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RESTORATION OF SOVEREIGNTY? INTERPRETATIVE LECTURES OF SOVEREIGNISM BEYOND NATIONALISM AND POPULISM[1]

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Abstract

Sovereignism has been lately widely used in the public debate, particularly in the context of the European Union, often misused as a plain synonym of nationalism or populism and paying little attention to the different levels of analysis. In this article we attempt to explore the concept by proposing interpretative lectures based on several theoretical approaches, including discourse theory and cleavage theory. In particular, we seek to better understand the concept of "sovereignism" through a comparison of articulations and linkages with the concepts of populism and nationalism. We also show the different nuances that the concept of sovereignism has acquired in some specific

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contexts, for example in Italy, where it has become a buzzword for far-right parties and movements, such as Matteo Salvini's Lega and CasaPound. In conclusion, we acknowledge the important elements of continuity with populism and nationalism, but also stress the elements that would characterise sovereignism as an ideology in its own right, such as the narratives based on the return to a past where sovereignty would be the exclusive preserve of the people and the nation.

Keywords

Sovereignism; populism; nationalism; cleaveage theory; discourse theory; far-right parties; ideology; past.

Resumen

El soberanismo ha sido últimamente muy utilizado en el debate público, especialmente en el contexto de la Unión Europea, a menudo mal utilizado como un simple sinónimo de nacionalismo o populismo y prestando poca atención a los diferentes niveles de análisis. En este artículo intentamos explorar el concepto proponiendo lecturas interpretativas basadas en varios enfoques teóricos, incluyendo la teoría del discurso y la teoría de los clivajes. En particular, tratamos de comprender mejor el concepto de "soberanismo" mediante una comparación de las articulaciones y los vínculos con los conceptos de populismo y nacionalismo. También mostramos los diferentes matices que el concepto de soberanismo ha adquirido en algunos contextos específicos, por ejemplo en Italia, donde se ha convertido en una palabra de moda para los partidos y movimientos de extrema derecha, como la Lega de Matteo Salvini y CasaPound. En conclusión, reconocemos los importantes elementos de continuidad con el populismo y el nacionalismo, pero también destacamos los elementos que caracterizarían al soberanismo como una ideología propia, como las narrativas basadas en el retorno a un pasado donde la soberanía sería patrimonio exclusivo del pueblo y la nación.

Palabras clave

Soberanismo; populismo; nacionalismo; teoría del clivaje; teoría del discurso; partidos de extrema derecha; ideología; pasado.

> The future has been transformed from being the natural habitat of hopes and the most legitimate expectations into a scenario of nightmares: the terror of losing one's job and the social status associated with it, the terror of having one's home and the rest of one's goods and chattels confiscated, the terror of watching helplessly as our children fall helplessly down the downward spiral of loss of well-being and prestige, and the terror of seeing the skills we have worked so hard to learn and memorise stripped of what little market value they might have left. The road to the future thus bears for us an uncanny resemblance to a path of corruption and degeneration. Could the road back to the past not be used as a route to clean up all those harms committed by the futures that were once present?
> Zygmunt Bauman, *Retrotopia*

> The xenophobic resurgence we are now witnessing has moved from the margins to the centre of politics. It is nothing like the vehement violence of fascism and Nazism, but it is part of the same broader political family. When nostalgia and pessimism are politicised they, quite logically, produce demands for various kinds of exclusion.
> Colin Crouch, *The 'left behind' and pessimistic nostalgia*

Introduction

In *Retrotopia* (2017), one of latest works by Zygmunt Bauman (1925-2017), it is argued that when the future appears uncertain and fearful, contemporary mankind is sort of tempted to look at and idealize the past, i.e., retrotopia as an ideal time situated in the past, a neologism[2] based on the combination of the Greek word τόπος "place" and the Latin suffix -retro, meaning "backwards, behind"[3]. Now precisely the discourse(s) built around the narrative of a lost sovereignty is what underpins sovereignism. In this article we attempt to put forward some lines of interpretation regarding the concept of "sovereignism". To this end we propose a series of theoretical approaches, including the discourse theory and the cleavage theory and, in the attempt to show its articulations and linkages with the concepts of nationalism and populism. As for the discourse theory, following the interpretation proposed, among others, by Mueller

2. See https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/retrotopia_%28altro%29/.
3. Colin Crouch (2019) spoke of "politicised nostalgic pessimism" in an attempt to find an explanation behind the renewed fortunes of political movements and parties belonging to the extreme right of the political spectrum.

and Heidelberger (2020), we consider that what distinguishes sovereignism from nationalism and populism is the rather vague idea of restoring a lost sovereignty. "Sovereignty" here is to be understood not in a precise and consistent manner (i.e., as for the political science field), rather as a more or less concrete, and more or less idealized, place and time, in which the people and the nation were allegedly deemed to hold the political power, disposing of full control over a given territory, its borders, policy-making, etc. In this sense it is understandable how sovereignism develops in constant opposition to phenomena such as globalisation and Europeanism, including their respective elites, which would have allegedly taken the original sovereignty away from the people and the nation. Moving to the cleavage theory, we consider widely acknowledged aspects, i.e. empirical, normative and organisational, to propose a definition as core theoretical assertion of cleavages in relation to sovereignism: *a cleavage structure "is a socially and culturally rooted conflict that shapes antithetical positions in societies through political parties*" (Scopelliti, 2021, p.1), in order to show linkages between nationalism, populism and sovereignism.

The sovereignist discourse: between nationalism and populism?

The academic debate over sovereignty (including the real or supposed lack of it) is huge, with the scholarship concerning "sovereignism" that has been developing quickly in recent times, in parallel with macro-phenomena as globalization and supranational integration, as in the case of the European Union[4]. As we said above, the aim of this paper is to shed some light on the concept of sovereignism, unsurprisingly a rather elusive and slippery one, by proposing to approach it through several theoretical lenses, including the discourse theory and the cleavage theory, which we consider could be helpful in framing articulations and linkages existing with (a) nationalism and (b) populism[5], in order to possibly find common denominators, but also the original traits of sovereignism. Starting with discourse theory, we aim to show how sovereignism has features in common with nationalism and populism and that, unlike these, it places its empha-

4. On the sui generis nature of the European Union there is a rich and boundless scholarly literature, ranging from interpretations who have spoken of it as a supranational union to others who consider it a unique international organization.
5. In doing so we follow in particular the approaches proposed by de Cleen (2017) in analysing the relationship between populism and nationalism and the insights proposed by Verzichelli (2021) on the linkages between populism and sovereignism. On this see the volume edited by Basile & Mazzoleni (2021) populism and sovereignism

sis on a "return", even a vague one, to a sovereignty placed in the past: in this sense it is interesting the focus on some insight related to Bauman's (2017) notion of *retrotopia*, i.e., retrotopia as an "ideal shelter" situated in the past. What is important is not whether that past was really a place where the people or the nation possessed sovereignty (understood in the most generic sense), but rather the ability of the sovereigntist leader to evoke a kind of nostalgia for a place and time. In this sense it is compensable how much the ideology of sovereignism, if we want to speak of ideology, has elements in common with nationalism and populism. Just like populism, sovereignism is an interesting concept and ideology which, however, is often overused and misused[6]. In an article appeared in 2019, Colin Crouch explained about pessimistic nostalgia and the role of the past:

> It is fairly easy to explain why the early 21st century is becoming one of the periods in which pessimistic nostalgia is successfully weaponised, at least in the western world. First, the move of the advanced economies into post-industrialism has produced considerable upheaval, removing what seemed to have been certainties from many people's lives. While automation and robotisation are probably the main causes of the decline in industrial employment, globalisation has also been involved, which provides some useful 'foreigner' targets among both developing economies and immigrants. Second, the financial crisis of 2007–8 showed another dark side of the internationalisation of the economy, and suggested that public authorities were unable to keep economic life secure. Until that moment, even many people who might have felt left behind in various ways could at least count on becoming a little better off each year. That is no longer the case. Third, waves of immigrants and refugees coming into the western world from poorer countries have provided easy targets for those feeling a need to restrict access to the good things of life in a declining world. […] These sources of insecurity and declining trust in the capacity of public authorities to ensure stability have appeared after a prolonged period of

6. In this direction, the Italian case, among others, is very interesting, since here sovereignty has recently been completely absorbed by radical right-wing populist parties and far-right movements, as the case of Matteo Salvini's Lega and CasaPound can well demonstrate (with the well-known "Sovranità" project of 2015). If we take the Italian case, it is very interesting that the terms *sovranismo* ("sovereignism") and *sovranista* ("sovereignist") are used almost as synonyms for radical right and extreme right, especially by these political subjects but also by much of the mainstream media, and not only (Bruno, 2022). As Bruno has pointed out (2022, p. 63): "'Sovranista', along with 'patriota', is the term that is currently widely used by radical right-wing politicians to describe themselves. The same goes for the media: La voce del Patriota, for instance, defines itself as 'informazione sovranista' ['Sovereignist news'], while Il Primato Nazionale prides itself on being "l'unico quotidiano sovranista Italiano indipendente" ('the only independent Italian sovereignist newspaper')". In particular, we no longer find an exclusive association with nation, as at the basis of the original sovereignty, which as we shall see was born in other contexts.

> dominance by liberal attitudes, favouring the admission of various kinds of 'outsider': the formation of multicultural societies; the entry of women into spaces previously reserved to men; a growing role for international organisations in what many people had believed to be their 'sovereign' national affairs.

We can now focus on the discursive articulations and linkages between sovereignism, nationalism and populism. Sovereignism does have important points of contact, but also some fundamental differences, with nationalism and populism. In terms of discourse, as we have seen, sovereignism and nationalism shares the emphasis on the nation-state, the control of territory, borders and nation-wide decision-making. However they differ mainly (a) on the dynamic which concerns a return to previously lost national sovereignty (and which, had to be present at least on the level of a narrative of a mythical and distant past) and (b) on the level of polemical targets, which are not so much other nation-states or other communities, but rather supranational institutions and bodies, and the multicultural elites that would have benefited from globalisation to plunder the nation of its sovereignty. In particular, related to the first point, the element of the "return" and "restoration" of the allegedly lost sovereignty is key both at the ideational and discursive level. As Mueller & Heidelberger (2020) have emphasized, the key feature of sovereignism lies in the vague desire of restoring the past, which however, does not necessarily mean that this past really existed. The element of returning to an allegedly idealized past is central in right-wing populist rhetoric. In 2016 Donald Trump was able to make a fortune on what sociologists as Zygmunt Bauman and Colin Crouch have called "pessimistic nostalgia" and "retrotopia": discontented with the present and uncertain about the future, the temptation to idealise the past, perhaps longing for a return to authoritarian and autarchic nation-states, led by supposed strongmen, and to strongly identity-based and pre-multicultural societies, may have fertile ground. The discourse framed by sovereignism has also some traits in common with populism, with corrupt elites in cahoots with supranational institutions and bureaucracies, or with the financial markets, seen as guilty of plundering sovereignty[7]. In fact, both sovereignism and populism frame their political discourse in terms of recovery of a lost

7. Sovereignism has been particularly influenced and shaped in and by anti-globalisation, anti-EU, dimensions. In particular, in relation to the EU, and due to the process of European integration and its prerogatives on a growing number of policy areas, sovereignism can be characterised by a political, cultural and economic tensions, between the EU (and its institutions) and the Member States composing it. If it is undeniable that the bottom-up demands related to sovereignism relate to a growing demand of soveregnity (vis-à-vis globalization or the EU or the corrupted elites) that surely pertain to some core themes, the relevance of sovereignism for understanding of the populist discourse, sovereignty has been largely under-theorised by scholars dealing with populism (see in particular Basile and Mazzoleni, 2021).

sovereignty from globalized and allegedly unresponsive elites. However, if the figure of the leader in populism is the "spokesperson" for popular demands and/or demands to defend the people (popular sovereignty), here the leader channels demands to return to sovereignty in the name of the nation and not of the people. Of course, in practice it is understandable that, especially at the level of far-right populism, there is much overlap and it is almost impossible to clearly separate the positions in terms of the approach and articulation of populist and sovereignist discourses[8]. In fact, if it is undeniable that the bottom-up demands related to sovereignism related to a growing demand of soveregnity (vis-à-vis globalization or the EU or the corrupted elites), these surely pertain to some core themes of populism (Basile & Mazzoleni, 2021). According to Verzichelli (2019), the three dimensions of sovereignism, i.e., cultural, political and economic, dealing respectively with preserving cultural and ethnic identities, defending people's sovereignty against corrupted elites and protect a nation prosperity vis-à-vis the demands of solidarity coming from other nations, are very often found in populist discourses (Verzichelli, 2021, p. 109)[9], making the sovereignism-populism linkage is a challenge for comparative politics[10]. In conclusion, sovereignism has several elements in common with nationalism and populism, yet it is a concept that can only partly be traced back to those, as it moves in a somewhat unique and complex context.

Exploring far-right parties' ideologies through the cleavage theory

What is a cleavage structure?

Although cleavage theory had a significant and enduring impact on political science

8. According to Basile and Mazzoleni (2021) there could be sovereignism without populism, but there is no populist discourse, or populism tout court, that does not include sovereignist arguments and demands.

9. As de Cleen (2017, p. 4) talking of the articulation between the construction of populism and nationalism by populist radical-right parties, points out the concept of nationalism is based on the construction of people, community but essentially on "nation" and "[…] the nation can only be constructed through the distinction between one nation and other nations, and between members of the nation and non-members". Thus, if in the case of nationalism the opposition or external group is those of other nations, in the case of sovereignism it is the European Union, and its institutions, which in populist rhetoric are often described as technocratic and the bearers of a top-down approach to politics, which severely limits the sovereignty of a nation (part of the EU). It is therefore nothing new that European institutions and "supranational" bureaucracies are one of the polemical targets of populist parties from both the right and the left. In this sense, sovereignism therefore also has some elements in common with the concept of populism.

10. Again de Cleen (2017) has shown clearly, populism and nationalism have some characteristics in common and important differences. The construction-distinction implemented by nationalist politics is based on an "in-out" antagonism between nation/community and other nations/communities, populist politics is based on a down-up opposition between the people, pure, and corrupt elites.

more than five decades ago (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967), there has been a general misunderstanding of *what* a cleavage is and how to define it (see the contributions of Zuckerman, 1975; Bartolini & Mair, 2007; Deegan-Krause, 2007, p. 538; Franklin, 2010; Kriesi, 2010). Firstly, the difference between 'cleavage' and other political concepts such as 'division' should be distinguished (Bartolini & Mair, 2007, p. 198). In this sense, Zuckerman (1975, p. 231) points out this semantic misunderstanding in the literature of his time by emphasising that, for instance, divisions within society do not necessarily turn into conflicts. In line with Lipset and Rokkan (1967), divided groups are entities in conflict only once they are antithetical towards each other over the same issue and, therefore, they provide opposite solutions. Therefore, the antithetic element of a conflict between groups of people is necessary for a 'division' to be identified as a cleavage. Indeed, a cleavage is most importantly a conflict in which you can discern two antithetical sides that clash against each other over the same issue (see Rokkan, 1999; Franklin, 2010). For instance, Marks et al. (2017, p. 5) define the GAL/TAN conflict as being a new cleavage. This conflict is framed as a 'cultural cleavage'[11] with green alternative and libertarian (GAL) values on one side, and on the other side traditional, authoritarian and nativist values (TAN). However, this divide cannot be defined as a cleavage because it does not fulfil the antithetical requirement of "objective distinction between the interests of those on different sides of a cleavage" (Franklin, 2010, p. 650). Indeed, rather than focusing on one topic (represented by two antithetical sides), this is a divide because it represents different and unilateral sides. For instance, the pro-environment stance is in the GAL side without its counterpart on the TAN side or the pro-traditionalist stance on the TAN side without its counterpart on the GAL side.

Having determined that cleavage structures are conflicts with antithetical sides over the same issue, it is still a matter of discussion as to how these sides can best be identified. In this sense, Bartolini and Mair (2007) discussed this in detail. There is ambiguity regarding definitions among scholars, for example, in differentiating between social cleavages from cultural cleavages. On the one hand, contributors to the structural dealignment (Brooks et al., 2006; Lachat, 2007), for instance, imply that cleavage structures are conflicts which are generated by societal stratification (Bartolini and Mair, 2007, p. 198). To quote Zuckerman (1975, p. 324): "cleavages *originate* in the social realm [and, eventually] they are politicized" (*our emphasis*). On the other hand, contributors to the post-materialist school (Inglehart, 1977, 1984; Dalton et al., 1984), for

11. By cultural cleavage is meant by the authors as a conflict generated from opposite beliefs.

instance, argue that cleavages are mostly determined by factors representing opposite beliefs/values rather than any particular societal factors. In line with that, Dalton and Flanagan (1982, p. 4, cited in Bartolini & Mair, 2007; see also Dalton et al., 1984) also state that "it is a set of beliefs rather any demographic attribute that defines one's location along the cleavage". Both interpretations provide useful insights into identifying cleavage structures. Yet, Bartolini and Mair (2007), successfully, provide conceptual clarity to the notion of cleavage structures by combining both these two aspects and adding a third one which links the relationship between cleavage structures and political parties: the organisational aspect of a cleavage.[12]

Bartolini and Mair (2007) propose three aspects that are equally important and are interrelated with each other and, thus, are all necessary to define a divide as a cleavage. First, referring to the above "social realm" argued by Zuckerman (1975, p. 324), it is necessary to identify the cleavage from its *empirical* aspect. A cleavage is, thus, related to those sociodemographic characteristics which separate individuals into two different antithetical groups[13]. By sociodemographic characteristics, Bartolini and Mair (2007) indicate that all those attributes that denote the individuals' unchangeable state of being. It means that once an individual belongs to a certain sociodemographic characteristic, it is less likely for them to "socially move" from one category to its antithetical one (Fabbrini, 2001). This low mobility characteristic is fundamental to the formation of anti-thetical sociodemographic groups. Indeed, self-containing and non-overlapping groups will reinforce more attitudes of solidarity among its members, and, therefore, will ac-centuate conflict with their antithetical counterparts (Fabbrini, 2001, p. 277; see also Kriesi, 2010). Secondly, a cleavage also requires a *normative* aspect, which means that, beyond the existence of sociodemographic characteristics that differentiate individuals in antithetical groups, there must be a common set of values or ideas that provide a sense of collective belonging for these groups[14]. Indeed, without a set of common values or ideas that distinguish antithetical groups, beyond the sociodemographic differences, "no objective social division will be transformed into a salient socio-political change" (Gallagher et al., 2011, p. 280). Finally, there must be a *behavioural/organisational* aspect which is inextricably linked to the cleavage. It means that "a cleavage must find its

12. This last element is fundamental for this study as it also determines how political parties behave.
13. Taking into consideration the classical cleavage structures, the sociodemographic differences that scholars have usually assigned to them were, for instance, the people's church attendance (Religious cleavage), ethnicity or languages spoken (Regional Cleavage), size of the community (Community cleavage) and, finally, type of job or family income (Class cleavage).
14. Similar to the first aspect, the classical cleavages are usually measured as people's personal religious beliefs (Religious cleavage), people's belonging to any sub-national identity (Regional cleavage), territorial self-belonging (Community cleavage) and socioeconomic class self-belonging (Class cleavage).

organizational expression" (Mair, 2006, p. 373), for instance, through political parties, trade unions, churches or civil societies and, therefore, must be institutionalised since "through the institutionalization of a conflict, the resulting cleavage leads to stability and social peace" (Goldberg, 2016, p, 14).

This last aspect is particularly salient in the Rokkanian view of a cleavage, since cleavages are inherently "unorganised" (Bartolini and Mair, 2007, p. 202). By unorganised Bartolini and Mair (2007) mean, for example, that when only considering the empirical (or normative) aspect of a cleavage, we would not identify a conflict, but we would rather find distinguished sociodemographic groups within society. Nevertheless, the existence of these groups does not necessarily produce cleavage structures. Let us consider, for instance, the ideological or material disagreements between different generational groups. Age stratification was identified in the 1960s and in the early 1970s as a possible measure of conflict that could drive different groups of people to claim different demands from their representatives. Although Lipset (1971, pp. 743-744) had already argued that youth movements were not an expression of cleavage conflict with age as its core ideology, Foner (1974) explored age stratification as the basis of a political cleavage, but he eventually concluded that the temporary status (of younger people) undermined the incentive to organise large scale movements because people are "unwilling to risk future rewards by engaging in activities that could lead to disciplinary measures, even arrest or expulsion from school or job". Moreover, unlike other sociodemographic groups (such as class, religion, gender or education), aging is the universal and inevitable type of 'mobility' between social strata that each person will eventually experience (Foner, 1974, pp. 192-193).

Similarly, when looking at the normative element of a cleavage, important societal conflicts may exist, but they do not always necessarily produce cleavages. For instance, there has been a long-term self-consciousness among women, but it has lacked a proper political representation because this conflict has been subordinated by other classical cleavages. For instance, the traditional class cleavage (or left vs. right conflict) intercepted this topic from the left, considering women as one of the minority groups that needs to be defended in order to reduce gender gaps in modern societies (Edlund & Pande, 2002); and from the right, this topic has been intercepted by conservatives and radical rightists as a way to criticise the 'submissiveness of women' in Muslim communities (Schwörer & Fernández-García, 2020). Consequently, the empirical element and the normative element are insufficient to produce cleavage structures, which inexorably necessitate an institutional/organisational component (such as political parties) in order

for a cleavage to be brought into the political world and, therefore, gain relevance (Mair, 2006, p. 373; von Schoultz, 2017, p. 34).

Considering the above widely acknowledged aspects (empirical, normative and organisational), we have adopted the following definition as a core theoretical assertion of cleavages for this paper: *a cleavage structure "is a socially and culturally rooted conflict that shapes antithetical positions in societies through political parties*" (Scopelliti, 2021, p.1).

Nationalism, populism and sovereignism through the lens of the cleavage theory

In the following section, we review the three ideologies (nationalism, populism and sovereignism) that are often associated with far-right parties through the three empirical aspects explained above. Table 1 is the schematic representation of the cleavage theory framework.

Table 1 Nationalism, Populism and Sovereignism through the Bartolini and Mair's (2007) theoretical framework

Empirical Aspect	**Normative Aspect**	**Organisational Aspect**
Low level of education	Nationalism	Far-right parties
	People-centre and anti-elitism	
	Sovereignism	

Starting with the empirical aspect, table 1 shows that all three ideological conflicts indicate identical sociodemographic characteristics. This is not surprising, in fact multiple studies demonstrate empirical and theoretical evidence that low level of education can often be associated with ideologies such as nationalism, populism and sovereignism. For instance, starting with nationalism, a person who is uneducated or less educated must compete with other mobilised workers who are better accustomed to working in poorer working conditions in terms of salaries and employment rights. This competition, thus, threatens the Western European workers' ability to sustain their income and lifestyle (Dalton et al., 1984; Kriesi, 1993; Kriesi et al., 2006). Moreover, education allows a person to understand and embrace different types of lifestyles creating

empathy for others who do not belong to the same identarian group (Inglehart, 1990; Bornschier and Kriesi, 2012; Kuhn et al., 2016). From voting studies, scholars have also demonstrated that uneducated people are more likely to embrace populist values (see e.g., Spruyt et al., 2016; Milner, 2020). And from these studies, more recent theoretical contributions propose about the advent of new cleavage structures — see e.g., the cultural backlash of Norris and Inglehart (2019) — where populism shall be interpretated "as a nostalgic reaction to value change in Western societies, leading to rejection of pluralism especially among men, older, and less educated generations who see themselves as the losers of globalization" (Staerklé & Green, 2018, p. 432). Finally, the recent literature on Euroscepticism usually associates a high level of education with pro-European individuals' attitudes (Kuhn, 2015). Indeed, thanks to the European integration process, the most educated people are more likely to perceive in their daily lives the benefits of the EU in terms of jobs and educational opportunities and, therefore, they "conceive their identities as being consistent with international governance" (Marks et al., 2020). The recognition of diplomas at the European level gives more working opportunities for graduates to change or improve their living condition looking for a job in other European countries. Moreover, culturally speaking, the Erasmus+ programme is another European initiative that encourages young undergraduate and postgraduate students to live for a short period of time in other European countries and reinforces their European identity by learning the local language and customs (Bascelli, 2018; Samuk et al., 2021). By contrast, less-educated people are excluded by these life changing benefits and, for that reason, they feel less attached to the European institutions and more attached to their national identity.

As concerns the normative aspect, we can observe from table 1 that all three ideological conflicts have unique denominations and, for that reason, different characteristics. Starting with nationalism, the main constitutive features of such ideological conflict can be summarized in two principal strands: nativism, and authoritarianism. In this paper nativism is in line with its dominant definition that is shared by different disciplines. In sociology, Jens Rydgren (2018) argues that nationalism aims to the mythization of a familiar past where population is ethnically homogeneous. In politics, Cas Mudde (2007, p. 22) also claims that nationalism reject cosmopolitan sentiments and believe that "states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group (the nation) and that non-native elements (persons and ideas) are fundamentally threatening to the nation-state's homogeneity". Therefore, nativism is referred to as a feature that establishes the 'membership' of citizens to their nation by ethnic terms (Betz, 1994). While

multiculturalism should be considered as a threat to the national heritage and cultural traditions (Triandafyllidou, 1998), the primary concern of far-right parties is to impede access to minorities who ethnically differ from the majoritarian ethnic group; or, alternatively, to enforce them a full assimilation of the national culture (Rovny, 2013). The second feature of nationalism is authoritarianism. This feature finds its theoretical roots from Adorno and his colleagues (1950) who intended to identify the potential traits of fascist individuals, like: obedience, conformity, and violence. As such, at the very basis of the nationalist ideology is the believe that society should be strictly controlled by the state in order to maintain security and order within the borders of the country (Mudde, 2007, pp. 22-23). Moreover, Flanagan and Lee (2003, p. 238) speak of authoritarianism a self-denial value where the loyalty to the group and the unchecked leaders is to be granted by everyone in the country. Thus, there is no limit for far-right parties to impose law and order "not only against external threats (immigrants and asylum seekers) and criminal elements, but also against its critics and political opponents" (Heinisch, 2003, p. 95).

Moving to populism, if one takes the definition of Cas Mudde, one of the foremost experts in the world on populism, he considers it as a "thin-cantered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups: 'the pure people' and 'the corrupt elite,' and argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people" (Mudde, 2004, p. 543). Although this 'ideational' approach has become most dominant in the political science literature (Hawkins and Kaltwasser, 2017), it still remains very ambiguous. The identification of 'the pure people' and the 'corrupted elite' can mean different things for different types of populist parties that can vary along the left vs. right political spectrum. For instance, Bugaric (2019) speaks of populist radical left parties as those political forces that change the current status quo through the reduction of income inequality and slightly retreating from the economic consequences of globalization (see also Huber and Schimpf, 2017; Norris and Inglehart, 2019). On the other hand, studies on populist far-right parties (including this paper) argue that the populist ideology is more focused to overcome the corrupted elite in the defence of the interests of the 'pure (native) people', which purity is, therefore, determined by one's ethnic belonging to the majority group in the country (Rydgren, 2007). For the latter, the fight against the establishment is meant to keep untouched the ethnic and cultural homogeneity of the population.

Finally, the last ideology that is often associated with far-right political parties is the concept of sovereignism. The term sovereignism finds its origin from the Quebecois independentist claims of the 1980s (Thériault, 1994) and, subsequently, this concept

has again been emphasised by the French politician Jean-Pierre Chevènement in the early 1990s while the Western European countries were about to tie hand in glove with each other, politically and economically, through the proposition and ratification of the Maastricht treaty. Chevènement (1997), for instance, explains how the European political elites (and people) relied on most of their expectations from the European integration process as the opportunity to leave behind the experience of war and disruption that nationalist values have provoked in the 20th century, with the promise to build a new transnational institution that would reflect the American experience: the United States of Europe (Dujardin, 2019; Varsori, 2020). Such promise is at the real basis of the Maastricht Treaty's supporters who welcomed such transnational agreement as a premise of economic and social stability. In fact, the transition of sovereignty from the national to the transitional level is even more evident since the European integration process has "extended EU authority over wide ranges of [European citizens'] public life" (Hooghe & Marks, 2018, p. 113). However, the European commission has received numerous critics from the European public opinion and party systems on the proposed policies to solve the Eurozone crisis in 2008 and the refugee crisis in 2015 (Vassallo & Valbruzzi, 2018, pp. 99-100). Therefore, as the European institutions were not able to achieve collective compromises at the supranational level, this political impasse has established the basis of sovereignism's ideas which goal is to pursue and maintain national self-determination though the antagonization of the European integration process (Goodliffe, 2015; Ivaldi, 2018). Accordingly, national interests must precede European ones. For that reason, anything that would promote multilevel governance, at the transnational level, shall be perceived as a threat that weakens the national sovereignty and homogeneity (Vasilopoulou, 2018).

To conclude, concerning the organisational aspect, "just as the religious cleavage and the class cleavage were raised by Catholic and socialist parties on one side of the divide" (Hooghe and Marks, 2018, p. 111), ideas and values of the three ideologies explored above are mostly mobilised by the far-right parties. Studies on nationalism, populism and sovereignism have confirmed that far-right parties are the typical organisational expression of such ideologies. Starting with nationalism, far-right parties espouse nativist policies such as proposing a welfare chauvinism that focuses on Sate intervention "to guarantee that jobs, housing, and other benefits are preserved for the native population are a natural outgrowth of the nativist desire to put 'our own people first'" (Golder, 2016, p. 480). Alongside, far-right parties also tend to have an opportunistic approach towards the possibilities provided by democratic regimes. Indeed, once far-right parties

consolidate their power (winning the elections), they "express extreme forms of majoritarianism that allow them to strengthen the majoritarian institutions at the expense of opposing forces" (Scopelliti, 2020, p. 1; see also Mudde, 2013, 2014; Castillo-Ortiz, 2019; Urbinati, 2019). For instance, governing far-right parties, such as Fidesz in Hungary or Law and Justice in Poland, have demonstrated that, once in government, they do not respect no longer "the rule of law, or democracy in the sense that competitive elections are held, but the economic or political rights or the rights of certain minorities are repressed" (Wintrobe, 2018, p. 218).

As concerns populism, far-right parties are often associated with such ideology because of their tendence (in the 2000s and 2010s) to be the fringes of the European party systems. In fact, far-right parties used to suffer from national electoral systems and cordon sanitaire employed by the centre-right and centre-left mainstream parties. Accordingly, these parties would experience political stigmatization and under-representation in the European national parliaments. However, thanks to this electoral premises, far-right parties are perfectly suited to embody such ideological conflict "because populism involves activating the people's resentment toward the existing power structure and the dominant values in society" and, "in Europe, the elite typically includes the established political parties, intellectuals, the economic upper class, and the media" (Golder, 2016, p. 479). In such political context, far-right parties claim to fight the national (and international) political elites, while representing the interests of the people, which is narrated as the morally superior group of society.

With regards to sovereignism, the European integration process has mostly been supported by mainstream parties from both the left-wing and right-wing between the early 1980s and the early 1990s. They were the years of the permissive consensus; a period of time when the political elites would negotiate on insulated deals without asking an explicit mandate from their national electors (Hooghe and Marks, 2009). In addition, at party level, all the established political forces agreed to depoliticise the European issue in order not to compromise the fate of the political integration process (Marks et al., 2002). This political compromise (among mainstream parties) aimed to allow the European political elites to sustain policies in pursuit of more economic and political unification of the EEC countries, without suffering from political blame in implementing significant institutional reforms and delegating national authority to transnational institutions. However, such historical development of the European integration process allows far-right parties as European issue owners which raison d'être is to leave the European membership (see the consequences of the Brexit referendum

in UK) or, alternatively, change from the inside the European institutions and values (see far-right parties as Fratelli d'Italia and Rassemblement Nationale).

Conclusion

In this article, we provide some theoretical interpretations to approach the phenomenon of sovereignism. Although, as we have been able to see, it is characterised by important elements of continuity and overlap with nationalism and populism (the latter already often overused and misused), it possesses some elements that could distinguish it as an ideology in its own right. As far as theoretical interpretations based on discourse theory are concerned, it is interesting to note how sovereignism uses both the notion of "people" and that of "nation", but in a relatively original way, to call for a return to a lost sovereignty (it matters little if it was never really there) and which would have been misappropriated by global and transnational elites under the banners of globalisation and Europeanism. Moreover, such interpretation also appears even more evident when investigating these three far-right ideologies through the lens of the cleavage theory. As you can notice from table 1, all three ideological conflicts have in common two out of three aspects of a cleavage structure: the empirical aspects and the organisational aspect. Thus, it is not surprise noticing as the literature often confuses these terms interchangeably (which was one of the reasons that prompted us writing this paper). Nevertheless, the normative aspect differs in every ideological conflict and obliges us to distinguish these three concepts as distinctive issues with their own ideological pull. To conclude, the main implication that we want to point out with this paper is that far-right parties have the chance to employ multiple ideological levers on which to mobilize their electorate. For that reason, we recommend for further research to keep focusing on these three ideologies, but as separate issues that allow far-right parties to deliver multiple political fights and, at the same time, allowing them to never "betray" their electorates.

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