Population ≠ Populism = Populism: Asserting Populism through Negating Populism from the Standpoint of *el pueblo*

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Abstract

This article examines the concept of populism by reevaluating its historical and theoretical dimensions, particularly through the lens of the neglected periphery. Drawing on the philosophies of Miki Kiyoshi, Tosaka Jun, and Enrique Dussel, the study critiques the conventional portrayal of populism as a regressive force, exploring its potential to serve as a transformative tool for marginalized communities. By integrating the Kyoto School's dialectical logic with Dussel's concept of *el pueblo*, the article develops a framework for asserting populist movements while resisting reification and hegemonic tendencies. It emphasizes the importance of myths as tools for fostering collective resistance and transformative praxis, advocating for a continuous process of self-negation to ensure inclusivity and prevent ideological capture. Through this cross-cultural philosophical synthesis, the article proposes a re-paradigm of populism that aligns with democratic empowerment and the decentralization of political power, creating a more equitable and pluralistic socio-political order.

Introduction

We tend to think of "populism" as a negative, if not a dangerous, phenomenon. The most recent cases support this concern: we have seen demagogues, like Trump and Bolsonaro for instance, come to power by riding the anxieties and fears of certain group identities and classes, only to manipulate the electorate and re-direct the regimes of power towards suppressing the voices of critique. The goal, as it can be said, is to consolidate power and re-assert a new kind of reactionary myth to oversee the communities under control. In fact, the concept

of "myth" often times go hand in hand with the concept of "populism": if we think of myth as this common or popular narrative structure that seeks to give meaning and significance to the experiences of the present, past and future, as Chiara Bottici claimed, then myth itself is what gives populist movements both its motivating arc and its political force. The danger of political myths in populist movements, as it is often thought then, is that it projects a totalizing and idealistic framework that fails to provide any genuine voice for the real struggles among the particulars of communities. Such can also be seen in "left-wing" populist movements throughout history that espouse the language of liberation based on a single population group and yet engage in intolerant acts of democratic discourse while ignoring the deeper nuances that affect all of the particulars themselves.

But are "populism" and "myths" always on the side of irrationality and violence, and thus instruments of oppressive power? Or, to put it another way: is there still space for populist movements and political myths in the field of the political despite their dangerous, regressive tendencies? In the 1970s, Ernesto Laclau asserted a view of populism against Marxist and modernist theories of populism, arguing for how populism can be conceived as a political-discursive logic that can constitute popular identities through the development of a political frontier between the oppressed and the oppressors.[1] For Laclau, a populist rupture with the status quo is a necessary condition for constructing a more inclusive system of identities, particularly within systems where the existing social, political, and economic institutions are incapable of resolving popular demands. Emancipatory discourses, therefore, serve to dislocate existing discourses that fail to represent the popular sectors of society. And so, in the spirit of Laclau, I will argue that there is still space for populism and political myths in political movements, but only under certain theoretical conditions: that is, through a negation of these categories themselves asserted from the standpoint of what Latin American philosopher Enrique Dussel calls *el pueblo*. What I will discuss more particularly is how we can theorize an attempt to rescue or save populist movements and political myths from becoming dangerous forces of history through

[1] See "Towards a Theory of Populism" in *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory: Capitalism, Fascism, Populism* (London and New York: Verso, 1977/2012, 143–199).

a dialectic that is both negative and positive in its assertion. By drawing on Kyoto School philosophers such as Miki Kiyoshi and Tosaka Jun as well as on Latin American philosopher Enrique Dussel as theoretical resources, I will present an alternative account of political resistance from a cross-fertilization of these authors' philosophy that could be used as fuel for the possibility of generating new political myths that can better guide and transform populist movements into more revolutionary movements that are more grounded in the concrete actions of the "people on the periphery."

The Source of Power in Political Myths

Kyoto School philosopher Miki Kiyoshi (三木清) (1897–1945) once described myths in his seminal text *Logic of Imagination* (*kōsōryoku no ronri*『構想力の論理』) as institutions that have the capacity to move and create history.[2] Although myths are political fictions, as Miki stated, they also possess a certain reality by fostering and mobilizing concrete actions to produce new historical forms through a dialectical unity of *logos* (reason and language) and *pathos* (insecurities, fears, anxieties, and so on).[3] Far from operating as the most primitive form of ideology, as the Enlightenment thinkers have claimed, myths, according to Miki, can be liberatory in its effect: that is, through myths, collectivities or communities can carve out a new reality out of the social world that could address the problems of the present moment. Grounded in the emotive effects of subjectivity, the *pathos* of the collective or community become the driving force of human production that works to create a new chapter of social history within its interactive web of *logos*. In other words, a new era of historical being can only truly exist within a dialectical unity of subject and object, rationality and irrationality, intellect and emotions, ideality and reality, being and becoming, activity and passivity, and interiority and exteriority located within what Miki calls the "creative imagination" (*kōsōryoku no ronri* 構想力). As Miki holds, the failure to maintain this dialectical unity will come

[2] The Kyoto School philosophy is a Japanese philosophical movement centered at Kyoto University that began with Nishida Kitarō and Tanabe Hajime. This school of thought integrated Western philosophy and Japanese religious and moral ideas and used them to critique Western epistemological and ontological truth-claims.

[3] Krummel 2016, 18–19.

at a cost, however: if irrationality overpowers rationality, then we will see the rise of fascism; or let us take the opposite scenario, if rationality overpowers irrationality, then we will see a proliferation of liberal narratives that will continue the justification of capitalism and all of its entanglement with colonialism.

We might think of Miki as being overly optimistic here, positioning myths on the more positive side of historical creativity where it has the ability to configure a new human nature that corresponds to some amorphous future history, but his discussion of myth situates the power of historical creativity within the interstitial space between the aforementioned structurizing activities—that is, within the co-constitutive, interactive relationship between the various bi-valences just mentioned—to avoid collapsing any single distinction into its opposite category. In other words, there is an aspect of "non-duality" to the way these bi-valences relate to each other. Now while the logic of the creative imagination is a logic of fantasy, and thus prone to the irrationalities of subjectivity, it also represents how dreams, as expressed in myths, can build and rebuild social institutions by actualizing the most appropriate historical forms that meet the needs of the people.

Interestingly enough, Miki, much like the other Kyoto School thinkers, held great suspicion against the modernity formulated in the West, and so as an attempt to reposition modernity within this "inter-civilizational network" of global ideas, he not only launched his critique of Western modernity but also re-interpreted a new modernity on the basis of revealing the intellectual prowess of Japan's own intellectual heritages. Not unlike Nishida Kitarō's and Tanabe Hajime's effort to affirm Buddhist notions of reality within a standpoint of overcoming modernity, Miki draws up a theory of cooperatives that largely remains Asiatic in structure in order to sublate Western liberalism and Marxism while avoiding the potential horrors of totalitarianism. To clarify, the sort of cooperatives Miki imagined were not a complete rejection of liberalism and Marxism, but rather an effort to unify their core ideas into a more particular system that seeks to assert the ontological development of the individual and the collective at the same time—that is, maintaining the view that society is a commodity producing system of relationships that is in need to be uprooted while ensuring that subjectivity will always be the

locus of social history (instead of turning subjectivity into an object of productive determination).

But the question is now: how can existence move from being a subject of the capitalistic system to an existence that is a subject of cooperatives, as theorized by Miki? While the later Miki would hint at the notion of political myths to function as the guide of this transformation, the younger Miki would theorize a different sort of framework around this process. Although the early Miki did not have this system of cooperatives in mind at that point, the framework of transformation Miki theorized, nonetheless, is useful in terms of understanding how transformation can be generated in a non-dogmatic way. From 1926 to 1929, Miki would re-interpret Marx with this aim in mind—namely, to rescue the individual subject from being turned into a mere (passive) object of material production by theorizing subjectivity as an active creator of historical reality. In other words, the "mode of production" was re-interpreted as the "mode of being" within a commodity producing society.[4] But Miki recognized that existence, as this "mode of being" entangled in the relationship of commodity production, must liberate itself from the alienation and material deprivation formed in capitalist society. Here is where Miki perhaps departs from the more conventional readings of Marx: that is, Miki claimed that many of the materialist readings of Marx are too utopian in their portrayal of historical change and thus fail to resolve the theory-praxis dichotomy.[5] Miki, as a result, would then argue that there needs to be a theoretical discourse that re-interprets praxis in a way that leads and guides, through particular stages, this revolutionary transformation of the existing world towards a new system of relationships. In other words, theory and praxis must be dialectically unified within the sensuous world of labor in order for material poverty, alienation, and misery to be rooted out.

What Miki argues here is that in order to have a more natural revolutionary transformation of existence we have to understand the dynamic relationship this sensuous world of labor must have to the discourses of society—namely, language and reason (*logos*). Miki argues that the problem of human existence is a problem

[4] Muramoto 2022, 8.
[5] Miki vol. 3, 1978, 71–2.

of everyday experience and the relationship such has to the problems of social history. For Miki, since humans existence is a "median existence" (*chūkansha* 中間者) stuck between infinity and nothingness, humans cannot exist without having to negotiate themselves with the world and other beings, and thus can only be the center of social-historical change. But if everyday experience is the groundwork of social history, as it is never fixed and always changes, and therefore always en route of social transformation on account of its negotiation with the historical world, then there must be a relationship between subjectivity and *logos* in a way that characterizes this dynamic movement of transformation. According to Miki, since human existence, and the society in which it grows and develops, is mediated by speech, society and its constitutive relationships can only exist through the medium of language. As Miki writes: "As long as we live socially, our individual consciousness is buried in words, which are public entities. An individual cannot socially negotiate without expressing his consciousness in words, immersing his subjectivity in words and making it public. Language is the only real consciousness in society."[6]

While everyday experience makes sense of its existence through *logos*, what Miki calls "basic experience" (*kiso keiken* 基礎経験) refers to the more pre-self-conscious or un-interpreted existence of the everyday experience that is independent of the domination of language—in other words, basic experience is thought to be more primal than *logos*.[7] What Miki is theorizing in his Marxist writings here is a dynamic relationship between basic experience and *logos*, where basic experience moves from a pre-theoretical framework to a more self-reflective framework expressive of its relationship with *logos* in order to address the problems, concerns, and demands of social history. In other words, Miki seeks to clarify how subjectivity, through its relationship with *logos*, can move beyond the arena of the everyday experience in a more organic way by discovering its true nature within the historical present without this process becoming authoritarian. Basic experience transforms itself in relation to *logos*, but it needs to be reflected within its own process of self-understanding, or what Miki would describe as

[6] Miki vol. 3, 1978, 56.
[7] Miki vol. 3, 1978, 5.

"anthropological self-understanding," and then realized in an ideological intervention that will guide and transform subjectivity to a different social existence or nature of being. This anti-dogmatic relationship between basic experience and *logos* is an important point, because as Miki sees it, *logos* cannot function as an ahistorical ideal where social change is an act of force, superimposing the ideology of the public sphere onto basic experience. What Miki calls the "proletarian basic experience" (*musansha kiso keiken* 無産者的基礎経験) then is this collective praxis within the modern period that seeks to overcome and transform its own existence within capitalist society through its relationship with *logos*.

Now what we can take from Miki's philosophical work, specifically his discussion of "myths" and his anti-dogmatic approach to "praxis," is this idea that "myths" can fuel praxis in a way that is less coercive or dominating for popular movements. While it is easy to concern ourselves with the more dangerous aspects of "myths" and "populist movements," what Miki teaches us is that there are also aspects to "myths" within populist movements that can be potentially transformative for social existence—for moving subjectivity and society from a place of peril, alienation, and commodification to a place where the needs of the individuals of a society are met. Of course, this is not to say that we can re-assert the category of "populism" by Miki's account of "myth" and "praxis" alone; in fact, Miki's work, especially his discussion on cooperatives, has been criticized for functioning as a thinly veiled attempt to assert Japan's own colonial project. Miki's cooperatives were not only thought to exist within a polity, but across polities as well, where the cultural particulars of East Asia would cooperate in a system under a cultural stewardship of Japan against Western capitalist-imperialist forces. As the critics maintain, the cultural particulars within Miki's scheme are subsumed for the sake of the unity of that totality, with the possibility to obscure the true will of the cultural particulars themselves.

In this sense, Miki's logic of creative imagination can behave not unlike like a quasi-idealism that can potentially smuggle in the violence of a hegemonic power. Such was indeed the case in this reversal of the colonial center throughout the Meiji, Taishō and early Shōwa periods, where the "political myth" of Asian

cosmopolitanism (i.e., this East Asia system of cooperatives) re-oriented itself back to the de facto position of Japan. Now this is where the "political myth" of a "populist" agenda breaks down in Miki's philosophy: namely, it fails to ground its dialectic within the neglected periphery—specifically the place where another round of self-negation is needed to sacrifice its entire scheme for a more inclusive one. In other words, Miki's dialectic itself fails to further develop the anti-reification powers of his teacher's concept, Nishida's concept of absolute contradictory self-identity, as well as his own friend's concept, Tosaka Jun's concept of "the people," that would otherwise ground the transformation within the particulars on the margins who are more directly resisting the ruling powers. If Miki had adopted and developed both concepts, he would have likely expanded his account in ways that prevents any reification from creeping back in, like Japan's position in the world, as well as how subjectivity can open itself more towards the neglected periphery. The key message here is that we need to continuously negate the category of "myths" as we continue to take up the struggles of those on the margins in order to prevent the mythic structure generating populist movements from reifying its own consciousness.[8] What I will examine next is how we can further rectify Miki's work on "myths" and "praxis" by Tosaka's critique of ideology and discussion of the journalistic investigations of the everyday and how such an intervention can further empower the "people on the periphery." The goal here is to convert Miki's "political myth" into a more concrete praxis that is more liberatory for those "outside" of the hegemonic system.

The Source of Power in Critical Reflection

While we can think of Miki's philosophy as more in the realm of a dialectic of social existence, Tosaka Jun's philosophy, on the other hand, is more in the realm of social and cultural criticism, questioning any approach to reality that fails to take up the perspective of those on the ground. Tosaka is more widely known as being

[8] To be sure, Miki's philosophy does express concern for marginalized identities, particularly, the economic dispossessed within Japan itself. In fact, Miki was imprisoned in the 1930s for unwittingly contributing money to the Japanese community party, and then again in 1945, when he sheltered political fugitive Takakura Terutaka—who was also a member of the Japanese community party.

a critic of the Kyoto School in the English-speaking literature, but his philosophical investigations that spans five volumes of work were more than that: that is, he often criticized the various ideologies that repeated themselves throughout Japan's intellectual history, with a particular commitment to unmasking the sort of iterations of idealism that were formulated in Japan during the Meiji period.[9] As opposed to Miki's re-reading of Marx, which is more in the vein of liberal hermeneutics, Tosaka's reading of Marxism accepted the view that the material conditions produced by capitalism engender ideologies that conceal their own engine. On the whole, Tosaka's style of cultural and literary critique exposes the ideological systems operating behind the repressive technologies of state power and imperialist control, which he did when charging the Kyoto School philosophy, particularly Nishida's and Tanabe's philosophy, for its complicity with the nationalist fervor of wartime Japan.

Unlike Miki, however, Tosaka explicitly loathed the ivory tower pretentiousness of philosophical discourse, declaring that philosophical investigations should always take up the concerns of the "proletarian masses" instead of defending the interests of the ruling elite.[10] The real failure of the Kyoto School philosophy, as Tosaka argued, was that its focus on the self-realization among individual identities and its reclamation of Japan's own intellectual heritage were not much more than a bourgeois ideology that implicitly participated in "Japanism" (*nihonshugi* 日本主義).[11] Tosaka was quite critical of Nishida's philosophy, which he described as the "consummation of romanticism"[12] because it could only provide the logical significance to existence itself rather than a critique about the (physical) existence of everyday life.[13] In this sense, Nishida's philosophy, and the Kyoto School philosophy as a whole, can more or less be characterized as

[9] Prooi 2020, 313.
[10] Tosaka vol 4, 1966, 136.
[11] Tosaka vol. 2, 1966, 233–4.
[12] Tosaka vol. 2, 1966, 348.
[13] Tosaka vol. 2, 1966, 347.
The Kyoto School openly rejects idealism, but Tosaka maintains that its thought implicitly affirms it. In fact, Tosaka claims that idealism disguises itself throughout history and that Japanese idealism in particular can be identified on the basis of its metaphysical structure and its hermeneutical method. See Tosaka vol. 2, 1966, 328–40.

an ideological form peculiar to Japanese capitalist culture. That is to say, although Nishida's philosophy may provide a sense of anti-reification powers in the production of thought, it does not go far enough to uncover the Marxist concept of reification expressed as the material practices of daily life.

This is where Tosaka's discussion of the everyday becomes an important asset for a re-assertion of "myth" and "populism." In *Japan as Part of the World* (*sekai no ikkan toshite no nihon*『世界の一環としての日本』), Tosaka begins to advance a method of political resistance grounded from the standpoint of the "people" (*minshū* 民衆), where the "people" themselves represent "the democratic masses that autonomously attempt to defend their daily lives."[14] According to Tosaka here, people exert themselves in the form of political power by standing together with others in the struggle against the ideologies of domination through a process of self-empowerment. To be clear: Tosaka was not advancing a world-wide international solidarity movement that transcends cultural differences, because all cultures must retain their singularity as well as remain translatable to the rest of the world.[15] Rather, Tosaka is more or less asserting, not unlike Miki, a universal-particular relationship that starts from the ground-up—starting from the particulars themselves. In fact, the concept of "culture" plays an important role in political resistance for Tosaka, namely, by functioning as a mirror for critical reflection on moral judgment. Since "culture" is an ever-changing hybrid practice derived from self-reflection rather than a fixed set of beliefs characteristic of a group of people, there is always potential within the everydayness of the "people" to escape the grip of ideological control. Or to put it another way, there is something within the "people" themselves that remains free or resistant to ideological power. But what is this kernel of resistance exactly?

Tosaka argues political resistance must be grounded in everyday life, particularly in the temporality of human action. In "The Principle of Everydayness and Historical Time" (*nichijōsei no genri to rekishiteki jikan*「日常性の原理と歴史的時間」), Tosaka argues for the importance of the everyday present, as the space

[14] Tosaka vol. 5, 1966, 3.
[15] Nakajima 2001, 125.

and time of the everyday are the very matrices in which people live their lives.[16] Opposing both the phenomenological and the scientific conception of time, which represent ideological views of time and space, Tosaka argues that temporality is historically determined, that which becomes divided or periodized resulting from the historical forces of production and material relations, but yet is experientially felt, shaped, and understood in the everyday present.[17] Human bodies are not "thrown" into the "eternal now," as theorized in Nishida's scheme of temporality, because the material practice governing the everyday life generates a perspective of space-time that organizes experience in a more continuous flow from one day to the next.[18] To the contrary: a temporality of the "eternal now" may in fact be experienced, but that is not the everyday experience from the standpoint of the "people" confronting the material forces of capitalist society.

Bear in mind that Tosaka departs from the more objectivist narratives of Marxism by theorizing how time is both perceived by subjectivity as well as how subjectivity itself is inherently furnished with a journalistic mindset necessary for critical reflection. Both of these departures intersect in an important way: that is, they bring to light the field of political resistance. Allow me to explain this point further. Tosaka claims that temporality can appear infinite in consciousness, like how Nishida theorized, but such only demonstrates a misrecognition of the reality of everydayness, because only the leisurely class can enjoy this sort of fiction. Without having to face the demands of the everyday present, the lives of the leisurely class misrecognize how historical and material forces govern the everyday cycles of yesterday, today, and tomorrow.[19] This misrecognition is nonetheless important for Tosaka, because it marks how the space of everydayness represents a site of political contestation and negotiation of temporality. In other words, the political resistance exercised by the people can only be engendered within the everyday present, with reverberating effects on the future. What this suggests is that while the principle of everydayness is in the end limited as a praxis of utopian

[16] Tosaka vol. 3, 1966, 100.
[17] Tosaka vol. 3, 1966, 96–101.
[18] Tosaka vol. 3, 1966, 101.
[19] Tosaka vol. 3, 1966, 101–102.

possibility, as there is no future ideal society that can be ultimately realized, there is nevertheless a kernel of resistance that can generate future possibilities from within the everyday present. But if such future possibilities are confined by actions expressed in the present, then how does resistance in the form of political power even begin to emerge within the "people" of everyday temporality?

Tosaka was both a cultural critic and a journalist for the anti-fascist movement of Japan, who sought to interweave the theory and practice of everyday life into a method of political resistance by positioning the power of intellectual thought within the "people" themselves. Critical thinking is not an elite experience, exclusive to academic life, according to Tosaka, but rather a potentiality for anyone in the everyday present. All people can become critically minded journalists and philosophers in their everyday lives, because the human being itself is equipped with the necessary linguistic and intellectual capabilities to support the creative activities of life. And the central purpose of philosophy and journalistic reflection is to impart this critical reflection upon everyday practices, particularly in the service of empowering the people themselves because the temporality of the present, where human life is ineluctably thrown, places a demand on the people to look at current affairs and common sense with more heightened philosophical scrutiny. Since the goal of philosophical and journalistic thought is criticism, the "people," who are latent intellectuals, must politicize the historical world in a way that destabilizes fascism, liberalism, and other ideologies naturalizing the everyday life under capitalism while forging different political strategies that will lead to the creation of new socio-political conventions. What we can take from Tosaka's discussion on the journalistic investigations of the everyday then is this idea of empowering the "people on the periphery" through converting the people's common sense into critical thinking tools aimed at problematizing the ideological iterations of capitalism.

Now if we bring Miki back into the fold here, we can see how Tosaka's discussion of critical reflection can better serve Miki's category of "myth." As previously mentioned, what Miki ignores is this theme of how "myth" can be used to generate resistance from the standpoint of those on the neglected periphery, from those outside of hegemonic forces. While Miki provides us with a sense of

how *logos* can be logically and existentially realized within the collective itself—that is, without the process of transformation being coercive—in order to create a new social world, what we can learn from Tosaka's discussion here is how journalistic reflection, as an anthropological intervention into ideology, can provide the necessary critical edge to Miki's notion of "myth." The "people on the periphery" can certainly exert a stronger force of political resistance through "myth," but only if the "myth" itself is continuously reflected on as a political *logos* within the everydayness of huma life so that the basic experience of the everyday present realizes its own voice from within. But what needs to be discussed further now is this process of political resistance of those on the periphery, not just in terms of critical reflection, like we did with Tosaka here, but in terms of how the people assert themselves democratically both within their communities as well as across communities. This brings me to my discussion on Enrique Dussel.

The Standpoint of *El Pueblo*

Like Tosaka's account of critical reflection *qua* political resistance, Latin American philosopher Enrique Dussel's theoretical account provides us with a method of resistance to the ideologies of capitalism for those on the neglected periphery, for those at the "exterior," but with a more specific aim of targeting the violence of capitalist modernity. In *veinte tesis de política* Dussel develops a concept of the people (*el pueblo*) as a political category that is made up of a variety of sectors, groups, and classes within the local struggle for self-empowerment. The term itself is rather ambiguous, but it nonetheless seeks to characterize an intersubjective community formed within a political field (*campo político*) "within which the actions, systems, and institutions appropriate to each of these activities are conducted." [20] Dussel holds that *el pueblo* cannot be reduced to mere oppressed classes and groups, and that it must include other social elements such as,

[20] Dussel 2006, 15.

> ethnic groups within their own language, race and religion; tribes; marginal groups which are not even a 'class,' simply because they have not achieved a salaried position within a weak capitalism. Therefore, strictly speaking, 'pueblo' is a *social block* of the oppressed of a nation. From this, firstly, we cannot identify 'pueblo' with a 'nation' or 'people.' When someone says 'the people of India,' we must distinguish between its *populist* meaning (all of the nation) and its *popular* meaning (the social block of the oppressed).[21]

Here, as one can see, Dussel is not conflating *el pueblo* with populism, and yet the category of *el pueblo* refers nonetheless to collective movements, particularly the subaltern or marginalized groups, as a hegemonic force. Therefore, the terms "popular" (popular) and "populista" (populist) must be distinguished in the discussion of *el pueblo*, where the former refers to the social bloc of those on the periphery while the latter refers to the instrumentalization carried out by dominant actors who seek to interpellate the people in order to conquer the majority, and thus, fail to achieve any proper interruption of the history of domination. The concept of *el pueblo*, in this regard, cannot be positioned alongside traditional populist movements because the political actors of these movements are often transmuting the rhetoric of the voiceless into the rhetoric for the dominant classes, and then seeking to suppress the voices of the subaltern.

It is also important to keep in mind that Dussel's *el pueblo* is more inclusive than what its linguistic reference allows for, because it seeks to integrate what is exterior to it, like the language and lifestyle of a social community with a strong sense of one's struggle to live and survive.[22] In other words, *el pueblo* cannot be thought of solely in terms of an economic class of people neither where subjectivity is reduced to Marxist categories and thus stripped of its cultural, political, and historical characteristics.[23] Of course, the dissent of the people grows out from their daily struggles with material reality, but since collective movements bring their cultural histories into the fields of the social, political, and economic, they

[21] Dussel 1986, 27–8.
[22] Dussel 2006, 91.
[23] Dussel 2007, 7.

cannot be fully understood within the discourse of orthodox Marxism. That is, *el pueblo* maintains a sense of plurality without becoming a reified category that can be used towards the consolidation of power, like in the case of populism for instance, where political actors affirm the dominant apparatuses of the state. In fact, Dussel would call this tendency towards political consolidation a "fetishism of power" (*fetichismo de poder*), which is the exercising of pure force. Such a fetish of power corrupts or destroys the origins of power at their source, amounting to a complete destruction of the political itself.[24] In this sense, *el pueblo* cannot be read in a Machiavellian or Hobbesian way, because it is more of an articulation of political power of those outside of the dominant systems of power that has both positive and negative features, where its positive features explain how such collective movements on the periphery undergo this goal of democratic transformation without it becoming a process that is top-down.[25]

According to Dussel, there is a positive characteristic of power, which is expressed as the capacity of the "will-to-live" (*voluntad-de-vida*) within human life. This will-to-live is what drives humans to avoid death and maintain life, particularly by moving, promoting, or restraining the people in their pursuit of material survival. Dussel furthers that political power characterizes the concept of *el pueblo* in the sense that it is expressed as that which fulfills the means for survival—this will-to-live. In other words, power is what already belongs or emanates from the members of the community in their determination to organize and promote the production and reproduction of life. Since there is no isolated subject or existence within *el pueblo*, the combined will of each member of the community creates a political force that can shape their own livelihoods. Combining strength within the common will-to-live and struggle for survival is what Dussel calls the "power-as-potential" (*potencia*), which is the capacity or faculty inherent in *el pueblo* to determine their own sovereignty, authority, and governability.[26] Implied here is this idea that the common will-to-live derives from the practical discursive function of reason where the will of the community seeks to develop a common good that best represents

[24] Dussel 2006, 13–14.
[25] Dussel 2006, 23.
[26] Dussel 2006, 24–7.

their interests—which is the essence of "political power" for Dussel. That is to say, "power-as-potential" constitutes the foundation of all that is political because political power among *el pueblo* can only arise through consensus and communication among the participants; therefore, power is not something that can be taken away, even if the community has been weakened or subjugated, because it is always held by the people themselves.[27]

What Dussel calls power as *potestas*, which is the "power outside-itself" (but not in-itself), functions as the starting point for *el pueblo* because it represents the foundation of all political power by virtue of *potencia* (power-as-potential) needing to unfold itself in the form of power outside of itself; but since *potestas* signifies the political strength of the community as well as future possibility, it has no objective, empirical coordinates, and therefore must unfold in a way that meets the diversity of desires and needs of the community. For Dussel, proper political action is not coercive or violent in nature because that would remove this foundation fueling political power; rather, the strategy of political action must be legitimized consensually and can only remain as a temporary historical bloc (and can be dissolved from a loss of consensus).[28] What is more important for Dussel is that political action democratically aspires toward the advancement of the *el pueblo* in the political field by forging a legitimate consensus without destroying their will-to-live and survive.

But how does Dussel here improve Tosaka's and Miki's philosophy in a way that asserts a new form of populism and myth without recuperating the old baggage around these categories? Dussel himself does not deny the value of myths, as they are viewed as valuable for generating coalitions among victims working to transform dominant structures and institutions. Both Tosaka and Dussel provide us with insightful accounts of how to promote democratic possibilities through local, everyday action from the standpoint of the subaltern, but there is an important difference here: Tosaka refuses to sketch any broader picture of an ideal future society, with the goal limited to only disrupting ideologically motivated social conventions through journalistic critical reflection, while Dussel on the other hand,

[27] Dussel 2006, 26–8.
[28] Dussel 2006, 49–54.

provides us with a sense of what we need to grope for—that is, to move towards what he calls a "transmodern pluriversalism" (*pluri-versalismo transmoderno*) where knowledge production is decentralized and pluralistic in a way that moves the subjects from a state of dependency and towards a state of empowerment and independence.[29] This is not to say that Dussel's philosophy is without theoretical errors or criticisms, however. One criticism launched against Dussel's concept of *el pueblo* has been that it has the potential to fall into a "metaphysical trap," where it can move from an empirical reference to a normative or rhetorical ideal because it does not bake into its viewpoint an anti-reification principle.[30] If (and/or when) such occurs, the differences in which the various political actors are embedded, for whom the concept of liberation and oppression may even differ, can easily be lost. What is worse is the rhetorization of *el pueblo* if it were to move toward thinking of people as quasi-subjects with the potential to fit the dreams of an idealized *el pueblo* itself. What we would see is a political reversal: the victims becoming the victimizers in a new set of political relations.

Perhaps this is where Tosaka's account of the "people" can be a resource for further improving Dussel's concept of *el pueblo*, because Tosaka's work offers a view of negativity that is grounded more in the process of critical and philosophical reflection within the people themselves. What Tosaka offers is a political strategy of intellectual criticism articulated from the peripheral masses that works to uncover the non-democratic forms and movements emerging from within a society, because the "people" as embodying journalistic existence and critical reflection are more apt to continuously negate ideologues and demagoguery from within their own movements. By tying critical reflection to the very ground of human activity, Tosaka's view of the people can be read as a critique of any form of idealism (or quasi-idealism) that assumes the need for a vanguard or set of party leaders to enlighten and guide the way in order to bring forth a particularized socio-political

[29] The vision of a "transmodern pluriversalism" promotes an inter-cultural/inter-philosophical dialogue through an "epistemological struggle" in the fight for empowering the voices on the political margins. The idea is that such a dialogue can only be truly pluralistic if it can move "beyond" (the modernity of) European and North American culture and categories as well as the "learned experts" of the academic world and thereby be grounded in local cultures and struggles.
[30] For such a criticism, see Stehn 2011, 13 and 16.

future—a point that fits well with Miki's own anti-dogmatic approach to Marx as well. Such is not a negation of *el pueblo* as a promising political category, but rather to position *el pueblo* within a dual space of political resistance from both sides of the aisle—that is, to continuously resist the ideologies of the ruling class as well as *el pueblo*'s own tendencies toward a fetishization of power.

If we bring the Miki-Tosaka discussion into this thread here, then we can see how "myths," when generated from within *el pueblo*, can be a critical tool for motivating the members of a community to transform themselves and the social world as well as to build alliances across groups, classes, and subaltern identities in the service of meeting the needs of those at the exterior. Of course, as we learned from Miki, the method or process of intervention must remain non-dogmatic if the transformation is to be genuine and organic, but what we learn from Dussel is this need to transform dominant structures and institutions more in the direction of a transmodern pluriverse where we work to move the victims on the periphery into a position of knowledge-production and self-empowerment. If *el pueblo* maintains their journalistic posture in their will-to-live, as theorized by Tosaka, then resistance remains potent enough to the tune of negating any tendency towards the consolidation of power. But what about *el pueblo* negating their own position, if needed?

Conclusion: Asserting Populism from the Standpoint of *El Pueblo*

The principal title of this essay is "populism is not populism; therefore, it is populism," which is my attempt to quietly assert the logic of the Diamon Sutra: A is not A, therefore, it is A. The idea that I want to introduce with this is that *el pueblo*, as the new category for framing populism I am seeking to advance, must be willing to even let go of itself if it wishes to remain a proper form of popular resistance. That is, political power, expressed in positive form, can be turned in on itself, turning the victim into a victimizer, if it is not vigilant of its own self-dangers. Therefore, an anti-reification principle built within *el pueblo* is needed to truly assert its own "myth" across communities and subaltern identities non-dogmatically—to cathect transformation in a more organic or natural way that represents the "will-to-live" of *el pueblo*. In other words, asserting populism

through a negation of populism is the starting point for advancing "myths" from the journalistic standpoint of the subaltern. This is one of the strengths of advancing negativity, or self-negation, within an approach to populism.

But political power, in the form of pure negativity on the other hand, often times offers quite little in terms of asserting anything other than negating what is presently dominating as well. This is why the non-dualistic logic of the Kyoto School, at the end of the day, would fall into the emancipatory trap of modernity—namely, by sneaking in its own universal of overcoming modernity within its particularized assertion.[31] By reclaiming the category of populism through the theoretical lens of *el pueblo*, we have a much clearer understanding of where to move from—particularly, from the position on the neglected periphery—as well as the procedures and methods it takes to affirm political resistance. What is external to the systems of power is important here, because what many traditional populist movements fail to include are precisely those minority groups and identities that fall outside of mainstream politics. Without a category of populism reframed as *el pueblo*, then the options are either to jettison the category of populism altogether or re-interpret the current category to fit the current paradigm of thought. I opt for the third option: re-paradigm the category of populism by asserting populism through a negation of populism from the standpoint of *el pueblo*.

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[31] Kojin Karatani criticized the Kyoto School's non-dualistic scheme as a position that amounts to a "zero-point" standpoint, that which allows the de facto institutions of power to re-assert themselves. See Karatani 2012, 184–185.

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