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Article

Exploring the Interplay between Apocalyptic and Millenarian Narratives within Populist Ideologies

***Abstract**: This paper delves into the intricate relationship between apocalyptic and millenarian narratives and populist ideologies and narratives. Drawing upon interdisciplinary perspectives from sociology, political science, and cultural studies, this research examines how apocalyptic visions of societal collapse and millenarian hopes for a utopian future intertwine and manifest within populist discourse.*

Through an analysis of historical and contemporary examples, including political speeches, media representations, and online communities, this study elucidates how populist leaders and movements employ apocalyptic rhetoric to galvanize support, mobilize followers, and construct collective identities. Moreover, it investigates the ways in which apocalyptic aspirations are utilized within populist narratives to promise transformative change and mobilize grassroots activism.

By scrutinizing the ideological underpinnings and rhetorical strategies employed by populist actors, this paper contributes to a deeper understanding of the intersection between apocalyptic anxieties, millenarian visions, and populist politics in contemporary society. Additionally, it sheds light on the implications of these narratives for democratic governance, social cohesion, and political participation, offering insights into the dynamics of power, authority, and resistance within populist movements.

***Keywords**: apocalyptic narratives; millenarianism; populist ideologies; political discourse; social movements; rhetoric*

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1. Introduction

In a time marked by socio-political crises and cultural upheavals, apocalyptic narratives and the promise of a utopian future have been frequently integrated into the discourse of populist movements and personalities. These, defined by their appeal to the frustrations and aspirations of the masses, often harness narratives of impending catastrophe and the possibility of a better future to mobilize support and promote a sense of collective identity. In this paper, I aim to explore

and understand the complex relationship between apocalyptic and millenarian narratives within the ideologies of contemporary populist movements.

For this paper I start from the assumption that apocalyptic and millenarian narratives serve as powerful tools to shape perceptions, stimulate action, and legitimize the authority of the movements and figures that draw on them. Apocalyptic visions of societal collapse and existential threat resonate deeply with individuals disillusioned with the status quo, offering an approach through which to interpret the context in which they live and hope for or even attempt to bring about radical changes.

By analysing the interplay between apocalyptic and millenarian narratives within populist ideologies, this paper aims not only to deepen our understanding of contemporary political dynamics, but also to provoke critical reflection on the anxieties, aspirations and power dynamics underlying these movements. In doing so, I aim to contribute to a more nuanced and informed discourse around the complexities of populism in the modern world.

2. Revelation, Millennialism and End of the World Narratives

As explained in the introduction to this paper, apocalypticism is one of the cornerstones on which this paper is built. Thus, one of the assumptions that I make regarding to it is that the problems, crises or uncertainties that a society or certain groups within it face end up underpinning different narratives, from topics on the public agenda to ideologies or myths. Among these have been narratives about the end of the world or rather the end of worlds understood as aspects of reality experienced by or relevant only to certain groups/communities. I am starting from the idea that one of the most widespread of such myths/narratives is that of the Apocalypse according to John, itself inspired by and continuing a long Judeo-Christian apocalyptic tradition.

In the collective mind, the idea of the end of the world tends to be associated with the Apocalypse of John. However, today, as Alison McQueen argues in her book, when we talk about this concept we tend to associate it with the idea of cataclysms, whether caused by nuclear war or global warming. Although separated by almost two millennia, these narratives are built on the idea of an imminent end, an event that will completely change the world (McQueen, 2018, p.2). As the two examples indicate, the term ‘apocalypse’ does not have a clear meaning, as those who use it do so to convey, in one form or another, the idea of the end, as literary critic Frank Kermode argues (Kermode, 1985, p.84).

Although they have undergone significant metamorphoses throughout their historical evolution, I believe that the concept of revelation, of gaining knowledge that a person or group cannot ordinarily access, remains a common element of apocalyptic narratives. Specifically, I am of the opinion that the process of ‘decoding reality’ by an authority with special status is an essential element in the construction of these narratives.

Over the centuries and the political and social contexts in which they have been used, apocalyptic eschatologies have undergone dramatic changes to adapt to and transform them. Because of this, Carey argues that it becomes impossible to formulate generalizations and proposes the use of the term “apocalyptic discourse” (Carey, 2005, pp.4-5). He resorts to this solution in an attempt to bring together the ideological, social, and literary aspects of apocalyptic language, thus arguing that despite the context in which they emerged, apocalyptic narratives share a common logic.

The origins of apocalypticism come from Zoroastrianism, in the European cultural space it is associated with Judaism and the history of the Jewish people. It should be emphasized that the origins of apocalyptic visions should not be understood as outside social and political realities but, on the contrary, deeply political (McQueen, 2018, pp. 24). McQueen, along with other authors points out that the apocalyptic visions of the ancient Jews represented a response, a form of rationalization of the political reality in Palestine. Specifically, the elites attempted to explain although they were under God's protection they were facing those problems (Berry, 1943, pp. 9-10; McQueen, 2018, p. 24).

The political and religious aspects of apocalyptic apocalypticism for the ancient Hebrews cannot be separated, these visions representing what McQueen calls "political theodicy" (McQueen, 2018, p.26). Specifically, the authors of ancient apocalyptic texts were compelled to find an answer related to the problems facing the communities without delegitimizing the divinity and their relationship to it. For this reason, prophets such as Amos or Isaiah explained that the situation they found themselves in was the direct result of the actions of the Jews, a form of punishment.

When discussing millenarianisms, it must be emphasized that although over time they have evolved out of the religious narratives from which they originated, any effort to analyse and understand them must start from their origin in sacred narratives. As Hall points out, apocalyptic and millenarian narratives have been one of the foundations of modernity. Apocalyptic transformations have been equally dramatic. Both before and after the onset of the Reformation, European colonizing ideologies depicted the triumphal spread of Christianity, sometimes to establish the new kingdom of heaven on earth. During the Reformation, apocalypticism morphed to incorporate religious contestation of how power was distributed. In turn, both Catholics and Protestant states increasingly limited the spread of apocalypticism through the regulation of religion, even as apocalyptic orientations spread into secular political struggles, eventually merging with diachronic discipline. Eventually, an ideology of progress reframed the growing predominance of objective time, so that history and diachronic time became articulated with each other, especially in increasingly effective efforts to plan and construct the future (Hall, 2009, p. 123).

The Christian millennial idea, derived from the interpretation of Revelation 20:4, which prophecies that the saved will "reign with Christ a thousand years" before the final judgment, has become a central theme in Christian theology. This interpretation has spawned various offshoots of millenarian thought which, by extension, have captured any vision that proposes that human history will reach a distinct climax. Although religious institutions have often displayed ambivalence towards this implicit rejection of the status quo, millenarianism's sacred roots in canonical texts have ensured its perpetuation, even in contemporary forms of popular religion (Barkun, 2013, p. 16).

On the other hand, in his work, Barkun analyses a further transformation of millenarianism, which began to dissociate itself from its religious basis. He argues that from the 18th century onwards, a secular form of millenarianism took shape, independent of religious undertones and focused on the idea of a perfect future. This development gained more and more ground in the nineteenth century, when millenarianism became associated especially with political ideologies, including concepts related to nationalism, class and race. According to Barkun (2013, p. 16), this development led to the prevalence in the twentieth century of ideologies that offered the promise of the fulfilment of millenarian hopes of specific groups.

Although in many cases millenarianism is associated with religion, it also plays a significant role in the political space and is often associated with revolutionary movements. However, for Barkun, millenarianism is not solely revolutionary. Thus, there may be instances in which they take a rather passive approach and transfer responsibility for the final battle between good and evil entirely to supernatural forces or, in the secular equivalent, to inevitable historical evolution. Whether expecting divine intervention or relying on socio-political progress, transformation is perceived as coming in due course. In reality, passivity may mean either that the movement has already had a moment of encounter with existing institutions and has been defeated, or that predictions of anticipated transformations have not been fulfilled. It is often difficult to distinguish between movements that attempt to speed up events or "force the end" and those that simply prepare (Barkun, 1986, p. 19). For this author, the most unusual aspect of millennialism is the bizarre behaviours it can generate. Many authors, he explains, refer to the idea of 'enthusiasm' (Mead, 1958; Talmon, 1966) or 'ecstasy'. Because of this, references abound to hallucinations, ecstatic dancing, trances, uncontrolled motor activity, feelings of persecution and conspiracy, extreme dependency on the leader, a sudden willingness to abandon the obligations and routines of everyday life, and feelings of personal rebirth and transformation.

Features of millenarianism appear, Barkun points out, even in the "classic" revolutions in France, Russia, America, England and China. The American Revolution, one of the least violent and least disruptive, nonetheless generated considerable literature on its own transcendent significance and on the shaping of the role the new nation was to play in the secular salvation of the world, he explains, and the other revolutions brought up in the debate have considered "the possibility of individual and social perfectibility" (Barkun, 1986, p. 22).

The claim made in 'Disaster and the Millennium' is that the division between revolution and millenarianism is largely artificial. Thus, in the first place, movements that are ostensibly religious in character tend to be classified as millenarian, whereas those that are avowedly secular are considered movements of political revolution, and this is partly due to historical change; most of the events that we now consider revolutions occurred after Western society secularized and, as a result, social discontent was expressed in secular terms. This secularization has not prevented the use of essentially messianic themes, in which "there are functional analogues of supernatural forces, such as 'the force of history' or 'national destiny' (Aberle, 1991). When a society fails to draw a clear distinction between the public and the religious space, millenarian movements express their ideals and claims in terms that can be considered as religious terms (Talmon, 1962; Barkun, 1986, p. 23).

One of the ultimate arguments proposed in this book is that millennialism is by no means a matter of the past. In the twentieth century, it was transformed at the very moment in social development when its old wellsprings of support were about to be invaded and absorbed by an avalanche of urbanism. The possibility of a perfect future in his own lifetime was too great, and man's ingenuity in generating disasters for himself is a capacity that can hardly be underestimated (Barkun, 1986, p.211). Millenarian movements and tendencies cannot be reduced to a mere "religion of the oppressed" (Lanternari, 1965). As the means of inducing disasters have been developed and used at will, millenarianism has become both the instrument of oppression and its by-product. Millenarianism left its old 'spaces' such as the ghetto, the small town and the cul-de-sac for modern urban society. In the process, it has increasingly left behind the oppressed, for whom it was the last resort in the face of adversity, and has become the creature of those who seek power and domination. The idea of the millennium, appropriated from those

who need it most, now animates those who need it least. Once an unintended consequence of disaster, millennialist expectation now flourishes as a cause of it.

As Cohn points out, there is a tendency in the social sciences to broaden the definition of millenarianism to refer to different forms of personal or group salvation (Cohn, 1970, p.15). I should note, however, that this approach has been helpful in my research, allowing me to more easily identify commonalities and areas of overlap between end of the world narratives and populism. Building on the previous idea, the author argues that millennialists interpret salvation in terms:

– collective, in the sense that it is to be enjoyed by believers as a collective;

– earthly, in the sense that it must be realized on this earth and not in some other-worldly heaven;

– imminent, in the sense that it must come both soon and suddenly;

– total, in the sense that they must completely transform life on earth, so that the new dispensation will not be a mere improvement on the present, but perfection itself;

– miraculous, in the sense that it must be accomplished by, or with the aid of, supernatural forces (Cohn, 1970, p.15).

Even within these limits identified by Cohn, there are infinite variants: there are innumerable possible ways of imagining the Millennium and the road to it. Millenarian sects and movements have varied in attitude from the most violent aggressiveness to the gentlest pacifism and from the most ethereal spirituality to the earthiest materialism, and they have also varied greatly in social composition and social function (Cohn, 1970, p.16).

3. Populism as a Thin Ideology

Cas Mudde defined populism as a "thin" ideology, i.e. it is used alongside other ideologies and is based on the assumption that society is separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic camps, "pure people" versus "corrupt elites", and that politics should be an expression of the general will of the people. By defining populism as a "thin ideology", he emphasizes the "flexibility" of the concept. In contrast to "complete" ideologies (e.g. fascism, liberalism, socialism), such as populism, have a restricted morphology, which appears necessarily attached or sometimes even assimilated into other ideologies. In fact, populism almost always appears attached to other ideological elements, which are crucial for the promotion of political projects appealing to a wider public. Therefore, populism in itself cannot provide complex or comprehensive answers to the political questions that modern societies generate (Cohn, 1970, p.16).

To understand the idea of populism, Mudde explains that it is built on three central concepts: the people, the elite and the general will.

As for the idea of the people, Cas Mudde emphasizes that there are three broad interpretations of it. Thus, the notion of the 'sovereign people' emerges as a common theme in the various populist traditions and emphasizes that the ultimate source of political power in a democracy comes from a collective body. Ignoring this can lead to mobilization and revolt.

The second understanding to which the author refers is that of "common people" – This refers to a broader class that combines socioeconomic status with certain cultural traditions and popular values. References to the idea of "ordinary people" often represent a critique of the dominant culture, which views the judgments, tastes and values of ordinary citizens with suspicion. In contrast to this elitist view, this interpretation is used to uphold the dignity and

recognition of groups that are socio-culturally and socioeconomically excluded from power (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017, p.9).

The notion of the people as a nation is the third form that the idea of the people assumes in populist narratives Here, the term 'the people is used to refer to the national community, defined in either civic or ethnic terms. Thus, different communities represent specific and unique nations, which are usually reinforced by foundational myths. However, delineating nation boundaries is far from straightforward, especially when different ethnic groups coexist on the same territory (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017, p.10).

As opposed to "the people," few authors have theorized about the meanings of "elite" in populism. Obviously, the crucial issue is obviously morality, as the distinction is between pure people and corrupt elites. But this says little about who the elites are. Most populists not only detest the political establishment, but their criticism also extends to the economic, cultural and media elite. They are all portrayed as a corrupt and homogeneous group working against the "general will" of the people. While the distinction is essentially moral, elites are identified on the basis of a wide variety of criteria (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017, p.12).

By using the idea of the general will, populist actors and advocates allude to a particular conception of the political, which is closely related to Jean-Jacques Rousseau. He made a distinction between the general will (*volonté générale*) and the will of all (*volonté de tous*). While the former refers to the ability of the people to unite into a community and legislate to enforce their common interest, the latter denotes the mere sum of particular interests at a specific moment in time (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017, p.16).

4. The Intricate Interplay Between Populism and Narratives of the End

As I explained at the beginning of this paper, I use a series of assumptions on the basis of which I present my thesis and construct my arguments. Thus, in order to argue that there is a connection between apocalyptic and millenarian narratives on the one hand and populist ideologies and discourse on the other hand, I need to introduce a supplementary assumption that I could not present in the introduction. More specifically, I want to start from the thesis that Cas Mudde proposes, that of the populist zeitgeist (Mudde, 2004), which tends to be the dominant form in which political struggle takes place and the mode of interaction between the various instances of political life; to which is added the idea proposed by James Beckford when he analysed the relationship between religion and social movements. Thus, he used the idea of spirituality/sacrality, arguing that there may be some movements that give rise to spiritual and religious associations that give rise to such a feeling in relation to the ideology, sentiments or collective actions that they characterize (Beckford, 2003, p.242). As he adds, this idea refers to a phenomenon that is spiritually 'charged' to such an extent that it engenders reverence and or awe. I am of the opinion that this thesis can be used, in relation to populism, in reverse, to argue that what we would currently consider sacred and independent of politics can be identified with populism.

To support my thesis, I turn to two other authors who argue in a similar way. Thus, for Daniel Nilsson DeHanas, those who support populist leaders and movements tend to attribute to them the ability to "get to the heart of the matter" and to have an accurate vision of realities, which the political mainstream might not be capable of (DeHanas, 2023, p.2). The argument

he advances is crystallized in the form proposed by Margaret Canovan, who is of the opinion that populism can be understood as "the politics of faith" (Canovan, 1999). Building my assumption on the ideas of these authors, I want to emphasize that I believe that populism should not only be understood in relation to different ideologies, but also in terms of the emotions and even spirituality that it generates and engages. In this way, I believe that I can recognize a fundamental link between apocalypticism and populism.

I would like to emphasize that while in this paper I have appealed to the theories that Cas Mudde proposes in the case of populism, in terms of the relationship between populism and emotion and, later, as I argue here, with apocalypticism and millenarianism, I choose to use a number of approaches that he considers insufficient for the study of this ideology. Specifically, he argues in "The Populist Zeitgeist" that understanding populism through its emotional aspects, through the reaction of the masses, comes with a number of limitations that would not allow for a proper study of it. However, I am of the opinion that in relation to end-of-the-world narratives, such a relatively broad approach would allow me to produce a comprehensive analysis.

In addition to the presuppositions that I have presented above and at the beginning of this paper, I want to emphasize that, in order to ensure that the process of argumentation of the proposed thesis is one that is easily understood and followed by those who will read this paper, I will analyse the parallels and points of intersection between the end of the world narratives, I am referring here to apocalypticism and millenarianism, and populism, using the Daniel Nilsson DeHanas model of the "spiritual" dimensions that this ideology has. However, I would like to emphasize from the outset that I do not equate populism with religious sentiment and that I believe that in order to argue my thesis I need to emphasize the emotional and spiritual side of this ideology.

According to DeHanas, his paper pulls together approaches to argue that populism comprises four distinct 'spiritual' dimensions: sacred, charismatic, redemptive and apocalyptic. In addition, as this author argues, the individual dimensions have been explored in previous research, his thesis is the first to succeed in combining all four into a unified framework (DeHanas, 2023, p.2).

Sacred populism. This tends to be one of the fundamental dimensions of this ideology, with DeHanas arguing that it always emphasizes the idea of the "sacred people", whether this idea is understood in religious terms or not. Also, in many instances, populism is seen as 'moralizing' (Kaltwasser, 2014). In this context, the reference to the idea of morality should be understood in a most general way, as an attempt to divide social and political reality into categories of Good and Evil (DeHanas, 2023, p.2).

The author emphasizes that populists generally speak in dualistic terms, of good and evil, pure and impure, which become the basis of a dynamic that determines who belongs to the group, in this case "the people" and who is unworthy and not entitled to belong to it. A similar line of argument has also been proposed by Cas Mudde, who explains that populism is built on the assumption that society is divided into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, the 'pure people' and the 'corrupt elite' (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017, p.6). DeHanas further argues that populism is compared to Manichaeism, the ancient religion defined by its radical dualism between Good and Evil (DeHanas, 2023, p.2).

Building on this idea, I believe that this form of dualism is the first point of commonality and intersection between populism and end-times narratives. Fundamentally, apocalypticism, especially in its "classical" form as it evolved into its Judeo-Christian form, is defined by du-

alisms. As Alison McQueen argues, scholars in the field are of the view that these narratives can be understood in terms of cosmic dualism and chronological dualism.

Cosmic dualism involves defining reality as a conflict between the forces of evil and the forces of good. On the side of evil are Satan and his demons, and on the side of good are God and his angels. This cosmic dichotomy also means that neutrality is not possible for those on earth (Ehram, 1999, p.121).

Chronological dualism is an extension in history of cosmic dualism, the struggle between Good and Evil. Thus, history can be divided into two categories: the present and "the age to come" (The Creed). Following the logic of the cosmic dichotomy, the present tends to be defined by the forces of evil and the way in which the good-believers subject to the divine are tormented, even persecuted. Incomprehensible to believers is God's decision to cede control of the world and history to the forces of evil. In the age to come, or the future, as we conventionally call it, Evil is defeated and divine control over the earth is resumed (McQueen, 2018: 26). The transition to the age to come comes in the wake of a catastrophic event, a battle in which the forces opposing God will be destroyed. This new age will no longer be defined by the suffering and decay of the previous age and, just as importantly, it will have no end (Ehram, 1999, p.121).

At this point I would like to point out that the defining features of apocalypticism also include pessimistic historical determinism, the final act of redemption and a sense of imminence, but I think that these can be better used to capture the relationship of these narratives to populism.

Also, by referring to the idea of sacred populism and how it captures the interplay between this ideology and end-times narratives I am of the opinion that McQueen in turn provides the theoretical grounding for identifying a new link Thus, she and others argue that in antiquity apocalyptic visions were a response, a form of rationalization of the political reality in Palestine. Thus, the communities in this region were going through eight consecutive centuries of military conflict and domination by surrounding powers that threatened their political and cultural existence. In addition, the destruction of the two ancient kingdoms of Israel and Judah, followed by a complete loss of political sovereignty, massive deportations and the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, presented political and religious elites with a dilemma that jeopardized their worldview. Specifically, the elites tried to explain although they were under God's protection they were grappling with those issues (Berry, 1943, pp. 9-10; McQueen, 2018, p.24).

The argument I propose here is that, with respect to proportion, both populism and apocalypticism place at their centre certain communities or groups, who are put at the centre of attention and whose situations are valorised within these discourses.

Charismatic populism represents the second spiritual dimension of these ideologies and I believe that, as I have demonstrated above, the way in which it is defined presents a number of clues that point to the interplay between end-goal narratives and this form of ideological manifestation.

Charisma, as the author points out, is among the most common themes in the literature dealing with populist movements and how they evolve and function. To support his argument, he appeals to Cas Mudde's thesis in his article on the "populist zeitgeist". The latter is of the opinion that, although charisma is not the defining feature of populism, charismatic leadership and direct communication between leader and people can nevertheless be commonly found among populists (Mudde, 2004, p.545). A similar line of argument is adopted by Margaret Canovan, as DeHanas points out. She refers to the 'populist state of mind' which includes 'the tendency to focus heightened emotions on a charismatic leader' (Canovan, 1999, p.6). Also,

Albertazzi and McDonnell advance the assumption that charisma is not just a common attribute or tendency, but that the charismatic bond between leader and follower is of absolute importance for populist parties (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2008, p.6). The importance of charisma continues to be the central topic in recent research on the phenomenon of populism, such as that conducted by Taggart and Weyland (Weyland, 2021).

The link between populism and apocalypticism/millenarianism can also be identified in this situation. More specifically, as Barkun argues, the presence of one or more charismatic leaders is one of the fundamental characteristics of these movements (Barkun, 1986, pp.18-19). In contrast, an analysis of Revelation from the perspective of political myths as analysed by Henry Tudor indicates that although individuals and leaders are included and may even have a central role in this type of narrative, their existence tends to be different from that of populist charismatic leaders.

More to the point, at first glance the presence of populist charismatic leaders can be interpreted as an element of movement coagulation, whereas in the case of political myths, leaders are included in political myths, but tend to be seen as representatives of the groups they belong to or as important figures in terms of implementing the community's vision for the future (Tudor, 1972. p.139). However, I must emphasize that although there is some tension between the two instances, at the core, the two have several things in common. The charismatic populist leader puts himself in the position of showing his supporters that he is the representative of their interests and identity.

Although this particular form of populism does not perfectly parallel apocalypticism or millenarianism, it should be noted that an extension of the analysis from the idea of the charismatic leader to a more comprehensive concept, such as the role of emotions, may lead to the identification of new areas of overlap between the two instances that are the subject of this analysis. Thus, many authors refer to the idea of "enthusiasm" (Mead, 1958; Talmon, 1966) or "ecstasy".

In the case of millenarianism, seen particularly from the perspective of religious studies, references abound to hallucinations, ecstatic dances, trances, uncontrolled motor activity, feelings of persecution and conspiracy, extreme dependence on the leader, a sudden willingness to abandon the obligations and routines of everyday life, and feelings of rebirth and personal transformation. However, despite the specific context in which these things may take place, I believe that they may in turn be a 'common ground' between populism and end of the world narratives. However, I should emphasize that this aspect could be the subject of a separate later analysis.

Populism of salvation/redemption, as Margaret Canovan points out, populism can be interpreted as a 'politics of faith', an alternative approach to 'established' approaches to dealing with the problems facing a community. In this way, she argues this ideology captures the modern vision of personal or group salvation through politics (Canovan, 1999; DeHanas, 2023, p.8). The second author emphasizes that over time, scholars in the social sciences have emerged who have talked about the "act of salvation" that occurs through populism.

If in the case of populism, the act of salvation becomes evident when using a 'spiritual' approach, in the case of apocalyptic narratives it does not require such sophisticated tools, and is ultimately a fundamental characteristic of them. Returning to the list of essential features that characterize apocalypticism proposed by McQueen, it should be noted that three of them fit this form of populism to a greater or lesser extent: pessimistic historical determinism, the final act of salvation and finality of history, and the sense of imminence.

When McQueen and other authors talk about cosmic dualism, they refer to a definition of reality as a conflict between the forces of evil and the forces of good. On the side of evil are Satan and his demons, and on the side of good are God and his angels. This cosmic dichotomy also means that neutrality is not possible for those on earth (Ehram, 1999, p.121). In relation to populism, this dichotomy can include 'the people' and 'the elites' and also this narrative structure can be fully taken over as form and content in political discourse to present the goals and vision of a leader or movement.

Chronological dualism is an expansion in history of cosmic dualism, the struggle between Good and Evil. Thus, history can be divided into two categories: the present and "the age to come" (Creed). Following the logic of the cosmic dichotomy, the present tends to be defined by the forces of evil and the way in which the good-believers subject to the divine are tormented, even persecuted. Incomprehensible to believers is God's decision to cede control of the world and history to the forces of evil. In the age to come, or the future, as we conventionally call it, Evil is defeated and divine control over the earth is resumed (McQueen, 2018, p. 26). The transition to the age to come comes in the wake of a catastrophic event, a battle in which the forces opposing God will be destroyed. This new age will no longer be defined by the suffering and decay of the previous age and, just as importantly, it will have no end (Ehram, 1999, p.121).

The idea of a final act of salvation is a logical conclusion also derived from the idea of chronological dualism. When the sufferings of the human world reach a critical point, God will take an active role in history and intervene to save believers. Thus, there will be a battle between the forces of Good and the forces of Evil, which will result in the victory of Good and a transformation of the universe (McQueen, 2018, p.27). As Bart emphasizes, Jewish apocalyptic visions advance the idea of a universe deeply corrupted by sin and Satan's influence, which in turn means that the act of salvation must be of cosmic proportions. Regardless of what form the final conflict takes and how this salvation will take place, all apocalyptic texts agree on the idea that the present world will be replaced by a new world in which evil will have no place (Ehram, 1999, p.122). In the case of populist movements, this idea of salvation refers to the struggle for political power and how this should be used in the interests of 'the people'.

In the case of apocalyptic narratives, be they secular, but especially sacred/religious, the sense of imminence can be observed in texts, persons, social groups or cultures that have an apocalyptic worldview. They tend to believe that they are living the end of history and will see the new world. In the Jewish tradition, prophecies always emphasize the need to turn to divinity under the threat of impending catastrophes (Ehram, 1999, p.123). As to how this facet of apocalypticism reflects on populism I am of the opinion that this needs to be analysed on a case-by-case basis. However, I am of the opinion that there may be movement leaders who try to induce a sense of impending doom among their supporters, especially in times of extreme political and social tension, such as elections. It is also ultimately a logical conclusion of the dichotomy that governs this ideology.

Just as Daniel Nilsson DeHanas constructed his arguments regarding salvation populism by appealing to the theses proposed by Nadia Marzouki and Duncan McDonnell, I think I must do the same with the argument thus obtained. Specifically, these authors argue that populist leaders tend to assert themselves or at least project the image of saviours in relation to their supporters (Marzouki and McDonnell, 2016). As argued above, the idea of rescue usually comes bundled with the idea of struggle. At this point, there is a perfect mirroring between

populism and millenarianism if we are to introduce the argument put forward by Michael Barkun about end of the world narratives.

Barkun argues that these types of millenarian movements lie at the intersection of the political and the religious and that approaches that focus on only one of these labels are incomplete (Barkun, 1986, pp.44-45). In brief, he argues that millenarianism, also known as chiliasm, anticipates the complete destruction of the existing social, political and economic order (Zygmunt, 1970), to be replaced by a new and perfect society. They often associate this anticipation with an active desire to hasten the inevitable outcome, often by violent and revolutionary means. The old must be completely destroyed before a new and perfect society can be established in its place. This type of utopia implies the potential for violent confrontation, with no room for negotiation or compromise (Barkun, 1986, p.18). Here I want to point out that the use of such terms leads, as I have shown above, to one conclusion, in these forms, between populism and end of the world narratives there is a perfect overlap.

Apocalyptic populism, as defined by Daniel Nilsson DeHanas and Wendy Brown, the latter in her analysis of Donald Trump (Brown, 2017), is not to be understood in catastrophic terms of the imminence of a devastating event. Instead, by relating to the former US president, "apocalypse" becomes a way of capturing a profound change in the attitudes of his supporters, specifically, the shift from resentment of elites and social and political reality to anger, in some cases like that which gave rise to the events of January 6, 2020 on Capitol Hill (Joose and Zelinsky, 2022).

As Catherine Wessinger points out, in order to fully understand apocalyptic populism, we need to pay attention to the concept of millennialism. She defines it as a worldview in which the elect must prepare themselves for salvation, understood in collective terms (Wessinger, 2014). In some cases, millenarianism can be 'progressive' and requires good actions that rise to moral standards to bring about change, the transition into the new millennium. In its negative forms, it becomes 'catastrophic' or 'apocalyptic'. Such visions are deeply pessimistic, assuming that the corrupt world is rapidly heading towards destruction. Millennial-catastrophic movements are hyper-dualistic. People outside the movement can be seen as obstacles to salvation and therefore violence against them can be justified.

As I pointed out in the previous paragraph, I am of the opinion that, once again, we find ourselves in a situation where between populism and end-times narratives there seems to be a perfect overlap, especially if the thesis proposed by Catherine Wessinger is taken into account.

In addition to identifying the similarities and areas of overlap between populism and end-of-the-world narratives based on the four spiritual dimensions of this ideology, as presented by Daniel Nilsson DeHanas, I believe that the relationship between the two instances can also be identified by referring to the historical evolution of millenarianism and how it has come to be integrated into the way politics is done.

Specifically, in this portion I want to argue that some of the elements of millenarianism have been integrated into European culture and the various ideologies it has produced over the past century. In addition, the relevance of millenarianism to my thesis on apocalyptic political mythology is emphasized by the argument proposed by Ernest Tuveson, who proposes a comparison with biology. Specifically, he considers millenarianism as a "recessive gene" that can become active under certain situations and conditions (Tuveson, 1968, p.213).

Getting back to Barkun and the way in which millenarianism has become a fundamental part of modern political life, even if this is not always easy to see, it should be noted that such

narratives were transformed in the twentieth century at the very moment in social development when its old reservoirs of support were about to be invaded and absorbed by an avalanche of urbanism. The possibility of a perfect future in his own lifetime was too great, and man's ingenuity in generating disasters for himself is a capacity that can hardly be underestimated (Barkun, 1986, p.211). Millenarian movements and tendencies cannot be reduced to a mere "religion of the oppressed" (Lanternari, 1965). As the means of inducing disasters have been developed and utilized at will, millenarianism has become both the instrument of oppression and its by-product. Millenarianism left its old 'spaces', such as the ghetto, the small town and the cul-de-sac, for modern urban society. In the process, it increasingly left behind the oppressed, for whom it was the last resort in adversity.

5. Conclusions

In the end, this paper attempts to capture the complex and interconnected reality of apocalypticism and populism, showing that they are deeply intertwined. Through a detailed exploration of these two types of discourse, we have identified that both are grounded in essential dichotomies of Good and Evil. Although at first associated with religious or philosophical contexts, these concepts are often adopted and adapted in the political discourse of populist movements in order to build a strong collective identity and mobilize mass support.

On the one hand, apocalyptic narratives draw attention to imminent threats and the possibility of societal collapse, creating a sense of urgency and the need for action. Populist narratives, on the other hand, exploit these fears and anxieties to promise radical change and moral recovery, offering themselves as a saviour solution. Thus, both apocalypse and populism become tools of mobilization and polarization in the political sphere.

Therefore, it is clear that the simultaneous analysis of these two phenomena is essential to a comprehensive understanding of contemporary political dynamics. In a world where apocalyptic and populist discourses are increasingly gaining momentum, it is crucial to have as comprehensive an understanding as possible of how they interact and how they influence political, social and cultural processes. Delving deeper into these issues offers important insights into how we can address and manage contemporary challenges to democratic governance, social cohesion and political participation in a constructive and responsible way.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest

About the author

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