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GENDER, POPULISM AND ANTI-POPULIST RESISTANCE: THE POLITICAL CONSTRUCTION OF WOMEN AND GENDER IN ITALY

Abstract. The relationship between gender and populism provides a significant lens through which to examine contemporary transformations of political representation, political subjectivity, and democratic conflict. This article examines how gender is constructed within Italian right-wing populist discourse and how feminist mobilisation challenges these constructions through alternative forms of political subjectivity and collective action. The analysis focuses on Giorgia Meloni, leader of the right-wing populist party *Fratelli d'Italia*, examining her political communication during her time in opposition (2020–2021) as a discursive precursor to her subsequent government agenda and, in comparative perspective, on the political communication and practices of *Non Una di Meno*, an Italian intersectional feminist movement. It draws on political communication data concerning Meloni and on *Non Una di Meno*'s communication and interviews with activists. The analysis shows that Meloni's discourse constructs women and gender through representations centred on motherhood, family, reproduction, and national belonging, contributing to a conservative and relatively homogeneous conception of the national "people". By contrast, *Non Una di Meno* challenges the homogenisation of women and political subjects by addressing gender-based violence, reproductive rights, work, migration, and motherhood through an intersectional perspective grounded in plurality, self-determination, and participation. The comparison suggests that the relationship between gender, populism, and anti-populism concerns not only competing positions on gender issues, but also different ways of constructing political subjects and defining the boundaries of the political community. Intersectional feminist mobilisation may thus operate as an anti-populist form of democratic resistance by challenging homogenising representations and developing alternative forms of participation and collective subjectivity. While the Italian case reflects broader patterns of contemporary right-wing populism, their articulation remains shaped by national political, cultural, and institutional specificities.

Keywords: right-wing populism; gender; Italy; anti-populism; intersectional feminism; Giorgia Meloni; *Non Una di Meno*; political subjectivity; democratic resistance

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1. Introduction. Examining the relationship between gender and populism is crucial to understanding how politics and gender intersect in contemporary societies. The emergence and consolidation of contemporary populisms should be situated within the broader transformations that politics and democratic systems have undergone under the pressures of neoliberal globalisation [1; 2].

Among the most significant changes are the crisis of the State and its traditional role as regulator of social relations [3], the weakening of political mediation struc-

tures — particularly political parties — and the transformation of political participation, increasingly shifting towards collective and social movements [4; 5; 6; 7]. These processes have been accompanied by the de-ideologisation of political discourse, the mediatization of political life, and the increasing personalisation of political power, with the emergence of highly visible leaders and the growing centrality of their public representation [8].

Taken together, these transformations have weakened traditional mechanisms of democratic representation and participation. Within this context of institutional disintermediation, declining trust, and growing distance between institutions and underrepresented citizens, populism has emerged and consolidated across Europe and beyond as a political identity centred on the opposition between “the people” and “the elites”, offering a distinctive conception of political community, representation, and belonging.

It is precisely here that gender becomes analytically significant. The populist construction of “the people” is never politically neutral: it involves inclusion and exclusion, collective identities, and symbolic boundaries between those who belong and those positioned outside. Gender relations, representations of femininity and masculinity, and ideas of family, reproduction, and social roles can thus shape these boundaries. Understanding populism and gender requires examining not only how populist actors address gender, but also how gender shapes political identities and competing visions of democracy.

Gender refers to the social processes and practices through which societies transform sex differences into norms, expectations, roles, and responsibilities for women and men. Gender is neither fixed nor univocal: its meanings vary across contexts, reflecting how societies organise sexual difference and distribute roles, resources, and power [9]. As an analytical and political category, gender makes visible how inequalities are produced, legitimised, and institutionalised.

Analysing gender requires examining power asymmetries in social relations and their intersection with class, ethnicity, and status. Bourdieu’s analysis of masculine domination is particularly relevant [10], showing how gender relations are embedded in symbolic and material structures that naturalise male authority and reproduce inequalities through institutions, cultural practices, socialisation, and resource distribution.

These dynamics emerge across three interconnected dimensions: control of resources, as economic, political, and social resources remain unequally distributed, giving men greater access to capital and influence; authority and decision-making, where men have traditionally occupied more positions of power despite women’s increased participation in public life; and cultural norms and socialisation, through which patriarchal relations are reproduced through representations, expectations, and practices assigning different roles to women and men. Gender-based violence is an extreme manifestation of these asymmetries and can function as an instrument of control and domination [11]. Finally, the relationship between patriarchy and capitalism highlights the interconnection between economic production and social reproduction, particularly through the unequal distribution of paid and unpaid labour, care responsibilities, and economic resources. Patriarchy and capitalism can thus mutually reinforce each other, contributing to the reproduction of gender and social inequalities.

These dimensions show that gender inequalities are embedded in social relations and reflected in political discourse, where gender representations can be reproduced, legitimised, or challenged.

The analysis of political discourse thus helps explain how gender contributes to shaping political identities and visions of society.

The empirical focus of this article is the political communication of Giorgia Meloni, leader of *Fratelli d'Italia* and Italy's Prime Minister since 2022. Her right-wing populist discourse is examined in relation to the discourse and practices of *Non Una di Meno* as an expression of intersectional feminist mobilisation with an anti-populist potential.

The comparison highlights two contrasting modes of political subject construction. Meloni's discourse tends to incorporate women into a largely homogeneous national community through representations centred on motherhood, family, reproduction, and national belonging. *Non Una di Meno*, by contrast, challenges this homogenisation by foregrounding plurality, intersectionality, participation, and the structural nature of gender inequalities. Gender thus becomes a political cleavage between competing conceptions of political subjectivity, community, democracy, and social justice. Feminist mobilisation can be understood as potentially anti-populist not merely because it opposes right-wing populist actors, but because it challenges the political logic through which a homogeneous "people" is constructed.

Against this background, the article asks how gender is constructed within right-wing populist discourse and how intersectional feminist mobilisation challenges this construction. More specifically, it examines how Meloni's political communication constructs women, gender roles, and national belonging, and how *Non Una di Meno* articulates an alternative political subject through intersectionality, plurality, and participation.

2. Populisms and the Construction of the Political Subject. Populisms can be defined as new forms of political identity, characterised by a family of attributes that recur, albeit differently, across contexts [12; 13]. Anti-elitism and constant reference to the "people" constitute, according to Laclau [14], the central elements of populist construction, alongside charismatic leadership, the representation of part of the population as marginalised and disadvantaged, and strongly emotional rhetoric [15]. Populism is thus constructed around a divide between elites and the people, which a leader or movement politicises and mobilises to challenge elite power through the legitimisation of popular consent [16, p. 144]. In their rhetoric, populisms present themselves as responses to emerging social problems attributed to neoliberal globalisation, which has generated new social demands and cleavages: the crisis of welfare systems, rising unemployment and job insecurity, the dismantling of industrial sectors, intensified migration, worsening economic crises, and austerity policies promoted by the European Union [17, p. 10].

While populist leaders tend to offer the "people" simplified solutions to complex social problems, the urgency produced by these transformations has also fostered new forms of political participation and collective mobilisation, with a significant presence of young women [17]. Within this broader transformation, the mobilisations of contemporary intersectional feminist movements can also be situated [18; 19], as they critique power inequalities and exclusion through the construction of new subjectivities and alliances.

A feature shared by many populist experiences, both European and non-European, is the construction of the "people" as a relatively homogeneous, cohesive, and conflict-free entity [20]. Constructing a unified collective subject entails temporarily suspending internal differences among the subjectivities that constitute it. Populist

discourse thus tends to define a community with relatively clear boundaries, beyond which forms of otherness are located and may become primary objects of political conflict [21, p. 65], alongside a conception of rights strongly anchored in community belonging [21; 22].

It is precisely on this terrain that a tension emerges between populist logic and a conception of democracy grounded in pluralism, recognition of minorities, legitimacy of dissent, and the distribution and decentralisation of power [23; 24]. This tension is particularly relevant from a gender perspective, which challenges homogeneous political subjects and centres the plurality of identities, differences, and social positions. Inequalities are not articulated exclusively through gender, but intersect with social class, ethnicity, cultural belonging, and other forms of social differentiation and stratification [25; 26; 27].

From this perspective, contemporary feminisms have contributed significantly to deconstructing rigid identity categories and the boundaries through which social and political belonging is defined. In particular, perspectives developed within so-called third-wave feminisms, which emerged between the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, were influenced by queer and postcolonial theories, opening space for new alliances and cross-fertilisation among struggles and subjectivities [19]. This development was complemented by the concept of intersectionality, introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw [28], which enables analysis of how subjectivities are simultaneously positioned within multiple relations and hierarchies of power, where gender intersects with sexual orientation, ethnicity, social class, disability, and other dimensions of inequality.

From this perspective, gender is relevant to the study of populism not simply because populist actors address women or gender-related issues, but because it reveals how political subjects are constructed, forms of belonging defined, and boundaries between “we” and “them” drawn. While populism tends to privilege the construction of a unified collective subject, feminist and intersectional perspectives foreground the differences and power relations that constitute collective identities.

3. Populisms and Gender. The relationship between gender politics and populism is variable. This aspect is highlighted by Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser [29, 30], whose comparative research in Europe and the Americas has shown that the gender politics of populist actors depends on the combination of the ideology they espouse and the local culture of the country in question.

More specifically, populism makes use of gender-related issues and, at different times, politicizes them also in relation to the models of masculinity and femininity embodied by its leaders, which contribute to shaping representations and producing or deconstructing stereotypes.

With regard to gender issues, however, populism, particularly in its right-wing variant, tends to constitute itself as a conservative political orientation, directing political perspectives towards the recovery and defence of tradition while limiting the advancement of women’s social and civil rights [31]. Even when populism embraces female leadership, it promotes a return to the features of a patriarchal culture, legitimizing and reproducing traditional female roles, beginning with the maternal role [31, p. 130].

Across Europe, there is a widespread tendency to instrumentalize the issue of women’s rights in order to draw symbolic boundaries between “us” and “them” and generate new cleavages, through strategies that vary according to the specific context. Radical right-wing populist parties incorporate gender discourse into the cul-

tural and historical trajectories of their respective countries, using it as a key instrument for broadening their electoral support.

On closer inspection, then, as Graff writes: «Gender is no distraction from real politics; it resides at the heart of politics today, both as a set of specific policy issues and as the nexus of a symbolic struggle, a space where differences are negotiated and defined. Not a marginal controversy, no mere “cultural” issue, gender has become a site of powerful and often violent conflict» [32, p. 164].

An important perspective from which to examine this relationship concerns the ways in which populist leaders construct and circulate gender representations through political communication, particularly via social media [33]. The empirical discussion developed in this article draws on materials collected within the PRIN 2017 project *Le Trasformazioni della Democrazia: Attori, Strategie ed Esiti dell'Opposizione al Populismo nelle Arene Politiche, Giuridiche e Sociali*. The original research examined the political communication of Giorgia Meloni and Matteo Salvini on Twitter between 2020 and 2021. For the purposes of the present article, the focus is specifically on Meloni's discourse on gender, which is then placed in dialogue with the political communication and practices of *Non Una di Meno*. This comparison makes it possible to examine how different political actors construct gendered subjectivities, collective identities, and competing conceptions of political community.

3.1. Brief Methodological Note. The empirical corpus comprises 848 tweets posted by Giorgia Meloni on her Twitter account between December 2020 and May 2021. The selection focused on posts relevant to the study of gender representations within her political discourse. Each tweet was treated as the unit of analysis, with particular attention paid to its verbal content. The material was examined through qualitative content analysis, aimed at identifying not only the explicit meanings conveyed in the posts but also the latent symbolic meanings through which gender is constructed and represented. The same analytical approach was applied to a second corpus consisting of 834 tweets posted by the feminist movement *Non Una di Meno* during the same period. The selection of *Non Una di Meno* tweets followed the same principle of relevance to the research questions, with particular attention to the ways in which gender, political subjectivity, and forms of collective action are articulated within the movement's discourse. The parallel analysis of the two Twitter corpora makes it possible to examine different forms of gender construction within political and feminist discourse, while maintaining a comparable temporal frame and analytical procedure.

The analysis of *Non Una di Meno's* online discourse was further complemented by 20 in-depth interviews with activists belonging to the movement's territorial assemblies in Messina, Rome, and Bologna, representing southern, central, and northern Italy. The interviews were conducted over a two-month period and focused on activists' discourses, representations, and practices of resistance. The selection of interviewees did not take into account variables such as age, sex, gender, or occupation; the only criterion was their membership in the movement and participation in one of the aforementioned territorial assemblies. The interviews therefore provided an additional empirical dimension through which to explore the meanings emerging from the movement's online discourse, allowing attention to be directed also towards activists' experiences, interpretations, and practices within the territorial contexts in which mobilisation takes place.

3.2. Gender Issues in the Political Discourse of Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni. Giorgia Meloni, leader of *Fratelli d'Italia*, a right-wing populist party,

and Italy's Prime Minister since 2022, has developed a political discourse that shares key characteristics of contemporary populist rhetoric while introducing a distinctive configuration of female political leadership. Her communication on Twitter focused predominantly on domestic politics, while approximately 10% of posts addressed gender-related issues. These are embedded within a broader populist and sovereigntist framework centred on the leader, the party, the people, and the defence of national sovereignty. Meloni's gender discourse can be organised around three interconnected areas: the construction of female identity, the centrality of motherhood, and the defence of the heterosexual family as a constitutive element of the national community.

First, female identity is articulated in an ambivalent and ultimately blurred manner. Although women are explicitly invoked as a political category, their gendered subjectivity is weakened through the avoidance of feminine grammatical forms in favour of the supposedly universal masculine and, visually, through the recurrent representation of women in uniform. The uniform levels gender differences and incorporates women into a homogeneous collective "people". Female identity is therefore simultaneously recognised and neutralised: women become visible as members of the national community as the inequalities and differences structuring their social position become less visible.

Second, this blurred representation is intertwined with the centrality attributed to motherhood. Motherhood is not merely an individual or private dimension, but a political and symbolic category through which female identity and political leadership are articulated. In Meloni's discourse, motherhood combines with strength, agency, and political combativeness, producing the figure of the "mother and fighter" or maternal heroine [31]. It thus becomes a resource through which female identity, political authority, and national belonging are simultaneously constructed.

This maternal imaginary also informs Meloni's conception of the nation. The centrality of motherhood is reflected in the electoral programmes of 2018 and 2022, which emphasised measures supporting birth rates and working mothers. Encouraging women perceived as belonging to the native population to become mothers of future generations therefore acquires demographic and national significance. Reproduction is linked to the preservation of national and cultural homogeneity.

Motherhood is consequently presented not simply as an individual choice, but as a socially and politically significant practice connected to the continuity of the national community.

Third, motherhood is embedded within a traditional representation of the heterosexual family as the foundational unit of the nation. This family is constructed through internal and external boundaries. Internally, it must be protected against the so-called "gender ideology", represented as a threat to the moral and social order and to the traditional distinction between men and women [34]. Externally, it must be defended against the alleged effects of Islamisation and cultural practices associated with Muslim communities. The idealised family therefore rests on a differentiated gender order centred on the strong man as protector of the nation and women as biological and social reproducers of the national community. Gender metaphors thus naturalise national belonging by presenting differentiated gender roles as complementary and foundational: masculinity is associated with the public sphere, political authority, and defence of the nation, while femininity is linked to reproduction, care, motherhood, and its continuity.

The instrumentalisation of gender-based violence constitutes a further dimension of Meloni's gender discourse. Violence against women is not primarily framed as a

structural manifestation of gender inequality but mobilised to articulate a sovereignist and exclusionary conception of the nation. Victims are predominantly Italian women or Muslim women portrayed as victims of Muslim male fundamentalism, while perpetrators are frequently associated with the foreigner and, more specifically, the Muslim male. The protection of women's rights is consequently linked to demands for harsher punishment and stronger state intervention against foreigners. Gender-based violence thus becomes intertwined with an anti-Islamic and xenophobic discourse in which the defence of women serves as evidence of the alleged cultural superiority of the national community.

This process corresponds to the dynamics identified by Farris [35] through the concept of *femonationalism*, whereby nationalist and Islamophobic political projects appropriate emancipatory claims concerning women to legitimise exclusionary policies and strengthen national boundaries. In Meloni's discourse, gender equality and the protection of women are selectively incorporated into a nationalist framework. Rather than questioning the gendered structures underlying inequality and violence, such claims distinguish between an allegedly emancipated national "us" and a culturally backward or threatening "them". Gender thus becomes a boundary-making device through which national belonging is defined and defended.

The intersection of gender and right-wing populism in Meloni's discourse therefore operates less through substantive policies advancing gender equality than through the symbolic appropriation of women's rights for nationalist purposes. The instrumentalisation of gender-based violence, motherhood, and the defence of the heterosexual family contributes to a gendered conception of national belonging. Women's bodies, reproductive capacities, vulnerability, and rights become symbolic resources in constructing and defending the national community. Such representations constrain the possibility of a transformative politics of gender equality, as gender issues are subordinated to national identity, sovereignty, security, and the preservation of a traditional social order.

These representations are consistent with a broader pattern characterising contemporary right-wing populist politics, in which gender is mobilised through representations reaffirming traditional femininity, motherhood, family, and differentiated gender roles and embedded within narratives of national identity, social order, and cultural belonging. Meloni's discourse can therefore be understood as part of a wider conservative gender politics that naturalises traditional roles and presents the family and gender order as foundations of social stability.

4. Intersectional Feminist Movements as Anti-Populist Actors. A different political response to the gender politics promoted by right-wing populist actors is represented by contemporary intersectional feminist movements, which can, under certain conditions, be understood as anti-populist actors. Their anti-populist dimension does not derive simply from opposition to right-wing populist parties, but from forms of political subject construction and collective organisation that challenge homogenisation, exclusion, and hierarchical representation.

Anti-populism, like populism, is a trans-ideological category capable of encompassing both right-wing and left-wing sectors [36]. Not all forms of anti-populism are embedded in social movements, nor are all equally capable of mobilising collective action [37]. Contemporary feminist movements nevertheless display a significant capacity for anti-populist mobilisation insofar as they oppose the anti-cosmopolitan,

anti-pluralist, often xenophobic, identitarian, conservative, and patriarchal perspectives of right-wing populisms.

Intersectionality is central to this political orientation. By recognising that gender inequalities intersect with class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, and other dimensions of social differentiation, intersectional feminism rejects the assumption of a homogeneous female subject [25; 28]. It instead emphasises plurality, difference, and the multiple positions from which political subjects experience and contest relations of power. These characteristics enable feminist movements to challenge the homogeneous “people” constructed by populist discourse and to develop alternative forms of collective political subjectivity.

Through emancipatory initiatives from below, such movements also challenge welfare chauvinism and the restrictive cultural retreat towards national ethnic majorities [37], as well as the instrumentalisation of women’s bodies and rights in pursuit of these objectives. They situate local inequalities and the conditions experienced by specific groups within the global dynamics in which they are produced.

Intersectionality, understood as the simultaneous positioning of subjects within multiple and intersecting hierarchies of power, thus constitutes both a distinctive feature of these movements and a political tool through which they challenge homogeneous conceptions of political belonging. Drawing on Black Feminism, intersectionality rests on the premise that rights must be universal and acquire meaning within a broader struggle for social justice, by exposing the intersections between gender, culture, class, and race as outcomes of power relations [18].

4.1. The case of *Non Una di Meno* in Italy. Among contemporary intersectional feminist movements that may, under certain conditions, act as anti-populist forces, the transnational movement *Ni Una Menos* is particularly relevant. Originating in Argentina in 2015, it subsequently spread to numerous countries, including Italy, where *Non Una di Meno* was established in 2016. Drawing on the Argentine movement’s intersectional and anti-capitalist approach, the Italian movement brought together a range of feminist political experiences that had developed in previous years through the work of anti-violence centres, women’s houses, feminist collectives, women’s health centres, and other feminist spaces.

A distinctive feature of *Non Una di Meno* is the development of a political and programmatic document, the *Feminist Plan Against Male and Gender-Based Violence*, presented during the national demonstration held on 25 November 2017, International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. The Plan was produced through a collective writing process and adopts the perspective of those who experience violence, framing resistance and transformation as collective political practices.

In Italy, *Non Una di Meno* has developed a distinctive political practice grounded in intersectionality, pluralism, and collective self-determination, challenging the homogenising representations of women and gender promoted by right-wing populist discourse.

The movement represents itself and its political experience through the metaphor of a *tangle*: a complex set of intertwined and overlapping lines that contrasts with the linearity and simplification of a single, unidirectional perspective. The *tangle* thus expresses the movement’s understanding of politics as a space in which different identities, experiences, and forms of knowledge encounter and accommodate one another.

The analysis of *Non Una di Meno*’s political discourse on Twitter and of the interviews conducted with activists reveals a clear divergence from the representations of women produced by right-wing populist parties. Violence, health — par-

ticularly abortion — work, migration, and motherhood constitute the main themes of the movement's political communication and are consistently addressed through an intersectional perspective. This perspective emerges from the movement's critique of the global neoliberal system and its attention to the multiple and intersecting forms of marginalisation and oppression affecting women.

Migration represents a significant entry point for this perspective. *Non Una di Meno* challenges institutional approaches that frame migration primarily as an emergency and denounces the invisibilisation of migrant women, recognising instead their differentiated experiences, struggles, and political agency both within and beyond national borders. A similar rejection of stereotypical representations emerges in the movement's discourse on motherhood. Against the construction of motherhood as the defining element of women's identity and as the foundation of the "natural family", *Non Una di Meno* presents motherhood as one possible dimension of women's lives rather than as an essential or obligatory destiny. In doing so, it emphasises women's capacity for self-determination and the possibility of pursuing diverse life trajectories beyond patriarchal family structures.

The movement's approach to gender-based violence further illustrates this alternative perspective. Rather than normalising violence or instrumentalising it to construct xenophobic narratives and symbolic boundaries, *Non Una di Meno* conceptualises violence as a structural and everyday phenomenon rooted in patriarchal power relations and reproduced within institutions and social relationships, including within the family (e.g. "Nel nome del padre. La famiglia patriarcale è il primo luogo di violenza sessuale, fisica, psicologica. Liberiamocene. #elvioladorerestu #nonseisola #ioticredo" [30/04/2021]). While right-wing populist actors tend to privilege punitive measures and the strengthening of criminal sanctions as responses to violence, the movement emphasises cultural and educational transformation, the dismantling of gendered power asymmetries, and increased public funding for anti-violence centres. The feminist and transfeminist strike against male and gender-based violence provides a particularly significant example of this approach. Rather than addressing violence as an isolated problem, the strike connects it to precarious living and working conditions, the unequal distribution of productive and reproductive labour, migration and residence policies, racism, and other forms of discrimination. By making visible differentiated needs and intersecting forms of oppression, the movement challenges the idea of a homogeneous "people" and constructs a political "we" grounded in plurality and the possibility of self-determination.

The movement's anti-populist dimension emerges particularly clearly from this intersectional approach. According to the activists interviewed, the deliberate effort to introduce complexity, question apparently neutral representations, and investigate the structural roots of social problems constitutes an explicit alternative to the simplification and stereotyping characteristic of populist discourse:

«With populism, we are faced, on the one hand, with an attempt to simplify the social problems raised by the opposition and, on the other, with an attempt to reconstruct an imagined homogeneous Italian society, which certainly does not exist. So, it is an attempt to create a narrative that makes us perceive Italy as a cohesive, stronger society» (C., NUdM, Milano).

Rather than reducing social conflicts to easily identifiable categories and oppositions, *Non Una di Meno* seeks to expose their multiple dimensions and develop responses addressing structural causes. This also involves rejecting the friend/enemy

dichotomy and the tendency to attribute responsibility exclusively to an external “other”.

This political orientation is reflected in the movement’s organisational practices. Assemblies, collective action, and the feminist and transfeminist strike provide spaces in which different identities, experiences, and forms of knowledge coexist and are negotiated:

«The practice of striking introduces a dimension of conflict within the homogeneous people, highlighting a specifically female and feminist dimension that means that, even in the world of work, the measures of reconciliation proposed by populism are not sufficient» (C., NUdM, Milano).

Rather than producing a homogeneous political subject, these practices allow differences to remain visible and contested. Participation therefore emerges as a concrete alternative to hierarchical and paternalistic forms of political representation, while the strike connects gender-based violence to precarious work and living conditions, reproductive labour, migration, racism, and other forms of inequality. The case of *Non Una di Meno* thus shows how intersectionality operates not only as an analytical framework but also as a principle of political organisation and subject formation.

5. Conclusions. The Italian case highlights how, in the contemporary political context, gender constitutes a crucial terrain of political contestation over political subjects, collective identities, and competing conceptions of the political community.

The case of Giorgia Meloni highlights dynamics that, although varying in intensity and form, recur across different experiences of right-wing populism. The cultural, historical, and territorial specificities of different contexts shape their concrete manifestations, without, however, eliminating some recurring elements: the construction of a largely homogeneous national community through gender representations centred on motherhood, family, reproduction, and national belonging. Gender is therefore mobilised within a conservative framework that reinforces traditional roles and contributes to constructing a cohesive and bounded national “people”.

From this perspective, the experience of *Non Una di Meno* shows how contemporary intersectional feminism, through its political and organisational practices, can develop forms of resistance and counter-representation in response to the conservative politicisation of gender. Intersectionality thus acquires a specifically political significance. By recognising that experiences of oppression and inequality are produced through the intersection of gender, class, ethnicity, migration status, and other dimensions of social stratification [25; 28], it challenges the idea of a unified female subject and enables forms of solidarity that keep visible the differences and the diverse positions from which power relations are experienced and contested. The perspective of a feminism for the 99% [18] thus makes it possible to conceive anti-populism not merely as opposition to populism, but as the production of alternative forms of democratic politics.

The comparison between Meloni’s political discourse on gender while in opposition (2020–2021) and that produced by *Non Una di Meno* shows, therefore, that the relationship between populism, gender, and anti-populism concerns a question broader than the specific positions adopted on women and gender policies: it concerns the different ways in which the political community is constructed and legitimised. In the first case, the unity of the collective subject tends to be produced through the subordination of internal differences and the definition of relatively clear boundaries between belonging and otherness; in the second, political unity

is instead grounded in the possibility of articulating differences without reducing them to a homogeneous identity.

Gender thus becomes a privileged lens through which to examine a broader conflict over democracy and its processes of representation: who can be recognised as part of “the people”, who is legitimised to represent it and speak in its name, and under what conditions a collective political subject can be constructed without erasing the plurality of experiences and the inequalities produced by relations of power. From this perspective, resistance to populism does not end with contesting its contents, but is expressed through the capacity to construct alternative practices, subjectivities, and forms of participation, through which pluralism ceases to be merely a normative principle and becomes a concrete practice of democracy.

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ГЕНДЕР, ПОПУЛИЗМ И АНТИПОПУЛИСТСКОЕ СОПРОТИВЛЕНИЕ: ПОЛИТИЧЕСКОЕ КОНСТРУИРОВАНИЕ ОБРАЗОВ ЖЕНЩИН И ГЕНДЕРА В ИТАЛИИ

Аннотация. Взаимосвязь гендера и популизма позволяет по-новому взглянуть на современные изменения в политическом представительстве, формировании политической субъектности и характере демократических противоречий. В статье рассматривается, как конструируется гендер в дискурсе итальянского правого популизма и как феминистская мобилизация оспаривает эти конструкции через альтернативные формы политической субъектности и коллективного действия. Анализ сосредоточен на политической коммуникации Джорджи Мелони, лидера правой популистской партии *Fratelli d'Italia* («Братья Италии»), в период её нахождения в оппозиции (2020–2021 гг.), как дискурсивном предвестнике последующей правительственной программы, а также на коммуникации и практиках итальянского интерсекционального феминистского движения *Non Una di Meno*. В качестве эмпирической базы используется корпус публикаций в социальных сетях Мелони и *Non Una di Meno*, а также интервью с активистками движения. Показано, что дискурс Мелони формирует образ женщин и гендерную риторику через репрезентации, связанные с материнством, семьёй, репродуктивной функцией и национальной принадлежностью, способствуя консервативному и относительно однородному представлению о национальном «народе». Напротив, *Non Una di Meno* оспаривает тенденции к унификации образа женщины и конструированию единого политического субъекта, поднимая вопросы гендерного насилия, репродуктивных прав, труда, миграции и материнства с точки зрения интерсекциональности, основанной на плюрализме, самоопределении и политическом участии. Сравнение показывает, что взаимосвязь гендера, популизма и антипопулизма касается не только конкурирующих позиций по гендерным вопросам, но и различных способов конструирования политических субъектов и определения границ политического сообщества. Тем самым интерсекциональная феминистская мобилизация может выступать формой антипопулистского демократического сопротивления, бросая вызов гомогенизирующим репрезентациям и развивая альтернативные формы участия и коллективной субъектности. Хотя пример Италии отражает общие тенденции современного правого популизма, их конкретная артикуляция остаётся обусловленной национальной политикой, а также культурными и институциональными особенностями.

Ключевые слова: правый популизм; гендер; Италия; антипопулизм; интерсекциональный феминизм; Джорджи Мелони; *Non Una di Meno*; политическая субъектность; демократическое сопротивление

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