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PROMISED LAND OF POPULISM? 'POPULIST' CULTURE AND POLITICS IN ITALY, 1800-2019 29-30 November 2019

PANEL 1.1: HISTORICAL ROOTS OF CONTEMPORARY POPULISM (Library)

Carlo Corrochano Perez (Universidad Carlos III de Madrid), *The Salvinian Left. The Italian roots and expressions of a paradoxical phenomenon*

The study of populism and the populist moment in Italy has generated numerous publications, ideas and trends of opinion around the phenomenon of the Movimento 5 Stelle, the Lega post-Bossi or the unequivocal trajectory of Forza Italia and Silvio Berlusconi himself. Beyond Matteo Renzi's pop phenomenon, perhaps comparable to Macron's in France, the ideological spectrum of the left has not been treated with enough attention. While this is partly due to the intrinsic weakness of this political option, incapable of reinventing itself in partisan terms (Sinistra Italiana, Articolo Uno and a long etcetera) or of overcoming the devalued framework of the Partito Democratico, there are also phenomena that are claimed on the left and which, despite not having a broad social mass of explicit support, are interesting and very revealing of the Italian political situation. The aim of this work is to ideologically unravel the 'Risorgimento Meridionale per l'Italia' movement, as well as one of its great exponents in the media field: the controversial philosopher Diego Fusaro. The generic appeal to the Italian people, the antiliberal, antiglobalizing and sovereignist rhetoric constitute the seed of a populist movement, a kind of Italian-style Peronism that maintains Keynesian positions in the economic sphere and that vindicates the family and tradition as fundamental pillars in the struggle against transnational capital and the 'turbocapitalist' ideal. Fusaro's work is interesting for unraveling what this line of thought hides: can we call this mixture of Marx and Heidegger populism, which vindicates the role of states like Venezuela, Ecuador or Bolivia as a true response to the capitalist dynamic? Next to this, can we still locate this on the left or is it more like Alain de Benoist's Nouvelle Droite? The aim of this paper is to study in depth the 'fusarini' and their sovereignist, socialist, patriotic, anti-globalist and identitarian populism, trying to fit them into Italian historical logics.

Giuliana Muscio (Università di Padova), *Bare-chested Men: Mussolini and Salvini and the show of politics*

Bertellini's book *The Divo and the Duce* (2019) allows to re-discuss the relationship populism/machismo/celebrity focusing on the coeval development of mass media. The Italian instance is complicated by the concept of patria as a feminine figure. It is therefore necessary to reconsider the triad populism/machismo/media together with the contradictory ideology on the role of women and, therefore, of the family as the hinge of the social organization, during Fascism. Mussolini, a perfect example of Italian populism, according to Brunetta was the only film star in Italian silent cinema, object of a cult encouraged by the development of cinema, newsreels and radio, but also actively producing media content as a journalist. In his "oceanic events" he spoke to the "people" not to the individual spectator. In reference to women, he seized power after a heated debate over suffrage, when even the socialist party did not sponsor the issue: la "questione femminile" was undoubtedly one of the sources of fascist machismo.

It is easy to trace a continuity with the contemporary Italian situation, originating from a similar paradigm. Since the "celodurismo" of Bossi's Lega, this self-proclaimed populist movement developed a strong macho lingo in politics. However, we are in the midst of a media revolution with the development of social media and internet. Salvini's use of social media and the mythology of the WEB on which the Five Stars Movement founded its idea of direct democracy relate to this important media evolution. Furthermore it does not appear senseless to connect the virulent misogyny, which has

entered the scene, with a reaction to the feminist movements of the 1970s. During fascism women were confined in the house as the hearth angel and their rights were limited, but today there is an explosion of ferocious “femminicidi”.

PANEL 1. 2: FASCISM/ANTIFASCISM/POPULISM I (Lecture Hall)

Fabio Ferrarini (Università di Milano), *Italian Populism and Fascism. Historical intersections and Core Issues*

This paper attempts to put in evidence the differences, but also the similarities (for example the conspiracy theory) between traditional extreme right propaganda and modern populist rhetoric. For example, islamophobia was not a “driver” for Fascist and Nazi propaganda. On the contrary, modern populism has exacerbated rather than mitigated muslim religious radicalisation. The rise of the extreme right in many European countries has been having an impact on ethnic relations, mainstream policies regarding immigration, and discussions on concepts such as citizenship, national culture, religion and race. Mussolini did not initially consider “race” relevant for the national culture, but it was a matter for demographic and migration policy. His interpretation was more political than scientific. He was convinced that Italian people had to improve, to become a “dominant” race and this could be defined as “racial nationalism”. But this improvement was “social”, not “biological”. Anyway, during the 1930s, some Italian scientists, anthropologists and journalists such as Corrado Gini, Giulio Cogni, Guido Landra, Telesio Interlandi and Roberto Farinacci, presented their studies on eugenics. Probably they were encouraged by the increasing popularity of these topics in Germany, the United States and Northern Europe, but their works were full of exploitations and manipulations (what we today could call “fake news”). By the end of WW2 populism had come to present a continuation of Fascism but also a renunciation of some of its defining dictatorial dimensions. For example, Hitler was a populist because he claimed to act in the name of the German people (Volk). However, as Mosse demonstrated, there was a strong and fundamental connection between spiritual, political and social factors in the Germanic world. Apparently modern populism doesn’t have much in common with traditional Fascism, except for violence, symbolism, authoritarianism and racism.

Marco Pluviano (ILSREC Genova), *Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro and Kraft durch Freude: Andare al popolo and Volksgemeinschaft. Was populism a mean to build consent?*

Fascist and Nazi governments in Italy and Germany devoted great efforts to create and to strengthen organizations aimed to manage people’s leisure: Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro (OND) and Kraft durch Freude (KdF). At the beginning KdF was strongly influenced by OND, but in few years it had an autonomous development. In the pre-fascist years both Italy and Germany had experienced socialist, catholic, and nationalist (in Germany) initiatives devoted to the popular leisure: gymnastic and theatrical associations, choirs, outdoor games, etc. These activities were among the main targets of Fascist and Nazi violence in the years before and immediately after they came into power. When the two dictatorships were established, they needed to embody their populist slogans aimed to emphasize the differences between the old, decadent, liberal governments and the new, national and popular regimes: Volksgemeinschaft and Andare al popolo. In this way, OND was considered the main weapon to reach the people (Andare al popolo), and KdF was one of the main pivots to build people’s community (Volksgemeinschaft). The two organizations had great economic and human resources (KdF more than OND), developing both traditional and innovative activities: opera and drama spectacles for workers and farmers in theatres, factories, and open air; dialectal theatre; no professional theatre performed by workers; tourism and cruises (especially in Germany); sport activities (football, gymnastic, but also elite sports as tennis and fencing). Moreover, they rediscovered, often invented, “traditional” ceremonies and games. Both the organizations were strictly controlled by the Fascist and Nazi parties, but they followed the anti-political populist feelings. In this way they were among the most effective instruments of both dictatorships, because people perceived them as relatively neutral institutions. In Italy, OND was perceived more a Mussolini than a Fascist Party’s creature. In this paper I shall try to show the links between the populist attitude (new against old political order, national against liberal and plutocratic State, building of the so-called “new German/Italian”) and the organization of consent, aimed both to strengthen dictatorships and to prepare the middle and lower classes to the war.

Matteo Pasetti (Università di Bologna), *The ambiguous links between fascism and populism*

As Roger Griffin argues in his famous generic definition of fascism as a palingenetic form of ultranationalism, fascism was also a «peculiarly undemocratic mode of populism». In fact, at the birth of the movement in 1919, the flourished fascist ideology was full of populist suggestions, as the distinction between the «true Italian people» and those who did not belong in that group. In the fascist language, the «true Italian people» were composed of combattenti and produttori, that is, those who had defended the honor of the nation in the trenches and those who had put their work at the service of the community during the Great War; while the others Italians represented the «antipeople». This distinction between

the «true people» and the «antipeople» constitutes a conceptual scheme common to all populisms of «contestary» type (Taguieff). However, from a historical perspective, the definition of fascism as populism is not entirely persuasive. For example, in order to rethink this problem, one of the more interesting issues lies in the fascist corporatist project: in this key point of fascist ideology, we can see some elements of explicit populism (like an anti-systemic rhetoric, a certain idea of self-government of the workers, an organic and palingenetic image of the nation, and a vision of classless society), but also some contradictions, because in the interwar period the implementation of corporatist rules led to opposite outcomes, both in fascist Italy and other European countries. This paper intends to examine the ambiguity of the relationship between fascism and populism, through the mirror of the corporatist project and its experience.

PANEL 2.1: FASCISM/ANTIFASCISM/POPULISM II (Library)

Nicola Cacciatore (Independent researcher), *“We are the real Italians” anti-fascism and the national discourse*

It is easy to see “populist” traits and patterns in the Fascist rhetoric. The obsession with a foreign plot against Italy, the claim of representing the whole of the Italian people, the veneration for the leader’s image, its constant attempts to present itself as a new, “anti-political” movement... However, the prominence of the Fascist rhetoric might have concealed some of the populist elements in the rhetoric of those who opposed it. In fact, the anti-fascists who, in exile, at the confino and in hiding, began theorizing the birth of a “new Italy” free from Fascism often dabbled in similar, if opposed topics. While Fascists were deeming anti-fascism as un-Italian, anti-fascists responded in tone claiming that “the real Italy is abroad” in the many small communities that they had constituted across Europe. Anti-fascists also pushed the idea of anti-fascism as the struggle of the people against the corrupted Fascist elite that was unlawfully occupying Italy, in an anticipation of what Pavone would later call “the war of national liberation” referring to one aspect of the armed Resistance of 1943-1945. From Giustizia e Libertà to the Communist Party, they theorised a popular movement that would topple the regime and rebuild Italy on new foundations, carrying the torch of a new concept of italianità, radically different from the Fascist one. Instrumental to this narrative was, for example, the connection with the Risorgimento and the idea, embraced by basically all the anti-fascist political spectrum, that they were on a mission to “complete” it, leaving behind the bad parts, often identified with the elites who ruled the country after its unification. They proposed a new Italy to replace the warped Fascist one, creating a tension between the reality and an ideal state that is a common trait of Italian history, but also of populist discourse.

Clementina Gentile Fusillo (Warwick University), *Aldo Moro and the project of a constitutional counter-populism*

The reasons why the argument that Italy may be ‘the promised land of populism’ is – to say the least – a plausible one, are clear. Historical evidence suggests so and so do the features of the current Italian socio-political fabric. However, Italian history and political culture also suggest that, if the uniqueness of the country’s relation to populism is a function of its susceptibility to it, it is also, and as importantly, a function of its resistance against it. My paper looks at the figure of Aldo Moro, as both theorist and politician, from this perspective. I argue that Moro’s political thought and his political life can be interpreted precisely as a specifically Italian counter-populist experience. In particular, I focus on Moro’s conception and practice of antifascism, from the time of the regime and throughout his election and work on the writing of the constitution. Fascism, Moro suggested in 1944, ‘obscured the differences [between individuals] and promoted a flat, meaningless unity’. Antifascism, by contrast, ‘must let them subsist, [...] embodying them towards the only admissible unity, that generated by the respectful encounter and the serious and honest scrutiny of all points of view.’ This unification in spite of pluralism, through what Rawls might have called the ‘representational use of judgment’, is the essence of what Moro conceives of as antifascism. Such unifying use of judgement is what erodes the ground on which populism thrives. The explicit incorporation of antifascist principles within the Italian constitution, thus, may provide a unique challenge to populist political strategies, inviting us to assess their legitimacy not only against procedural and substantive democratic standards, but also against standard of constitutionality.

PANEL 2.2: CONTEMPORARY POPULISM (Lecture Hall)

George Newth (University of Bath), *‘Le Pen è fascista come i partiti di Roma’*. *Populist and nativist anti-fascism and post-fascism (?) in the Lega’s political discourse*

My paper examines the complex relationship between the Lega Nord’s early anti-fascism on the one hand, and its populism and nativism on the other. Examining these seemingly dichotomous ideological components through a historical perspective raises questions surrounding the very nature of the party. Whether in its regionalist or nationalist form, the

Lega (Nord) has always been both populist, arguing for the return of popular sovereignty from corrupt elites in Rome and/or Brussels, and nativist, claiming to protect honest, virtuous hard working (North) Italians from the threat of internal and/or external others. The current populist nationalism of Matteo Salvini's Lega, therefore, owes much to the preceding populist regionalism promoted by Umberto Bossi's Lega Nord. Within this key element of continuity lies one significant discontinuity: from the 1980s until the mid-1990s, Bossi, unlike Salvini, portrayed his movement as anti-fascist. Bossi argued that the Lega Nord was fighting against the 'fascist' centralist tyranny of the (southernized) Roman elites which were compared unfavourably in Lega propaganda to Jean-Marie Le Pen's neo-fascist Front National in France. However, the Lega Nord's ostensible anti-fascism was complicated by its right-wing form of populist regionalism, of which a nativist discourse against both southern Italians and foreign migrants formed a key component. This exclusionary ideology contributed to the Lega Nord's lurch to the far-right from the mid-1990s, the intensification of which throughout the 2000s saw the disappearance of anti-fascist rhetoric. Today, Salvini's Lega shares a close relationship with Marine Le Pen's Rassemblement National (National Rally) and has asserted on several occasions that fascism and anti-fascism no longer exist. Making use of Discourse Historical Analysis (DHA), my paper examines key moments in the Lega Nord's journey from being an anti-fascist to a potentially 'post-fascist' movement during which populism and nativism have always been present.

Luigi Rullo (Università di Napoli Federico II) & Federica Nunziata (Università di Napoli Federico II), *Populism Under Contract? The Digital Communication of the Five Star Movement-Lega Coalition Agreement*

In light of the latest formation of the Five Star Movement-Lega coalition government in 2018, the presence of populism in the Italian politics seems to be as dominant as ever. The signing of an agreement – the so-called “Contratto per il Governo del Cambiamento” (transl. “Contract for the Government of Change”) – by the two political leaders seems to redefine the mechanisms of legitimization of the Italian executive, establishing a new relationship between governors and citizens. Whilst some analyses have investigated the characteristics and problems related to its constitutionality profiles, less attention has been given to the communication of the contract and its impact on the media arena. Accordingly, the aim of this paper is to provide an empirical analysis of the political communication of the contract, by analysing the digital discourse. By means of a joint analysis of both textual content and related metadata of the main actors involved in the coalition agreement, we will investigate whether and how populism is conceived, identifying, firstly, the presence of the discursive construction of “the people” against the perceived group of “elites” and the identity of the subjects appealed and targeted; secondly, the effects of populist messages on citizens in terms of political (and digital) engagement; thirdly, the evolution over time and the differences among actors. Finally, we observe whether and how online populist political communication is changing the traditional models of political legitimation of Italian institutions. At a broader level, our analysis shows how populist leaders seek, exercise and legitimize government power, also emphasising how a private vision of political action allowed two political forces to highlight the main points of government action.

Antonia Murolo (Università di Napoli Federico II), Ciro Clemente De Falco (Università di Napoli Federico II) & Federica Nunziata (Università di Napoli Federico II), *Populism Italian Style: the political narratives of Matteo Salvini and Luigi Di Maio*

Populism is undoubtedly one of the most widespread and yet, at the same time, most contested concepts in the sociology and political sciences. Around an ontological and epistemological debate, three main approaches – which define it as an ideology, a discursive style and a political strategy – allow for a systematic understanding of such a phenomenon. At a communicative level, however, different aspects of populist politics and discourse are still uncharted territory. This applies particularly to the Italian literature on populism, whereby studies explicitly focusing on populist traits of political communication are so far hard to find. In light of the current political and social turmoil, the study of populist political communication thus becomes necessary to interpret the messages, the successes and the failures of the main actors of contemporary politics. Accordingly, the paper aims to investigate the effective elements of the discursive construction of populism in the political narratives of the Italian populist leaders Matteo Salvini and Luigi Di Maio. Conducting a quantitative content analysis of Facebook posts in order to detect topics related to populist semantic categories, we will reveal the relationship between populist contents, key themes (i.e. migration and Euroscepticism) and user engagement. Furthermore, a qualitative look at the semantic structure will highlight the main traits of the populist discourse, also capturing the differences among the two leaders of the 5 Star Movement-League coalition government. The paper shows the role of the populist rhetoric in the Italian politics – as well as how it shapes the current political discourse on main topics – eventually allowing to further our understanding of the study surrounding populist politics and discourse.

Mirco Carrattieri (INSMLI), *"People's Historian". The historiographical side of Italian populism*

In one of his last works Renzo De Felice, who had previously labeled "vulgate" the left wing Italian historiography, defined himself as "people's historian", in order to legitimate his role as public opinion leader. During the '90s Italian contemporary historiography lived a relevant turn, in which the main currents, strictly linked with political parties, were overwhelmed by fall of the so called "First Republic". As a result, a new and aggressive revisionism came out and became in a few years the new common sense. Nicola Gallerano revealed this trend in the debate about "public use of history"; and Giovanni De Luna denounced the coming of a sort of "historiographical populism". In the last two decade this "easy" approach to national history, mostly winking and self-exculpatory, prevailed in the media; and the figure of the commentator or essayist imposed himself as the genuine historian, who brilliantly dialogues with the general audience about the past without useless frills and academic trappings, often confusing history and public memory or flaunting a suspected neutrality. In this paper I am going to focus on historiographical populism, following this pattern: I will analyze its roots, remembering founding fathers as Indro Montanelli; I will deal with its main features, comparing them with those of political populism; I will insert this topic in the recent Italian debate about "public history".

Rosario Forlenza (New York University) & Bjørn Thomassen (University of Roskilde), *The "opulent society" as the breeding ground for populism: understanding the present through the analysis of Augusto Del Noce*

The emergence of what many people and scholars label as populist movements and parties has provoked a series of attempts to understand the underlying reasons why such movements have gained momentum in the current period. We will briefly indicate the limits of these approaches before we try to open up an alternative interpretation. We will do so by engaging the work of Catholic philosopher, Augusto del Noce (1910-1989), interpreting the current figuration within a process of secularization and the emergence of what Del Noce in his later work diagnosed as the "opulent society". According to Del Noce, the opulent society had long before the collapse of communism replaced socialist atheism as the biggest challenge to a democracy adjectivized by the "Christian". However, the very same opulent society was also eroding Christian Democracy from within, reducing politics to strategic choices, flattening out the alternative it had originally posed to both socialism and liberalism after the horrors of Fascism and Nazism. Del Noce saw the opulent society as a society marked by nihilism and cultural relativism, scientism, technocracy and positivist managerialism, the triumph of consumerism, the death of the sacred, a genuine vacuum at the level of foundational values and a concomitant moral decay in which human beings and political institutions were no longer able to justify or direct their existence with reference to ethics or morality. To Del Noce, this opulent society would inevitably lead to a deep-seated crisis of authority – a crisis in which elites become reduced to the enemy of the "people", a constant sense of disorientation and disillusion every moment the (ever-increasing) consumer "needs" of the "people" could no longer be satisfied. If Del Noce is right, our current crisis must be taken back to the 1970s, if not further.

Fiona M. Stewart (Pepperdine University), *Nuto Revelli: A Model for Bridge Building in a Fractured Society?*

This paper argues and demonstrates that Nuto Revelli's approach to oral history allowed him to build bridges between the 'élites' and the 'popolo' in ways which continue to be instructive in 2019. Revelli (2019-2004) worked in the rural communities of Piedmont in the decades following World War II; decades in which these communities and Italian society at large faced challenging social and political realities following the Ventennio and World War II, and major social and political changes as Italy became an industrialized consumer society. The paper looks briefly at Revelli's approach as historian before focusing on why he took this approach, what he achieved with it, and which elements of it might be instructive today.

Mattia Diletti (Università di Roma La Sapienza), *"Populists in Power" and Intellectual Elites. Who Fell in Love with Italian Populists?*

Is populism really anti-intellectual? The anti-elitism of populist leaders, parties and movements usually includes the dimension of anti-intellectualism, whether it be against public intellectuals or experts involved in decision-making processes. Anti-intellectualism has always been categorized as a specific type of anti-elitism (Riesman, 1963; Canovan, 1982). Despite these negative representations, anti-intellectual populists are not necessarily dismissive of experts and intellectuals. What happens, for example, to populists when they take power? The institutionalization of populist parties

and leaders could shape a new relationship between “Populists in power” (Argesinger, 1987; Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2014) and “Men of ideas” (Coser, 1965). If we assume that contemporary populism actively engaged in a politics of regime transformation (de la Torre and Peruzzotti, 2018), we must also take into account that it could employ intellectuals and policy experts in order to reach its goals. The first in the function of legitimization of the system of ideas that supports the choices of parties and leaders who express the “popular will”, the latter with the goal of delivering policy proposals. The aim of this paper is to focus on some working hypotheses on the relationship between current populist political forces and Italian intellectual elites. Current Italian populisms blend far-right extremism, neoliberalism, nationalism, catchwords of American and European populisms. Who are the clerics of this new order of discourse? How is “populist discourse” justified in the Italian intellectual world?

PANEL 4.1: FASCISM/ANTIFASCISM/POPULISM III (Lecture Hall)

David Brown (The Sixth Form College Farnborough), *‘We will not bend because we cannot beg for a sympathy which we can do without’*. *The populist rhetoric and appeal of Italian fascism in Italo-Australian communities 1920-1940*

As Roger Eatwell has argued (Eatwell, 2017) although at their foundational ideological core fascism and populism can be seen as distinctively different, at times fascism undoubtedly draws from populist aspects. The expressions of populism that permeated Italian fascism tend to rest largely in its stylistic forms, although the argument as to how distinct the two ideologies are continues to be a strong area of debate between historians and political scientists, particularly with the rise of Trump and other so called ‘populist’ governments in countries like Brazil, Italy and France. This paper will argue that it was outside of Italy that the populist elements of fascism were most on display. Devoid of its authoritarian pretensions, Italian fascist authorities in Australia instead attempted to rally Italian immigrants through its claim to be the only authority willing to defend the cultural and legal rights of Italians against the corruption of racist and authoritarian governments, returned services leagues and a hostile media. Populist rhetoric was employed by the fascists that sought to portray Italians in Australia as one homogenous mass whose identity and livelihoods were under attack from the elite authority institutions of their new country. Italians were encouraged to see ‘Italianness’ as the most important definer of their identity and to ensure that they remained Italian, ‘above all else’. Fascist authorities in Australia not only organised cultural events that continually celebrated the migrants’ Italian identity, they also campaigned for Italian workers’ rights and took advantage of any discriminatory activities by Australian institutions or media outlets in an attempt to show they were actively defending all disrespectful actions (real or otherwise) towards Italians in Australia. Thus, the study of fascist organisations and actions in Australia is important in providing a wider transnational historical focus that highlights further the blurred lines between fascism and populism.

Giulio Zorini (University of Cambridge), *Populism and elitism during the RSI (1943-45): the essays on racism written by the GNR officer cadets at the Fontanellato school*

The Repubblica Sociale Italiana is often seen as the brief resurrection of a more left-wing fascism, similar to what fascism was before the Ventennio, involving the return to republicanism and the new propaganda tool of the socialisation of economy. Whereas the Ventennio may be considered as an age of collaboration between the fascist party, the royal family, the Catholic Church, private entrepreneurs and landowners, the RSI marks the return of ideological stances more akin to Sansepolcristo: fascist hardliners attacked the clergy, the defeatist bourgeoisie, the imboscati, the intellectuals and deemed the King, Badoglio, high-ranking officers, treacherous gerarchi and Freemasons as the culprits of military failure. Jews, Western Allies and Communists were considered as members of a conspiracy against Italy and propaganda focused on the theme of proletarian blood against capitalist gold to portray the last struggle of the people against its imperialist enemies. These elements depict this iteration of Italian fascism in a way that Roger Griffin labelled as populist ultra-nationalism: an elite-led but populist “armed party” promising radical politics to rescue Italy from decadence. But who were the member of the elite? What did they think of Italian military defeats, the “betrayals” of July 25 and September 8 and the people’s reaction to fascism? The essays on racism written by the officer cadets of the Guardia Nazionale Repubblicana at the Fontanellato school during 1944 show us how, under a populist mask, some hardliners developed a strong elitism, aiming to emulate Nazi SS as a ruling caste of heroes, a racial aristocracy acting against the perceived vices of Italians, immunising the rest of the people against the Jewish conception of life and reeducating it through racial selection.

Laura Cerasi (Università di Venezia), *They, the people. The ambivalence of corporatist populism and its legacy*

There is no need to recall that the very newspaper Benito Mussolini started his career as a Fascist with was headed “Il Popolo d’Italia”, to agree with Federico Finchelstein’s argument on the genetic link between fascism and populism, as part of a historical continuum that, whilst reversible and still viable, originated in post-WWI Italy and affected the “transatlantic” 20th century. From a political point of view, however, Italian fascist experience was not confined to the leader/crowd dialogue, patriotic corporativ politics, subversive “anti-elitist” appeals, and other traits of the populist choreography which formed the distinctive political liturgy made known by Mosse and Gentile. Indeed, the defining political feature brought about by Italian Fascism, the one that was supposed to replace political franchise with an all-encompassing representation the people in its concrete entirety – and which in fact was for some years the theme of a successful cultural foreign policy on a transnational level – was its authoritarian brand of corporatist organicism. Corporatist “people” was not an indeterminate unity; authoritarian corporatism assumed a structured, organized and de-politicised people, defined by hierarchically arranged social affiliations. Corporatist “people” was shaped by intermediate bodies, and was not trusted to act politically, unless governed. The ambivalences of Fascist populism might therefore be worth of further investigation. In this contribution a tentative historical semantics of the concept of “people” is presented, starting with a reconsideration of Giuseppe Bottai’s works, then analysing some of the debates generated in his journals (*Critica Fascista* and *Archivio di studi Corporative* especially), and finally taking into account its legacy across the post war – and post-fascist – decades.

PANEL 4.2: SHADES OF ITALIAN POPULISMS (VISUAL/CRIMINAL) (First Floor Hall)

Manuel Anselmi (Unitelma Sapienza) & Stefania Anastasia (Università di Perugia), *Punishment and consensus: criminal populism as an instrument of Italian political neo-populism*

In this presentation we’ll shows how the phenomenon of the spread of Italian penal populism is linked with Italian political populism. In particular, we’ll illustrates some cases of laws passed by the Italian Parliament and promoted by populist governments that are characterized more by a purpose of political consensus than by a real need. Considered in sequence, they are laws that denote a constant in the Italian political mentality that also involves civil society and public opinion, showing a punitive vision of society. We will illustrate how almost three decades of neo-populism have triggered several dynamics of penal populism, altering the relationship between politics and the justice system in this country. In particular, we will analyse the laws that have been produced in the last few years by ruling political forces of different ideological orientations on issues such as immigration, urban security and road checks. We will stress how the idea of justice that underpins these laws could be attributed more to reasons of political consensus than to a rational approach to the problems at stake. Furthermore, we will show that these actions promote a mindset aiming at changing the orientations of the civil society, shared values and the common sense, in a new perspective detached from the rule of law and based on irrational and emotional aspects, aptly defined “punitive society”. We believe that the neo-populist turn in the Italian system has not only deeply transformed the political system and structures, but also the mentality (Tarchi: 2018) civil society and public opinion, creating new arrangements of entire spheres of the social and political system in Italy. In particular, the Italian populist turn has determined, especially in the right-wing populist parties, a new form of political consensus based on anger, fear (Wodak: 2015) and punishment.

Noemi Biasetton (IUAV), *The Design of Populism. Consent, Empathy and Participation in times of Visual Populism*

‘The Design of Populism’ is a research aimed at understanding the relationship between visual communication and populism. Firstly, among the many definitions given to this term, the research explores literature which defines it as a ‘discursive strategy’ or ‘visual discourse’. Furthermore, the research queries the impact of a ‘new media factor’ —reasoned under cultural and technological perspectives—as a third component to the success of contemporary populism, adding to the well known combination of ‘demand side’ (contextual socio-economical issues) and ‘supply side’ (strategic availability of political parties). Secondly, this research questions the existence of ‘visual populism’, an expression coined to explicit a coincidence of visual elements that helps political leaders better engage with their audience on-line. Elements resonating under ‘visual populism’ are considered as the result of the mediatization of politics. This process generates a communication framework where the message is manipulated and made partial through a series of biases to which it is subjected from its generated form to its read one. The purpose of this investigation is the deconstruction of such model, in order to understand how visual components of social media messages created by Italian politicians (sender) might have an effect on on-line users (receiver). To achieve that, the researcher will look for visual variables that touch upon visceral aspects of the communication mode, such as 1) the sympathetic function, 2) the identification function and 3) the ridiculing function. These functions will be tested through the psychophysical method, in combination with six dependent variables (three populist and three non-populist Italian political actors) and three properties of the image (objects, lighting, angle). The final aim of the research will be to verify if it is possible to define a proper populist ‘visual algorithm’, able to sway the user’s perception and influence its attitude in terms of political consent.

Luca Paci (Swansea University), *Action 30 and the critique of Italian populism*

“The things we do are always very interstitial, off-format and off-circuit” Action30

In this paper I will discuss the work of Action30, an Italian collective made of graphic designers, film-makers, musicians, cartoonists, journalists and scholars of various disciplines founded in 2005. I am interested in the collective's analysis of the rise of populism as well as its cultural and intellectual manifestations. Their theoretical references are Bataille and Breton but also Pasolini, Basaglia, Negri and Agamben. Action30 acts as a 'performative observatory' and has created a series of incursions articulated in various cultural formats such as books, workshops, theatre productions, cinema and happenings. Its aim is to intercept new forms of racism and fascism using the 1930s as a magnifying glass. The collective juxtaposes seemingly heterogeneous and disparate elements to draw similarities and differences between the '30s and now. With an original mix of academic writing and performance the group has created a constellation of events where the general public interacts with scholars from various disciplines, authors, artists and filmmakers. In an interview, philosopher Pierangelo Di Vittorio explains: “Instead of describing events from the outside, we are directly involved in them trying to transform reality and transform ourselves with it.” This paper will examine some of the Action30 happenings including the book events *L'Uniforme e l'anima* and *Bazar Elettrico* and the live performance *Remix the Cinema*.

PANEL 4.3: NATIONALISM/POPULISM (Library)

Donatello Aramini (Università di Roma III), *The Italian Nationalist Association: a populist or an elitist movement?*

In the last years the historiography has analyzed the ideology of Italian nationalism with new approaches and new lens, oriented to underline its relations with the European climate and to consider it as a phenomenon produced by the ambivalence of modernity and as a response to the dilemmas of mass society and politics. Keeping in mind these new trends of research, my paper aims at highlighting that the Italian Nationalist Association was not so much an elitist and aristocratic movement, just like for decades the historiography described its members, but a modern movement which shaped myths and issues oriented towards a way of making politics with many topics of a populist nature. By examining the nationalist ideology and how much the first postwar climate, the political experience of D'Annunzio in Fiume (according to Gaeta the Italian Boulanger) and the fascist example influenced Ani ideology, the paper aims at underlining that some of the typical topics of populism were shaped in Italy by the Italian nationalism: the opposition between a good people and the corrupt elites; the charismatic leader who perfectly embodies people will and springs up by the race spirit; more in general the opposition between two Italy, one productive and the other one parasitical; the criticism of Parliament and representative democracy, considered as distant and incapable of understanding the desires of the nation. In this way, my paper will be able to highlight some of Italian nationalist topics still in the shade, reinterpreting them in relation to the XX century nationalisms. It will show that the Italian nationalism was a bridge between an elitist XIX century politics and the rise of fascism, which was the first mass party to develop a political populist discourse. By analyzing the Italian nationalism with the lens of populism, in fact, will be possible to stress the nature of the nationalism as a modern movement risen as a response to modern problems and, moreover, to bring to light the intensity and pervasiveness of some populist topics before the birth of fascism. Finally, the paper will strengthen those researches showing that the populist politics is an enduring peril inherent the mass politics and the dilemmas and challenges the latter places to the representative democracies.

Saverio Battente (Università di Siena), *Nazionalismo e populismo nella storia d'Italia: esperienze a confronto*

The idea of nationalism and its implication with the concept of populism, have recently returned to great interest in Italy, as in the rest of Europe. However, these concepts have not necessarily kept their semantic values unchanged in the Italian history. The present paper intends to focus on any existing ideological and theoretical differences between the Italian nationalistic movement, developed in the early XX century and merged into the fascism in the 1923, and the new nationalism risen in the XXI century, related to the nation and state building process in the faces of the challenges of modernization. Indirectly this could be useful to analyze their genesis, their goals and, for example, the formation of their ruling class of these two different seasons of the Italian nationalism. The research is potentially open in a comparative perspective with France, Germany, Spain, Great Britain or Hungary, for example. The present research will be based on the press of that time and on the media of nowadays, integrated by the existing bibliography and documents of archives as sources. This research could be useful even to investigate the relationship existing between the nationalistic movement and the fascist regime, too often used as synonyms, as a first step to analyze the birth of a new right in Italy after the end of the WWII and the rise of the Republic.

Enrico Serventi Longhi (Università di Roma La Sapienza), *Between 'national aristocrats' and 'noble people'. Gabriele D'Annunzio and imperialist populism from WWI to Fiume's occupation (1914-1920)*

The paper aims to analyze the use of the concept of people by Gabriele D'Annunzio from the interventionist campaign up to occupation of Fiume-Rijeka. Gabriele D'Annunzio's conceptions was a creative example of a "new modernity", whose most significant feature was the sacralization of politics. It envisaged the direct relationship with the masses, bypassing through the use of myths, rituals and symbols the rational intermediate bodies typical of liberal system. D'Annunzio's new lyrical order was not just an exercise of empty rhetoric or pure aesthetics, but the frame of an articulated and coherent ideological pattern characterized first of all by the redefinition in imperialist terms of the concept of "people". D'Annunzio looked forward the birth of "new popular faith" and of a "noble people", made by young peasants and soldiers and forged by the battle experience in WWI. Directed by professional agitators, by artists of action and by military rebels – the real 'aristocracy of the nation' – this "noble people" had to become protagonist of the revolt against the established order, against the liberal State and "the political caste that tried to prolong impaired and despised forms of life". Being an aristocracy and a 'noble people' no longer responded to objective and material factors, but was the prerogative of active and voluntary subjects, of 'believers' from all social classes obeying the cult of the Fatherland and expressing a vocation to power of the Italic race. In the laboratory of Fiume-Rijeka, the myth of the 'noble people' was connected with the myth of 'oppressed peoples': the rebellion against liberal Italy became a rebellion against the world order too, projecting D'Annunzio's 'populism' in an even more dynamic and imperialist dimension.

PANEL 5.1: DISCOURSE & COMMUNICATION (Lecture Hall)

Dario Quattromani (Link University), *Populist Leaders & Movements in Italy: a Long Story*

Significant changes in Italian politics have been quite well distributed since the early eighties of the twentieth century: in particular, it dates back to 1983 when the secretary of the Italian Socialist Party, Bettino Craxi, became Prime Minister (in Italy, President of the Council of Ministers), introducing a different leadership in a country whose previous habits were concerned with maintaining the status quo inherited from the post-WW2 period. Although commonly shared with the European countries' political landscapes at the time, a more relevant shift did appear with the new populist messages generated by center-right and territorial parties, such as Forza Italia and Lega Nord, in the late eighties and early nineties. Then, after 2009 (but with important roots in the previous years), with the top-down creation of a political movement from the digital world, Italian politics entered a new era, that is still in need of much in-depth research (besides excellent exceptions as Tarchi 2003, 2015 and Biorcio 2015): however, this is only one of the events which contributed to increase the substantial distance with the European political landscape. In fact, shortly after the official birth of the MoVimento 5 Stelle, founded by the former Italian comedian Beppe Grillo, a critical action started within the Partito Democratico, with the mayor of Florence as its main leader: the "rottamatori", whose harsh and clear proposals reached the public opinion, becoming part of the national political debate without any internal filter from their own party. The aim of this paper will be answering the main research question, whether or not Italian populism should be addressed as a style or a syndrome, analyzing the key discursive elements adopted by the most prominent national political leaders and movements over the last 35 years, proceeding with historical order and communicative testing.

Donatella Campus (Università di Bologna) & Marco Mazzoni (Università di Perugia), *Italy: a fertile field for populist celebrities*

Starting from a general discussion of the classical definitions of celebrity politics and of its recent transformations in the era of digital media, the paper aims at discussing the implications and the impact of the phenomenon of celebritization on Italian politics and, in particular, of its interaction with the rise of populism. The major argument is that, due to a set of circumstances, Italy has provided a very fertile field for the development of celebrity politics in different forms and that such a propaganda style has proved to be well suited to the populist narrative. The paper will retrace the history of the relationship between celebrity politics and populism from Silvio Berlusconi's ascent in the early '90s to Beppe Grillo's founding of the Five Star Movement. In addition to such two paradigmatic cases of leaders who used their previous celebrity status as a political resource, the authors will argue that also other Italian populist figures, such as Umberto Bossi, Matteo Salvini, and Giorgia Meloni, have used codes and formats of the popular culture and the world of entertainment to attract attention and increase their appeal. In particular, a special focus will be given to the League's leader Matteo Salvini. As suggested by the coverage in the 'popular' press and his use of social media, the paper will argue that Salvini can be taken as an example of "everyday political celebrity", who, according to Wood, Corbett and Flinders' definition (2016), is the politician that intends to appear as "just like us".

Marianna Griffini (King's College London), *'Prima gli Italiani': The People and the Nation in the Lega's Discourse*

The March 2018 elections sanctioned the success of the Lega, which claims to speak for a specific people, which mirrors the party's typical view of the nation. The Lega's success was further confirmed at the May 2019 European elections. Therefore, it is a matter of urgency to closely analyse the Lega's conception of the people and of the nation, which are two ideological pillars of this party. While the existing literature on the Lega predominantly focuses separately on populism and nationalism, this paper, drawing on the Critical Discourse Analysis of interviews with Lega representatives, innovatively investigates the entanglement of populism and nationalism in this party, and its articulation vis-à-vis immigration. While the Lega has made populism its ideological and stylistic hallmark since its inception, it has shifted from regionalism to nationalism throughout its lifetime. Overall, the interviews show that the Lega excludes from the people it claims to represent the elites, especially the ones that manage immigration, and the immigrants. The latter are also excluded from the Lega's predominantly ethno-cultural view of the nation, which includes some civic undertones. Therefore, populism and nationalism in the Lega are deeply entangled: they are both currently articulated vis-à-vis the perceived economic, social, and political crisis related to immigration. Indeed, the Lega, by heightening the perception of the crisis, legitimises its attack on the immigrants and on the elites that manage immigration. However, as suggested by the interviews, when the Lega is explicitly asked who belongs to the nation, it prevalently opens up the borders of it to regular immigrants, thus unsettling the nexus between excluding populism and the ethno-cultural notion of the nation.

PANEL 5.2: AESTHETIC DIMENSION OF POPULISM (First Floor Hall)

Giulio Azzolini (Università di Venezia), *Umberto Eco and the problem of populism*

The paper aims to reconstruct Umberto Eco's reflection on populism, notable above all for his ability to link multiple aspects of the same problem. Unlike most of the literature on the subject, Eco studied both the aesthetic dimension and the political dimension of populism in *Apocalittici e integrati* (1964), and he analyzed contemporary and historical populism in *Il fascismo eterno* (1995) and in other essays. Moreover, he explained both what populism is and how it works in *A passo di gambero* (2006), and showed how and why populism would be intrinsically linked to plebiscitarianism in *Il superuomo di massa* (1976).

Erica Capecchi (University of Bristol), *Understanding Right-Wing Populism Through Aesthetics: A Reflection on The Appeal of Matteo Salvini and Neo-Fascist Narratives in Today's Italy*

Italy is facing today a deep social and political crisis with far-right and populist forces represented by both the League and Five Stars parties in power locally and nationally. This tendency has been accompanied by a rise in neo-fascist propaganda in the context of anti-immigrant xenophobia, racism, hate speech and politically motivated violence against intellectuals, journalists, and political opponents. Propaganda and political activity have also been linked to organisations such as Casapound and Forza Nuova, the two main Italian neo-fascist fringe parties, whose public activities have become increasingly accepted and normalised. These narratives have now gone mainstream reaching to the heart of the Italian state and are particularly emphasised by the current Interior Minister Matteo Salvini, who is implementing an increasing extremist politics of fear and securisation which showcases clear parallelisms with a fascist attitude. This paper will examine the aesthetic strategies used by Salvini in building his mass appeal. Salvini has become a celebrity in the eyes of many Italians to the extent of assuming a sort of messianic role as the Capitano (Captain) of the Patria. The Interior Minister has created a powerful self-image by making evident juxtapositions with the Duce and implementing populist rhetoric through aesthetics designed to work with the emotions of the electorate by fomenting social hatred and encouraging far-right prejudice, especially against immigrants and the Roma community. The paper will examine visual material gathered on social media including pictures, videos, and public posts connected to neo-fascist narratives. The focus will be on one city - Pistoia and in particular on the case of a priest - Father Biancalani - who was targeted by local neo-fascists and by Salvini on social media and tv broadcasts for his role in helping migrants. The case of Father Biancalani and the city of Pistoia became a national issue and it constitutes one of the earliest examples of the racist and intimidatory politics implemented by Salvini and the far-right across the country. The aesthetic nature of this appeal and strategy has rarely been analysed but in fact forms a key element of Salvini's negative and positive appeal to his base and beyond.

Gianluca Fantoni (Nottingham Trent University) & Marco Paoli (University of Liverpool), *Representations of "Italian populism" in films*

This paper will provide audio-visual evidence of cinematic representations of “populism” through the screening of a series of relevant sequences taken from some of the most significant Italian films from the post-war period to the present. This will be followed by brief theoretical introduction to the conceptual confusion of populism in the film context. The aim of this paper is to illustrate some key points, which will encourage further reflection on the cinematic representations and meanings of populism in the Italian context and beyond.

PANEL 5.3: *MERIDIONALISMO/BORDERS/POPULISM* (Library)

Maria Stella Chiaruttini (University of Göttingen), *Neo-Bourbonism and Financial History Revisionism: A Methodological Question*

For years, both parties now forming the populist coalition governing Italy have been fanning discontent against the EU, depicted as an elitist and authoritarian institution closer to foreign than to national interests. Ironically enough, whereas Salvini's League has always posed as the champion of Northern Italy against the South, the Five Stars Movement has occasionally endorsed 'Neo-bourbonism', an Italian equivalent of the Neo-Confederates in the United States flirting with the idea of independence from Northern Italy. In both its rhetoric and practices, Neo-bourbonism has a distinctively populist as well as regionalist character. Its claims that Risorgimento historiography amounts to little more than an impressive collection of 'fake news' crafted by the 'establishment' and complacent scholars since Unification in order to beautify the 'colonisation' of the South by the North are couched in highly emotional terms. History produced by non-professional historians is presented as a path to enlightenment to rediscover the dignity of the 'Southern nation' and to mobilise against cultural prejudice as well as ongoing political oppression from the North. Indignation at the 'sack of the South', its Treasury and banks by Northern politicians and bankers in the wake of national unification chimes in well with the current outrage at the alleged financial exploitation of Italy by Northern Europe. Archives, however, reveal that this narrative, far from being new, started to be crafted at the time of Unification. Bourbon exiles revelled in the fiscal troubles of the Italian state, guilty in their eyes of abandoning the virtuous austerity pursued by the former government. The largest banking institutions in the South, the Banks of Naples and Sicily, strove to present themselves as victims of a rapacious central government and champions of the South as well as small against big business, while in fact they had become a fief of local bankers and politicians. With the support of the Left, they developed a populist discourse pitting North against South, (Northern) bankers against (Southern) people, central against local government. Their very inability to ultimately get the upper hand in their struggle with the future Bank of Italy only reinforced a narrative of victimisation which has ever since systematically glossed over the positive role played by the latter and the new state in democratising Southern credit markets, previously characterised by fragmentation and severe credit undersupply due to entrenched oligopolies.

Nicola Toniello (Università di Trieste), *Populismo e "Vento del Sud": tra qualunquismo e neofascismo nell'immediato secondo dopoguerra*

All'indomani della Liberazione si assistette all'innalzarsi del "Vento del Sud", ovvero al manifestarsi di un certo malcontento tra le forze moderate e reazionarie del centro e del meridione d'Italia che non erano state toccate dalla lotta per la Liberazione e che non si riconoscevano nel governo del CLN o che avevano iniziato ad avversare le sue politiche. Significativa espressione di tale sentimento fu il qualunquismo, movimento che prese il via dal settimanale "L'Uomo Qualunque", diretto da Guglielmo Giannini, e trasformato in un soggetto politico «prototipo del populismo europeo contemporaneo» [Tarchi]. Le sue parole d'ordine come il rifiuto del professionismo politico in nome di una radicale "depoliticizzazione" delle istituzioni statali, espressa dalla formula dello "Stato amministrativo", le invettive contro i leader del CLN, incarnazione di quegli "uomini politici professionali" che il movimento si proponeva di combattere, permisero di fare breccia nell'area moderato-reazionaria della popolazione. Alcune delle istanze del qualunquismo come la polemica contro la partitocrazia e il politicantismo erano peraltro apprezzate dai nostalgici del fascismo che provavano a riorganizzarsi in clandestinità. In alcuni casi, pertanto, l'Uomo qualunque fu utilizzato come una sorta di "ombrello protettivo" fino a che non si fosse presentato sulla scena politica un partito che potesse rappresentarli più degnamente. Anche per tale ragione, la nascita del Movimento Sociale Italiano fu una delle concause della crisi irrevocabile che colpì l'Uomo Qualunque dal 1947. Il partito della Fiamma si candidava pertanto a raccogliere una parte dell'eredità di Giannini, come ad esempio la propaganda anticomunista e antipartitica e la promessa di un rapporto più diretto e corretto tra governanti e governati. Alcuni tratti distintivi della retorica neofascista (concezione eroica della vita, mito della patria e della nazione), non conciliabili con il pensiero di Giannini, venivano invece rivendicati dal MSI, che poteva pertanto presentarsi come unico degno rappresentante degli «esuli in patria».