

Populist discourse as a blurring of political issues

From a discourse point of view, the study of populism is problematic for several reasons. In view of the comments circulating in the public space mainly carried by the news media which accuse any party that claims to be of the people as populist. In view of the judgments made on populism by the political actors themselves, who sometimes stigmatize it, sometimes claim it. Finally, with regard to the ways of analyzing this question, through the prism of disciplines in the human and social sciences, which each time provide a specific explanation: for the historian Pierre Rosanvallon, “The news of populism is the news of democratic fatigue; it is the dark shadow of democratic dysfunctions.”¹; for the philosopher Jacques Rancière, it would have the appearance of a left-wing republicanism advocating universal values, but despising differences, stigmatizing communitarianism; for Cas Mudde and Cristobal Rovira Kaltwasser, populism is “an insubstantial ideology which considers that society is divided into two homogeneous and antagonistic camps, the ‘pure people’ and ‘the corrupt elite’”²; and for Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe populism must be integrated into democracy as a form of government that appears: “when the popular masses are excluded for a long time from the political arena, then certain forms of leadership emerge which are not in the framework orthodox of liberal democracy”.

Like any question of society, populism is the object of analysis of various disciplines, none being able to exhaust the subject on its own, but their conjunction being able to shed some light on it. However, we find a common point in these explanations, which states that populism is neither a political regime nor an ideology, nor a political program, nor a theory of the State, nor a fascism, nor a totalitarianism, without being totally foreign to all these forms of political society. In other words, populism is a stakeholder in democracy since what it founds is the opposition of points of view.

For discourse analysis, it is a question of describing the discourses which circulate in the public space of the political field according to a double point of view: (i) that of discursive mechanics, that is to say of *enunciative staging* as a persuasion strategy for the citizen population in order to build a public opinion favorable to the speaker; (ii) that of the *axiological content* carrying values organized in an ideological system of thought, echoing the social imaginaries that characterize a given society and culture. This double perspective of analysis takes its starting point in various corpora: corpus of declarations of political actors; corpus of the news media that peddle them and analyze them; corpus of commentators and thinkers of all kinds. But since we must also observe the reactions of citizens, we have recourse to a corpus made up of citizen testimonies collected by the media and by various surveys, as well as opinions circulating in social networks. It is therefore a question of examining the interaction that occurs between *political supply* and *social demand*.

¹ L’Obs n° 2717, 12/01/2016, then his book *Le siècle du populisme*, Paris, Seuil, 2020.

² Case Mudde and Cristobal Rovira Kaltwasser, *Brève introduction au populisme*, co-published by Fondation Jean-Jaurès and L’Aube, 2018.

Characteristics of populist discourse

I have been led, on several occasions, to describe the discursive characteristics of populist discourse³ and its manipulation strategies, which are part of this postmodern era of disbelief. I will recall them by specifying them, the essential points, and I will endeavor here to show how the populist discourse produces an ideological confusion which destabilizes society.

Populist discourse is part of a *strategy* intended to build a public opinion favorable to a political leader. Thus defined as a first approximation, populist discourse would merge with any political discourse. Indeed, it is part of the *contract* of political discourse that is established between a *political body* and a *citizen body*. This contract causes the political body to develop a discourse according to a triadic scenography which is made up of three discursive moments: to *describe the state of social disorder* from which society and citizens suffer, by determining the source of the evil; *denounce those in charge* who have allowed this disorder to develop because of their ideas or their incompetence; *defend the values* which must govern the well-being of citizens and life in society, which supposes that the defender of these values presents himself as exemplary.

The populist discourse is built on the three pillars of this scenario, but by carrying its characteristics to the excess: the social disorder is *exacerbated* with the help of a discourse of *victimization* which describes the forces of evil and builds a *scapegoat*; those responsible become *culprits* with the help of a speech of *satanization* which makes them adversaries to be eliminated; as for the values they are defended in a *paroxysmal* way, glorifying the tradition, the past and the purity of the identities, and their defender presents himself as a perfectly upright *savior*, even as a *messiah*.

His discursive strategy is deployed mainly in the field of emotions and feelings: the fear of the other which generates xenophobic feelings; the fear of losing one's social condition which relegates people to non-existence; anger at injustices and inequalities; the doubt vis-à-vis information and knowledge, source of mistrust causing disenchantment, helplessness and tendency to conspiracy; uncertainty in the face of the forces of globalization and of nature, a source of anxiety in the face of the unknown. From the point of view of its discursive strategy, populist discourse is therefore part of political discourse by exacerbating it.

The ideas and values defended by peoples, populations and electorates depend *on the belief systems* specific to the various social groups who live in a certain cultural context. Among these belief systems -which we can call ideology or social imaginaries- there are some which correspond to the positions of political parties on the right and on the left. They are configured in what we will call “ideological discursive matrices”: ideological matrix on the right, ideological matrix on the left which we will now briefly review.

The ideological matrix of the Right

³ Among others: “Réflexions pour l’analyse du discours populiste”, review *Mots*, n° 97, *Local authorities in search of identity*, ENS Éditions, Lyon, 2011; and “Du discours politique au discours populiste. Le populisme est-il de droite ou de gauche ?”, In Corcuera F. et alii (eds.), *Discours politique. Regards croisés*, Paris L’Harmattan, 2016, p. 32-43.

The right-wing ideological matrix is characterized by a *vision of the world* in which ‘nature imposes itself on man’. From this follows a ‘natural law’ which submits the human being to the command of mother nature, behind which, in a religious version, is the hand of God. The metaphor of *the tree*, as the organic order of the human world, is its symbol. Observing that all is not equal in nature and that, as in animals, the relationships between individuals are relationships of force. It follows that the inequalities are of nature, and that the relations are of domination between the strong and the weak, as the Bible shows it which justifies the right of the elect. It is *the order of nature*. This is not free from contradictions since it is the policies of the radical right which destroy nature (deforestation in Brazil) and which are climatosceptics (Trump, Bolsonaro). A certain number of values flow from it in a movement of conservation of things.

The family value

It is within it that the individual is made: it is not the individual who makes the group but the group who makes the individual, hence the importance of filiation, the innate and the weight of the family tradition through which the individual reproduces and which, at the same time, essentializes this core group in an immutable destiny.

This justifies a pyramidal order of the family composition at the top of which is the figure of the patriarch, of the commander, at the same time protector of the members of his family. This model is extended to the body politic, at the top of which is a tutelary power: first under the figure of the king, in times of monarchical rule, himself of divine obedience, whose members are subjects making an act of allegiance, then under the figure of the natural leader, in this case the president of the republic.

The work value

Man is conceived as a manufacturer of wealth by his creative and industrious activity which requires a position of power to *make things happen*. Endless movement since the need is constantly renewed which leads to an infinite expansion, as stated by Adam Smith, for whom “insatiable appetites (...) lead to the permanent expansion of the machine for the production of goods and services, sources satisfaction”.⁴

Work is based on merit, because competition is the law of life which requires courage and a taste for effort. But in a hierarchical order from superior to inferior, between, first, the lords, the masters, the chiefs, then the leaders, on the one hand, and the executing subordinates who are first the peasants then the workers, on the other. This ensures an order in which the word of the leader must not be called into question, thus excluding any organization of protest which would destabilize the production work. Because the search by individuals of their own interest ensures collective prosperity: “By pursuing his own interest, [the individual] often advances that of society”⁵ writes Adam Smith. Thus a productive activity is organized in the service of the social body to which those who work owe everything, thereby justifying, without always saying it, serfdom, slavery, factory work and finally the employee. Hence the

⁴ *Recherches sur la nature et les causes de la richesse des nations*, Économica, 2000.

⁵ *Théorie des sentiments moraux*, Puf, 2014.

passion for order which is linked to profit, to self-control and to the apparatuses of production.

The nation value

The nation is conceived as that which symbolically brings together a people on a territory, in an ethnic, religious and linguistic purity. We are dealing with a social body made up of the 'children of the Nation' as the founding essence of its identity, the symbol of which is the tree which does not suffer from being moved or grafted. Therefore, any foreign interference and any ethnic mixture must be fought as an enemy that risks sully the identity heritage of the nation. If there are several nationalisms, *ethnico-cultural*, as it is defended in certain Latin American countries, *religious* as in Arab-Muslim countries, *state* as in countries where the secular republican state dominates, we can say that in Right-wing ideology, at least until the twentieth century, nationalism is at the same time ethnico-cultural, religious and state.

The Right Body of Doctrine

These basic values constitute the body of doctrine of the Right. We find them, gathered, in the slogan of the government of Vichy, in France, ('Work, Family, Fatherland'). These values are variously configured according to historical circumstances, but we can say that remained constant those of *conservatism*, of *segregationist* and *nationalism*.

A conservatism which is based on the values of *filiation* and *heredity* which depend on an origin for which we are accountable, and which are perpetuated throughout history. A conservatism which strives to maintain a hierarchy of ranks, in a social stratification from top to bottom, each level wanting to be higher than the one below. A segregationism which results from the *naturalistic* conception of the world, in which beings are not, in essence, equal to each other⁶. There would therefore be categories of individuals who are superior to others. A nationalism of uniqueness which brings together people, territory and language, and this particularly in France in its centralizing and Jacobin conception of politics. We find here the idea of a founding origin of a people that has been perpetuated through history, which means that this nationalism is accompanied by a vision of an *ethnos*, white, Christian people, but who must be taken care of by the elites, by this people is ignorant.

It follows a conception of freedom which endeavors to preserve its good and therefore the property of individuals. It is accompanied by the concept of *security* as an action to preserve one's property. The sentence of the declaration of the rights of man and of the citizen of 1789 'Liberty consists in being able to do anything that does not harm others' is interpreted here with regard to the *free enterprise* of the Market. Thus, are developed -and continue to be developed- on the right, the themes of sovereignty, and the cult of identity according to Christian roots which takes the place of the universal.

⁶ A recurring theme in Jean-Marie Le Pen. See the study by Souchard M. et al., *Le Pen. Les mots. Analyse d'un discours d'extrême droite*, Le Monde Éditions, Paris, 1997.

The Left ideological matrix

It was necessary to begin by describing the ideological matrix on the right, because the matrix on the left is based in opposition to this one, on a vision of the world in which it is 'the man who imposes himself on nature'. Noting that nature is unequal, that the relationships between living beings are dominating, the human being, living in society, must strive to gradually reduce inequalities. Its vision of the world is therefore dynamic: we do not seek to defend a state of affairs but to make it evolve for the betterment of individuals, from which the notion of *progress is born*, guaranteeing equality between men.

The value of the group

It is a question here of the conception of the group as a *social body* resulting from various aggregations of class, of professional corporation, of associative activities, and not of the family, the only reference group of the right. Relations between group members are egalitarian in the name of equal dignity of being individuals. This egalitarian conception is therefore opposed to any attempt at relations of domination in society on the part of an authority which would take advantage of its position of power to submit individuals. Even more, nature being unequal for the benefit of the strongest and some wanting to maintain this state of affairs, it is necessary to fight against those very people who want to keep their privileges: in front of *the hierarchical order* is opposed an *egalitarian order in rights* ; facing the *discrimination* is against the *social solidarity* ; meet the *interests* of the group opposed the *general interest*. In this perspective, the people, contrary to the vision of the right, are conceived as the mass of those who are not in a dominant position: the *plebs*, the *demos people*, are opposed to *the ethnos people* of the right.

The work value

It also defines itself in opposition to a vertical, hierarchical organization, subject to the dictates of the bosses. It is ideally conceived according to a horizontal order, self-management, distribution and sharing of decisions, and possibilities of negotiation through the intermediary of workers' defense groups: the unions. In other words, the *principle of command* of the right is opposed to a *principle of dispute*. This conception of work is linked to an urbanized society and to the industrialization of production which has organized a certain division of labor into specialties around the machine conducive to the prioritization and control of tasks and their performers, a different conception of work. traditional land. Thus, at the time of the industrialization of the 19th century, a esprit de corps of workers entering into the struggle against employers' power was formed. Thus the liberal economy is denounced. The left, however, retains a progressive faith in technical and scientific development, collective, for the benefit of society.

The nation value

This value also comes from struggles for equality. The people being conceived as the plebs, the *demos*, it is the foundation of democracy insofar as it represents *popular sovereignty*, according to an equal right to participate in the life of the City. Such a nation cannot live according to the immutable order of an authority of divine or profane origin from

which emanates a social world hierarchical by nature. The model must be reversed in favor of popular sovereignty which, based on the equal rights of citizens, chooses its representatives and controls political action. If the nation is linked to the people, it is as the people decide. Nothing being able to oppose the equality between the citizens, the religious beliefs cannot replace the public power, and this one in its temporal organization can only be neutralized, hence, in France, the law of *secularism*. These values being given as a universal principle, another characteristic characterizes the left: *internationalism*. Because there is a call for international solidarity between the peoples of the countries which pursue the same fight for liberation against the oppression of authoritarian political systems, and for the defense of underprivileged social classes.

The body of doctrine

Thus is defined the *body of doctrine* of the left: an *egalitarianism* which commits to fight against all forms of domination and discrimination; a *progressivism* to the emancipation of the individual must lead to social emancipation; a concern for the *general interest* which leads to social solidarity; a separation between public life and private life, guaranteed by the principle of secularism, religious beliefs being reserved for the private sector without the possibility of proselytism.

Unlike the right, which sees freedom as the place where the goods of the individual are preserved in relation to free enterprise, the left sees freedom as a process, a process of liberation from all forms of domination that prevent individuals from emancipating. But it is a question of personal emancipation within the framework of a human community, a social emancipation through the exercise of collective work (against liberal right-wing individualism). Hence the need for a strong State, a state interventionist and protective, which, according to the Convention of 1792, guarantees these values. The left was built on an ideal where economic growth and technical and scientific progress have allowed social progress and better living together.

The egalitarian spirit of the left means that, faced with a hierarchical organization of work subject to the diktats of the bosses, a self-management order is opposed, or at least one of negotiation and sharing of decisions. And in general, faced with any attempt at domination and discrimination, the response through education, and citizen participation in the life of the City. A principle of universality which is supposed to create international solidarity between countries which pursue the same fight for liberation against the oppression of authoritarian political systems, and the defense of underprivileged social classes, which can sometimes justify revolutionary action.

We see that the ideological matrix of the left is defined against that of the right by predominating a single principle, the founder of life in society: *equality*. While honoring the vertical republican transcendence, the *res-publica*, which confers on every individual an equal humanity, a heritage of the Revolution and the Enlightenment, his fight is situated in the horizontality of democracy which results in the demand for a well-being of the person in the social equality of individuals⁷.

⁷ We can refer to *L'histoire globale des socialismes. XIX^e-XXI^e siècle*, under the direction of Jean-Numa Ducange, Razmig Keucheyan and Stéphanie Roza, Paris, PUF, 2021.

The scrambling of discursive staging

Right and left use the same discourse of *victimization* of the working class, stirring up fears: identity fears of *national disidentification* under the threat of a foreign invasion (right), and under the diktats of a Europe perceived as an abstract sovereign power, without proper identity (right and left); fears of *social downgrading* due to the globalization of the economic and financial crisis, and of an ultraliberal economy, which blur the distinction between social categories, having in common a loss of purchasing power; fears in the face of *insecurity* by focusing on acts of delinquency, the burning suburbs, the school which is no longer a place of sanctuary but of moral decadence and incivility. Thus, far left and far right find themselves taking into account of affects by playing on fears, anger, indignation and contempt.

Right and left use the same discourse of *satanizing the culprits*. Europe presented as the follower of financial capitalism and neoliberalism: “brutal and insatiable idol”⁸; a “stifling and destructive straitjacket [which imposes] ultra-liberalism and [free trade], to the detriment of public employment services, social equity and even our economic growth”⁹ says the extreme right. “The European Union is abolishing our republican history and it is making us pay for it with a bang!”¹⁰ says the radical left, denouncing *finance capital*: “The world before us is the result of the increased domination of finance capital over the world, the monstrous product of two decades of neoliberal policies which have thrown the seeds of a serious decline in civilization.” Criticized is everything that constitutes a *system* (institutions and bureaucracy) which would be the cause of all evils: “The system is a group of people who defend their own interests without the people, or against them.”¹¹, for the far right; “The system is caste”, for the far left¹². Also guilty are the *politicians* and all the *elites*, who are accused of holding an expert discourse which only reasons with figures, who sell themselves to the diktats of neoliberalism, and who are disconnected from deep France, from “forgotten France”¹³, when they are not accused of being corrupt.

Right and left *appeal to the people* and merge with them. The discourse of appeal to the people, which is concomitant with the other discourses, is also found in the two extremes. He is called ‘the little people’, ‘the people’, ‘the abandoned’, ‘the left behind’, and he is called to believe in the promise of redemption and liberation from the yoke imposed by the elites. We make him spark the illusion of immediate change (“Ahora!”, “Agora!”); it is called to direct action by bypassing the administrative-political apparatuses and calling for referendums in the name of a participatory democracy. We call on our fellow citizens to merge into a

⁸ *Le Monde*, June 24, 2015.

⁹ Marine Le Pen, January 16, 2011, FN investiture congress, *Le Monde*, 01/11/17.

¹⁰ J.-L. Mélenchon, RMC 2005.

¹¹ Marine Le Pen, *Le Monde*, 6/01/17.

¹² J.-L. Mélenchon, *Le Monde*, 6/01/17.

¹³ See: Christophe Guilluy, *La France Périphérique*, Flammarion, champs, 2015; expression which was taken up by the FN.

collective soul all stretched out towards a desire for salvation, because it is a question of mobilizing hope. Thus, the populist leader, according to his temperament and his charisma, could go so far as to present himself as *the providential man* such, although in a different way, Trump in the United States, Orban in Hungary, Erdogan in Turkey or Bolsonaro in Brazil, Pablo Iglesias in Spain, Bepe Grillo and Salvini in Italy, Mélenchon in France. He then sets himself up as a guide of the people, and if he has charisma, he takes the form of a *prophet*. He can even go so far as to merge with the people, like Chavez who declared: “I am no longer myself, I am a people who are standing here, with their courage and dignity, rewriting their history, the people of Bolívar”¹⁴. It must also be credible by building an *ethos* of authenticity: ‘I am as you see me’, ‘I do what I say’, ‘I have nothing to hide’. It is about establishing a relationship of blind trust with the people by being pure.

Ideological scrambling over the defense of values

To the scrambling effected by the staging of the political scenography, is added a scrambling in the field of the defense of values, as we see through the major themes that characterize the moment of the exaltation of values: *popular sovereignty*, *sovereign economy*, *national identity*.

Right and Left defend *popular sovereignty*. The two are found, in a different way, around Europe: an attack on economic and then political sovereignty, as the decisions of the European Court of Justice testify. Europe is criticized for imposing its neoliberal diktats (the length of working time in the army)¹⁵, and to promote a neoliberal federalism which erases national differences: there is no European sovereignty because there is no European people, it is argued here and there, left and right to be found in what Ernest Renan wrote in the eighteenth century: ‘What constitutes a nation is having done great things together in the past and wanting to do more in the future.’ ‘The far right defends sovereignty in the name of the myth of the *organic nation* against a liberal Europe (...) which maintains all peoples under the yoke of the Sarkozy-Merkel axis (which) must be broken in France’¹⁶. The radical left, for its part, does it in the name of *the citizen-people* and of *equality*: ‘Let us be the sovereign people in all places, citizens in the city and at work’¹⁷. But on the right and on the left, the leaders are calling for a *referendum* on the European Union treaty, and even its extension within the framework of a participatory democracy: for Jean-Luc Mélenchon, we must “strengthen and amplify direct sovereignty of the people”; for Marine Le Pen, we have to go through a referendum because “to renegotiate a treaty, we start by voting against to say that we do not agree!”¹⁸.

Right and Left defend a *sovereign economy*. The far right, by advocating a *protectionist economy*: “I will put an end to the dictatorship of the financial markets by establishing a

¹⁴ Hugo Chávez, “Gran concentración ‘Día del pueblo heroico’”, Presidencia de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela, discurso del 13 de abril del 2003.

¹⁵ Decision of July 15, 2021.

¹⁶ Marine Le Pen.

¹⁷ *Profession of faith of the FN*, during the presidential campaign of 2012.

¹⁸ In Montpellier, February 8.

strong, strategic and protective state”¹⁹. The far left, by claiming a *national market economy*, a relocation of activities so that “power [is] in the people, not in finance”²⁰. These two parties are against an international neoliberal economy, and claim an “economic patriotism”, by criticizing a tax system that demands too many taxes and too many taxes. In both camps, to be liberal is to be the son of the French Revolution and the Republic, in the name of emancipation, individual freedom and the right to private property against that of the lords (formerly), of the State (today), which is not without contradiction. Indeed, liberalism, which we will call societal, did indeed come from the Revolution as the emancipation of the individual and his right to exist autonomously, which we will find later in the declaration of human rights, but at the same time it generates an economic liberalism which advocates freedom of enterprise, competition in the market and a law of the strongest for the purposes of developing the wealth supposed to fall on the popular classes²¹.

Right and Left defend a *national identity*. A certain nationalism, on the far right by exalting the patriotism of a native nation, calling for ‘a vast gathering of patriots from the left as well as from the right’, on the left by exalting a patriotism of a *nation that is equal* in social rights. Despite these few differences, it is indeed a blurring of ideologies that we are witnessing around the question of identity as *independence*: political independence as the right to national sovereignty, economic independence as the right to dispose of one's own resources, independence of the people as a right to recognize themselves in their historical specificity. The notion of the nation-state has always been a source of division, the left wanting to be internationalist, the right an authoritarian and anti-Semitic nationalism (the Dreyfus affair). But now right and left find themselves in a nationalism against any identity disintegration.

Right and Left defend the same *republican values*, as we can see with regard to secularism. Admittedly, there seems to be opposition between the two camps as regards immigration, the extreme right considering that it is necessary to resist multiculturalism by demanding that immigrants assimilate or that they be expelled from the country: “I oppose foreigners in the name of republican values, because they are incompatible with these values”, while the radical left recalls the universality of the values of the Republic by advocating, not the assimilation, but *the integration* of immigrant populations in the name of social solidarity and equal rights, and this in accordance with the ideological matrices of both right and left, the first supporting the individual-nature, the second the society-man which controls social organization and imposes itself on the individual. However, this claim for republican values is unanimously made against globalization and Europe responsible for the non-control of migratory movements, maintaining a *xenophobic* social imagination.

Right and left find the same vision of the people. We have seen, in this regard, that the ideological matrices are opposed. The right has an *ethnicist view* of the people, the left a *plebeian view*. But this difference is now covered by a new partition. On the right, an

¹⁹ *Profession of faith* of the FN, 2012 presidential campaign.

²⁰ *Profession of Faith* of LFI, 2012 presidential campaign.

²¹ See: Pierre Manent, *Histoire intellectuelle du libéralisme*, Fayard, 1987.

opposition between a ‘We-the-French-of-stock-at home’, and a ‘They-the-foreigners-at home’; on the left, an opposition between a ‘We-the-people-of-the-poor-people’, and a ‘They-the corrupt-rich-elites’. But the fact that the two camps dedicate the elites, the powerful, the rich, the authoritarian leaders to gemonies, the class struggle on the left, the bourgeoisie/people opposition on the right, is erased. These speeches, the common denominator of which is a right to *be oneself against the other*, create a social imaginary of the people which distinguishes and opposes the ‘We from below’ and the ‘We from above’, ‘the oligarchy and the people’, an opposition between two vague entities that would be big and small, good and bad citizens.

On the demand side: the state of society

As we said in the introduction, faced with the discourses of political supply, we must observe what the discourses of social demand are. There is indeed a reciprocal influence, but not symmetrical, an echo, mirror effect, between these two discourses, the politician and the citizen, the first trying to stick to the second, the second sometimes allowing itself to be seduced by the first, but also sending back to it a staggered demand which forces it to rectify itself, because the partition of social demand does not correspond in all points to the ideological matrices of right and left which are based on a systematization of thought.

Social demand is also sensitive to values, but they are those which are inscribed in the tradition of the environments to which they belong and in the living conditions of the time. These values are carried by a socially heterogeneous population, mostly not politicized, and which is not concerned with the thought systems underlying them. For a long time, these values have been grouped around the two major tendencies of conservatism and progressivism, being claimed by various trades and by the voice of trade unions. The results of the elections showed that, until 1980, the electorate was divided between voters with low economic and educational capital who voted more on the left, and voters with strong economic and educational capital who voted more on the right. Then the electorate gradually fragmented until there were transfers of votes, part of the left electorate being divided between the radical left and the extreme right, part of the electorate of the government right sliding to the extreme right, not to mention the increase in abstention, on the right and on the left.

Now this cleavage is disturbed. Opinion surveys, for their part, also highlight this phenomenon of fragmentation, partisan change and voter defection in relation to the values that are expressed. We learn that, out of 87% of a population surveyed who believe that the state lacks *authority*, 56% say they are from the Left Front, 76% from the Socialist Party, 99% from the Republicans. At the same time, 65% of the whole want more power to be given to the police, 70% deem the justice lax, and 87% want a real leader to restore order. This demand for authority is accompanied by a *demand for security*: the respondents combine delinquency, terrorism and Islamism, which they consider to be threats: 66% say they no longer feel at home, and 83% believe that fundamentalism religious is dangerous²². The

²² Political Barometer *ViaVoice*.

European Value Study which, since 1981, has studied the evolution of values in around thirty countries every 10 years, shows that right-wing and left-wing electorates come together around values of authority: the welfare state, institutions like the police, army, health and schools (up 80%), and against political institutions (trust down 40%) and parties (down 12%)²³. An investigation by Cevipof²⁴, on the eve of the 2017 presidential elections, shows that voters ‘very left’ or ‘very right’ defend the primacy of the *popular will*, denounce the cut between the elites and the people, and s’ protest against the intermediary bodies, the elected representatives of the Republic, the unions and the journalists. This is corroborated by another survey by the same institute on the *perception of populism*, which populism peaks among voters ‘very left’ and ‘very right’, and even in the ‘center’²⁵.

One can observe a hypersensitivity on the part of a part of the opinion to the themes of national sovereignty, authority, security, and the desire for recognition, particularly on the part of the popular layers who have the feeling ‘that nothing is done for them’ and that “the ‘they from above’ prosper at their expense”²⁶, and who empower themselves by refusing any support from intermediary bodies. The recent movement of yellow vests bears witness to this, which challenged the authority of representative bodies, parties or unions, refused to be represented by leaders, and threw into the same basket experts, learned elites, leaders of whatever side, journalists and news media, without however stigmatizing the bosses, while purchasing power was the main stake of the movement²⁷. More generally, we see the emergence of protest movements that no longer correspond to professional bodies, unions or parties. These movements, on the contrary, bring together populations representing various professions (crafts, commerce, small and medium-sized enterprises, medical and service professions), and various political affiliations (left and extreme left, right and extreme right), by mixing social affiliations. (popular, lower and upper middle).

This creates a certain confusion, because these speeches find an echo in the population from where reactions of refuge in a national protectionism against the idea of a supra nationality,²⁸ and xenophobia²⁹, as evidenced by a survey which reveals that part of the population, the surveyed population, declares that there are ‘Too many foreigners in France’, 91% belonging to the extreme right (FN), 50% to the LR, LO, NPA and Green parties, and 35 to 40% to the PS, PC, UDI. Scrambling is also ensured by a far left and a far right which claim to embody the *real people*, demand referendums and want to overthrow the political class.

²³ Published by Pierre Bréchon and Frédéric Gonthier (eds.), *La France des valeurs, quarante ans d’évolution*, Presses Universitaires de Grenoble.

²⁴ *Le Monde*, February 13, 2019.

²⁵ Cevipof study: ‘Populist France?’, May 2017.

²⁶ Robert Castel, “Pourquoi la classe ouvrière a perdu la partie”, in *La montée des incertitudes. Travail, protections, statut des individus*, Paris, Seuil, 2009.

²⁷ See: *Le Monde*, May 30-31, 2019.

²⁸ Let us recall the rejection of the European Constitutional Treaty in 2005, and the rejection of the integration of Turkey into Europe by 60-80% of the population.

²⁹ Out of the entire population surveyed who believe that there are ‘Too many foreigners in France’, 91% belong to the extreme right (FN), 50% to the LR, LO, NPA parties, and Greens, and 35-40% to PS, PC, UDI.

The interference effects of social demand

This new and complex state of social demand disrupts, by a feedback effect, the parties, both those of governments and the most radical, and puts them in ideological contradiction.

On the right, the ideological matrix which maintains that it is nature that imposes itself on man, that he must accept their inequalities and submit to authority, now comes up against a social demand that demands equality, transparency in the management of state affairs, recognition of minorities, and an evolution of societal values. Likewise, his doctrine of an economic neoliberalism defended in the name of the theory of 'runoff', but which in reality favors multinational companies, international finance and competition, comes up against a desire for control and regulation, through a part of the right-wing electorate who demand more social protection from the state. And in terms of morals, his conservatism which defends values such as the family based on the man-woman couple alone to be able to father children, which opposes the marriage of people of the same sex, rejects medically assisted procreation (PMA), refuses interventions on the end of life, and is opposed to scientific research on stem cells, this positioning on societal values comes up against a change in social demand which, for the most part, as the surveys show, is favorable to the recognition of various minorities, of their equal rights, and to freedom in matters of procreation and end of life³⁰.

On the Left, the disturbances are even more pronounced and severe. Indeed, its body of doctrine which is based on the values of emancipation, progress, openness, international struggle of the popular classes, is undermined. Its progressivism is called into question by the developments of a technology which disables more than it emancipates, and which produces job losses. Its traditional internationalist aim has been replaced by an abstract economic globalism which divides countries. Its spirit of openness and solidarity comes up against the migratory invasion and the demand for border closures. Surveys and electoral results show that the popular and middle classes, more inclined to vote on the left, are moving towards a demand for authority, security, refusal of immigration, rejection of ethnic and religious communitarianism. The values of hierarchy and meritocracy, once hated by the left electorate, are considered legitimate. A certain conservatism -particularly in the rural world and in small deterritorialized towns- is valued as resistance to economic changes, and as it would allow us to recover a lifestyle from the past that is disappearing, joining in this the right-wing electorate. This population criticizes left-wing parties for being more concerned with social minorities than with immigration, which increases insecurity. The European left which declared itself in favor of the opening of open borders, then, subsequently, demanded only a few technical adjustments, encountered the popular classes' assent to the theses of disidentification (invasion and denationalization), and are felt betrayed³¹. Finally, the working and popular classes which formerly acted in relation to the intermediary bodies, including the unions, claim a 'right to be oneself' and to act without intermediaries, without union leaders or intermediaries.

³⁰ If 74% of the French population surveyed is against the abrogation of *Marriage for All*, 56% belong to the Republicans (LR).

³¹ See: Kahn S. and Lévy J., *The country of the Europeans*, Odile Jacob, 2019.

In summary, we can say that the left, whether moderate or extreme, finds itself in ideological contradictions. It finds itself stripped of its myths about people, progress, emancipation and equality. And that is why, in an attempt to respond to this collapse, part of the left, in certain countries such as Spain (Podemos), Greece (Syriza), Italy (5 stars), France (LFI), is radicalized in movements of revolt and permanent protest against all systems.

Conclusion: Where are we?

It is at the meeting of the discourse of social demand and political offer that a *transversal populism is generated*, which, by its ideological scrambling effects, disrupts the classic divisions, on the right and on the left. We no longer know who has the monopoly of conservatism and progressivism. The conservatism specific to the body of doctrine of the right, claimed in the name of values of tradition and filiation, is now found on the left in a more societal version, that of a defense of acquired rights in the name of egalitarian values. The progressivism characteristic of the body of doctrine of the left, defended in the name of the emancipation of the individual, is itself undermined under the combined effects of financial capitalism and the development of technologies which questions the very notion of progress. The differences between universalism and relativism, general interest and particular interests are blurred, going so far as to mix political liberalism, societal liberalism and economic liberalism. It follows a shattering of the republican-naturalist matrix of the right, and of the republican-emancipatory matrix of the left; a break-up of French Christian democracy into a multicultural archipelago³². And then, a series of contradictions: contradiction between unitary nationalism and communitarianism; contradiction between libertarian demands and demand for protectionism; contradiction between demand for equality and recognition of merit; Finally, there is a contradiction between the demand for consumerist growth and the demand for degrowth.

Thus, right and left merge. It is no longer a question of class struggle, of divisions between a working class and a bourgeois class, but of a new social divide between real and pseudo-French, rich and poor, those above and those from below, in other words a legitimate *Us*, against a *Them*, illegitimate, encouraging people *not to be the other*, a new cleavage that simultaneously feeds mistrust of the elites and the rejection of any *system*. Of course, there are still some differences between the extremes of the right and the left, the first emphasizing more on protectionism, the second on equality between citizens; the extreme right maintaining an elitist and closed *ethnic vision* of the people, the extreme left an egalitarian and open *plebeian vision*. These differences, however, are not always perceived or heard by part of the social demand.

³² Jérôme Fourquet, *L'archipel français. Birth of a Multiple and Divided Nation*, Threshold, 2019.