is only the final chapter in countless years of discrimination. The Windrush generation, for all the romantic descriptions of successful integration, were perhaps always second-class citizens in some ways, and their lack of financial and political clout after so many years cost them dear.

Zbyněk Tarant’s chapter aims to enlighten the “pro-Israel” and “philosemitic” political attitudes of right-wing populism in Hungary, Czech Republic and so on. Focusing on the Czech Republic case, it provides a description of the paradoxical relationship between the Czech right-wing populist scene and Jewish affairs. It investigates the ideological background of these parties and movements, explaining the rationale behind some of the paradoxes. It discusses the implications of the right-wing populist policies for the security and well-being of the Jewish communities in the country. Finally, its core argument is that in order to understand the “pro-Israel” far-right claims we need to understand the far-right’s thought and its political strategy, based mainly on the category of “ethnopluralism”. Coined by the theorist of body culture and far-right environmentalism Henning Eichberg in 1973, the term ethnopluralism was later adopted by the French far-right political philosopher Alain de Benoist as part of the *Nouvelle Droite* (“New Right”) ideological concept. Ethnopluralism calls for “right to difference” by means of “diversity on the global scale”, yet “preservation of ethnic homogeneity on the regional level” as a necessity for maintaining this global diversity. As a matter of fact, all ethnic groups are seen as nominally equal, according to this ideology, as long as they remain in their native region or territory. At the end, Tarant’s chapter raises the question whether Israel will maintain the hopes of Czech right wing to fight Muslims and Islam, and if not, what the reaction of the alleged supporters of Jews and Israel might be. Even if some right-wing movements today express pro-Israel and philosemitic sympathies, they still think in conspiracist frameworks, and it cannot leave Jews and Israel very serene.

Ireneusz Krzeminski’s chapter analyses direct relationship among nationalism, populism and racism by the analysis of various

empirical researches carried out in Poland. The author identifies in the national feelings and ideological views the postulate called “proper treating” of the very own citizens facing the flows of refugees and migrants who “when coming, are demanding a lot for themselves”. On the basis of national, populist political ideology it is possible to highlight the process of the activation and mobilization of people against actual democracy. There are hidden authoritarian tendencies under the national, populist ideology by the politicians, who criticize the “unjust” elements of actual democracy. This dynamic of the demolition of Polish democracy is easier when it is supported by religious institutions, such as the Catholic Church. In this perspective, the author shows another significant factor: the Polish kind of religiosity, *ow/here?* connected with the national tradition of *Polak – katolik*, favours rather not friendly attitudes to people of other religions. In any case, it is important for populist decision, particularly in Poland, to create a strong connection between the image of danger and the great wave of people coming to, or even invading Europe from Africa and Middle East, who are a threat to “our” culture. This has been the most important element, opening nations toward xenophobic and nationalistic views, and attitudes. At least/finally, the analysis highlights as the structure of the Islamophobic attitudes are basically analogous to the structure of the anti-Semitic attitudes. So, it is possible to articulate the hypothesis that the image of Jews as a conspiracy group in “our” nation becomes “a model for anti-Muslim, Islamophobic attitudes and views”.

Drawing on the work of heterodox Marxian critical theorists such as Moishe Postone, Matt Bolton and Frederick Harry Pitts’ chapter suggests that the notion of capitalism as a ‘rigged system’ imposed by a minority of wealth extractors on ‘the many’ carries potentially troubling resonances. Pushed to its limits, such a depiction can nurture the development of an antisemitic worldview. This is particularly so when it is combined with a Manichean ‘anti-imperialist’ politics that attributes all that is wrong in the world to the actions of the USA and the very existence of Israel, and thus offers support to, and seeks to build political alliances with any movements claiming to oppose ‘the imperialists’. regardless of that movement’s own reactionary political, social and, in some

cases, antisemitic character. Bolton and Pitts's chapter begins with the idea that traditional Marxism sees capitalism as "a monolithic system consciously designed and covertly imposed by one group – be it the 'capitalist class', the 'bourgeoisie' or the 'élite' – upon another – whether 'workers' or 'the people'". According to the authors that follow Moishe Postone's works, this vision fails to grasp what is meant by capitalist society. Capitalism is not in its essence a gang of "immoral or corrupt individuals or groups", even if it is also possible as history teaches us, but "a specific historical set of human social relations, centred around the production of wealth as the peculiar form of 'value'". Capitalism is an "automatic subject" aimed to generate value, but value "exists as a social relation between objects, which is validated as such at the moment those objects are successfully exchanged with one another". This process of value-production or of capital self-valorisation "compels everyone – rich and poor, capitalist and worker – to behave in certain ways in order to survive, even whilst one group benefits at the other's expense. Companies have to compete to make a profit in order to avoid going bankrupt. This is a compulsion, not a choice". Authors here share a perspective coming from Moishe Postone but also from others, such as the *Wertkritik* launched by Robert Kurz who strongly criticized any sort of personalization in the critique of capitalism. Corbynism promotes just the opposite: in its view, the idea of a parasitical, unproductive aristocratic class that exploits workers is dominant. But the authors suggest using the words of Anselm Jappe, "it is, precisely, a 'truncated' critique". In other words, without an adequate theoretical framework for grasping the strange and unpredictable dynamics of capitalist society, "partial forms of anti-capitalism on the left leave themselves open to reactionary or regressive outcomes, including antisemitism, authoritarian nationalism, or fascistic theocracy".

The final chapter by Claudia Dina Hassan investigates the rise of populism in the frame of the crisis of democracy, asking for antibodies that must be built to cope with it and its racist, xenophobic and antisemitic manifestations. It starts with the very crucial question: what links all these different types of populism, wherever they are in the world? Hassan suggests that its indeterminate nature,

disintermediation, detachment from the classes traditionally in power and the creation of a state of “us and them” are all common to the various types of populism. All populisms, starting from the construction of a new grammar and syntax, from the desire to build a new symbolic universe of reference, break away from a certain and given system to create contexts of anticipation and changes within an indefinite outcome. According to Hassan thought, all populisms share common features. The first one consists in the inability of populism to distinguish between the people, the electorate and the nation; the second one sees the population as an entity that encapsulates all the traditionally tripartite powers; and the third one is the one that sanctions the truth of the people as unique and exclusive, not open to discussion and excluding every other possibility. There are other populism’s core characteristics, namely racism and the wide use of scapegoat strategy. These two aspects are interesting in the perspective of this book because, as we claimed before, the propulsion of populism is its overt and undeniable racism, based on scapegoat strategy. Thus, Hassan makes the scapegoat as the core of her interesting reflections, where a scapegoat can be a member of a group, a minority, an organisation or an institution that is always blamed for the failure of a social, political or cultural mechanism. In this way, social conflict between members of a society is avoided.

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