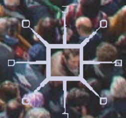
PODEMOS AND THE NEW POLITICAL CYCLE

LEFT-WING POPULISM AND ANTI-ESTABLISHMENT POLITICS

EDITED BY ÓSCAR GARCÍA AGUSTÍN AND MARCO BRIZIARELLI



Podemos and the New Political Cycle

Óscar García Agustín • Marco Briziarelli
Editors

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Left-Wing Populism and Anti-Establishment Politics

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PART I

Introduction

CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Wind of Change: Podemos, Its Dreams and Its Politics

Óscar García Agustín and Marco Briziarelli

On January 22, 2015, Podemos leader Pablo Iglesias joined the Greek candidate Alexis Tsipras on stage in Athens and talked at the rally of the Coalition of the Radical Left (Syriza). Other Leftish European leaders were also in attendance, including Cayo Lara, the general secretary of the Spanish party United Left (UL). However, the attention was focused on the two young leaders, both around thirty-five to forty years old, dressed in casual clothes, cheering the forthcoming victory of Syriza and possibly the next step to turn European politics to the Left. Both grew up politically during the Global Justice Movement in the 2000s, and represented at that moment a new generation of Left politicians. In fact, while the economic crisis had not led to a stronger presence of the radical Left on the political stage, the prominence acquired by Iglesias made his presence particularly significant, as he was representing a party that had been founded barely a year earlier.

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The days prior to the rally, Pablo Iglesias had carefully pondered the relevance of Syriza's triumph: it would have proven that governments could not rule for their people while being controlled by other economic and political interests, alien to national ones, which, in the European case, was incarnated by the German Chancellor Angela Merkel. Developing the dichotomization between democracy as people's power and neoliberalism representing imposed economic and political interests, a group of well-known Left-wing intellectuals—Étienne Balibar, Susan George, and Francis Wurt—considered the possibilities opened by Syriza's victory and how it could affect other European progressive governments or parties in their fight against austerity, particularly in the defense of a new Europe as an alternative against nationalism and radical Right populism.

This sense of the possibility of change was captured by Pablo Iglesias in his speech at Syriza's rally. Before his brief intervention, the multitude chanted "Venceremos [We will win], Syriza, Podemos." Iglesias, in Greek, said: "The wind of change is blowing in Europe. In Greece it is called Syriza; in Spain, it is called Podemos." Such a message of another Europe, "united in diversity," pointed to a new wave of political change, and possibly a new political cycle, in which reinforced "radical" Left parties and renewed social democratic parties would be capable of concluding the era of austerity and the (non-)ideological coexistence of conservative-liberals and social democrats in their fight to occupy the political center. Finally, greeting the Greek Syriza supporters, Tsipras and Iglesias embraced each other and captured the image of that possibility of change. Two projects with different backgrounds and, thus far, different results: Syriza, on the one hand, a party in government, started as a renewed radical Left coalition, which was built up while the social democratic Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) was free-falling; Podemos, on the other hand, grounded in the massive social mobilizations in Spain called 15M (May 15, 2011), developed a process of organizational and ideological definition in an attempt to forge a way of doing politics differently compared to the dominant parties of the establishment.

Back in Madrid, Pablo Iglesias talked to 100,000 Podemos sympathizers gathered in the Puerta del Sol on the occasion of the so-called "Marcha por el Cambio" (Rally for Change), whose goal was to celebrate the "joy of being together" and the possibility of political change in Spain. Iglesias emphasized the first measures taken by the new Greek government as an example of new politics. Most importantly, he used his speech to connect the different social struggles and movements opposed to the dominant

powers, which culminated with the massive 15M demonstrations. The emphasis on popular power as a real political alternative was articulated in the statement: "It is necessary to dream. But we dream, taking our dream very seriously." For Podemos that meant taking up the challenge of developing a new political project, whose final goal was to gain governmental power, combining "the dreams" of social and popular power; as well as "taking the dreams seriously," that is, ensuring the construction of a political party capable of playing the political game without putting people's dreams aside.

In order for such a new political cycle to materialize, it must be receptive and reflective with regard to several key issues. Accordingly, in the following sections we examine some of those issues, which also allows us to review key themes of this volume. Accordingly, in the first section we review Podemos' genealogy and its current development in relation to the social historical context of Spain. In the second section, we broaden the reflection to a larger geopolitical scenario with particular reference to Syriza, by reflecting on the tension between the "moment of madness" and the moment of "institutionalization" of a given political initiative. By that, we refer to the potential and constraints of the cycle of social protests applied to the political cycle, and the kind of synergies and contradictions emerging from the development of Podemos as a party–movement, that is, between the appeal to emerging social forces and the limitations imposed by the institutional framework. Third, we consider the necessity of (re)thinking the Left in the context of austerity and as a political project beyond political categories such as "social democracy." Finally, we believe it is important to contextualize Podemos in the particular intersection between theoretical debates and political praxis that gravitates around competing understandings of the concept of hegemony, populism, and the social laboratory provided by the Latin American experience.

1.1 Podemos' Genealogy: The Social and Political Definition of a Project

By the end of 2013, the enthusiasm and the social and political energies that put under siege the so-called Regime of '78—the political order that transitioned from the end of Franco's dictatorship to Spain's Second Republic and the consequent approval of its Constitution—seemed to be experiencing a dangerous *impasse*. Such a stall made increasingly more manifest the contradictory productivity of crises deriving from the ten-

sions between socially productive and socially conservative/reproductive predispositions: on the one hand, the segments more affected by the crisis could produce organized responses that in turn could potentially bring about significantly new configurations of the social and the political; on the other, a failed progressive attempt could cause a reactionary response by the ruling group, which would lead to *new configurations of the old*, in other words, a passive revolution in a Gramscian sense.

In this sense, when Podemos was launched in early January 2014, many saw in it that needed and awaited strong political initiative to conjure substantial political change and prevent the ruling forces of the country from reorganizing. It was not by accident that Podemos entered the political arena with a rhetoric marked by the necessity of conveying a twofold program: simultaneously marked by common sense and "dream." Common sense was considered a *practical consciousness* that demanded a renegotiation of the social pact between the people and the institutions in the name of social solidarity, social justice, the defense of the decommodifying functions of the welfare state (i.e. redistributing wealth, offering public services), a more democratized and transparent political system, and, last but not the least, a genuine involvement of the people in the political process. At the same time, the organization was also propelled by the power of "dreaming" a *potential consciousness*, a genuinely new "good sense" driven by sociological imagination and the determination to go beyond the rhetoric of inevitability of neoliberalism.

Such a dual consciousness possibly reflects the compound nature of Podemos (and the transition that, later on, we describe from the 'moment of madness' to the 'moment of institutionalization'): a pragmatic element that tries to boldly answer the question of power for the Left and is prone to "elevate" the struggle to the institutional level of political society; and a more movement-oriented element prone to operate at the level of civil society, the combination of political and civil society that, for Gramsci, defines the so-called "integral state." There is indeed a dialectical and constructive tension between the two, which can be in part explained by Podemos' particular genealogy. As a matter of fact, Podemos emerged from the convergence of 15M militancy, from the Trotskyist organization Izquierda Anticapitalista, which was composed from parts of the fragmented political party Izquierda Unida and a group of Political Science professors at the Universidad Complutense in Madrid, such as Juan Carlos Monedero, Pablo Iglesias, and Íñigo Errejón, who drew important lessons from the Latin American experiences known as the Pink Tide govern-

ments, and intended to translate those populist responses into pressure against neoliberal globalization in the European context.

After its initial presentation, in March 2014, Podemos constituted itself as a political party, with the goal of catalyzing the mixed and productive emotions stirred up in previous years into a political project. The chosen name, Podemos (We can), signals a willingness to capitalize on the sense of popular empowerment emerging from virtual and physical *plazas* as a way to promote action in the Spanish parliamentary system. The party also reached its audience through careful and intensive use of media. In fact, another particularity of Podemos consisted in that while the typical Leftist movement had been traditionally skeptical of mediated political communication, Podemos took advantage of one of its media savvy founders, Pablo Iglesias, and his usage of TV, to broadcast political information and trigger discussion through TV programs and social media campaigns.

After an initial very positive electoral endorsement, Podemos has been dealing with the never-ending campaign that started in fall 2015 and still goes on as we write this introduction. During the December 2015 national election, Podemos gained 20% of the vote, triumphing over the socialist party in several key regions. At the municipal level, Podemos led joint candidacies—with citizen platforms that allowed it to win municipal elections in the country's biggest cities, Madrid, Barcelona, and Valencia. Then,after the partial disappointment of the joint venture with Izquierda Unida in June 26, 2016, Podemos is currently transitioning toward what Iglesias, drawing on Gramsci, defined as "trench warfare." That is a position aimed at consolidating parliamentary representation, but also at providing a stable organization for the party, and an equally consistent involvement of local *círculos* in the decision-making. The succesive internal contestation against Iglesias has led to the emergence of an opposition wing around the figure of Íñigo Errejón, cofounder and close friend of Iglesias, responsible for translating Laclau's theory into the discourse and strategy of Podemos. It is likely that the tensions—ideological, strategic, territorial, or personal—will continue in the coming years.

As we write this introductory chapter, the window of opportunity created by the crisis of Regime of '78 is not necessarily closing, but its navigation has certainly become more complex and presents important challenges for Podemos. First of all, the sense of emergency triggered by the economic and legitimation crisis is being currently dispersed by the emergent rhetoric of an economic recovery and return to normalization. Despite the fact that most of the population have not enjoyed the alleged recovery—as

unemployment still approaches 20% and the few employed experience salary contractions, erosion of their working rights, and a permanent condition of precarity, thus contradicting any sense of recuperation —Podemos must still decide whether it wants to keep tying itself to a narrative of contingent urgency and a progressive kind of reactionarism triggered by the crisis, or instead promote itself as a long-term project of social change.

Second, Podemos has to deal with its strategic alliances both in the national and international contexts. For instance, Podemos' position with regard to the Catalan independentist project presents an ideological dilemma that can potentially problematize its ideal of Left transversality. Third, as we will mention later on when analyzing in more detail the discursive approach to hegemony, Podemos needs to disambiguate even further its discourse about 'new politics' from that of other emergent parties, such as Ciudadanos. Equally important, in a turbulent context of self-reflection for the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE), Podemos will probably be obliged to define its relation with the party either in antagonistic or agonist terms, as Mouffe would put it. Finally, Podemos has yet to define its relation to labor, by taking a clear stance in relation to workers, who have become increasingly skeptical of political mobilization and, in turn, of trade union organizations such as the General Workers' Union of Spain (UGT) and Workers' Commissions (CCOO). In fact, in the last few decades, they have played a marginal role in Spanish politics and have taken a "soft" position against the neoliberal government ruled by the Popular Party (PP). In this sense, the fundamental question of whether Podemos can embrace concrete labor and class issues without compromising its middle-class-centered transversalism remains unanswered.

Summing up, it is unclear whether or not Podemos aspires to renew social democracy or if the introduction of new components (e.g. populism, transversality) is sufficient to renew the Left, specifically overcoming the marginality into which the radical Left has traditionally been pushed. The conceptualization of Podemos as a winner, in a similar way to Syriza in Greece, entails a new way of thinking about progressive politics: that it can play a major role in office and is not limited to supporting or influencing a government led by the social democratic party. Not without contradiction, Podemos assumes gaining an electoral majority is necessary to make that step possible. In the next section, we make sense of this ambiguity by framing it in the internal tension of the political cycle between two distinct moments: madness and institutionalization.

1.2 The Political Cycle: Moments of Madness and Institutionalization

Reflecting on the post-crisis challenges for the Left, Luke March (2013) used the words of Francis Fukuyama about the absence of a "Tea Party of the Left," which could put grassroots representatives in establishment positions. Both during the Global Justice Movement in the 2000s and, more recently, after 2011 with the Occupy and 15M Movements, Leftist parties, or what March calls "radical Left parties," have faced serious difficulties in strengthening links to social movements, and have revealed their incapacity to be embedded in politics from below. However, recent events make us reconsider such possibilities as we witness a stronger convergence through different modalities: the reinforcement of radical Left parties, such as Syriza, winning the general elections twice in Greece; the establishment of a Left Bloc becoming part of the coalition government in Portugal; the emergence of new parties capitalizing on strong social movements, such as Podemos in Spain or Initiative for Democratic Socialism in Slovenia; the formation of movement forms of participation within mainstream parties, like the case of OccupyPD within the Democratic Party in Italy and Momentum within the Labour Party in UK. In this context it is convenient to explore the connection between the cycle of protest initiated in 2011 and the possibilities of a new political cycle.

In his development of the concept of "cycle of protest," Sidney Tarrow (1993) refers to the idea of "moments of madness," formulated originally by Aristide Zolberg, as the moments when "all is possible" (1993: 281). Despite their later evolution and the risk of provoking disappointment (because of not meeting their expectations), such moments are necessary for the political transformations of societies and for new actors to challenge existing political constraints. Tarrow identifies these moments with the beginning of the protest cycle, when collective action starts to be shaped. Besides, the explosion of creativity contrasts with the slow historic development of the repertoire of contention. In this sense, the moments of madness are "tempered into the permanent tools of a society's repertoire of contention" (1993: 284), since they contribute to the evolution of that repertoire of contestation rather than transform it immediately.

The cycle of protest from 2011 onwards, particularly in Southern Europe, emerged in the context of the 2007–2008 economic crisis, which was characterized by a global systemic downturn, debt, and austerity

policies (Vivas 2013). As in every protest cycle, a window of political opportunity is opened. When some mobilizations put the focus on the need for more "democracy" and questioned the role played by political parties and the economic system, they revealed a major problem to be the crisis of representativeness. This frontal opposition against institutions makes it difficult to think of political opportunities that could strengthen the links between the party system and social movements. On the other hand, the openness provoked by the "moment of madness," despite the unclearness on how to gain institutional influence, paves the possibility for more radical social and political change.

Thus, the appearance and renewal of Left political parties can be interpreted within the context of evolution of the cycle of protest and how, in turn, it intertwines with the political cycle. The double crisis, in terms of economic and political systems, is contested at the political level as Left parties try to redefine their projects and ideologies by striving to connect more firmly with social movements and approach grassroots politics. Therefore, mobilizations developed in multiple directions and the receptiveness of political parties incorporated part of the dynamics, demands, and possibilities previously undertaken by social movements during the protest cycle. We understand this evolution as a shift from the "moment of madness" to a "moment of institutionalization." In this case, institutionalization does not necessarily mean the only possible way of resolving the moment of madness, since it is also being developed during the cycle protest, but rather its incorporation into the institutional political realm. Furthermore, institutionalization goes beyond becoming part of institutions, as it implies the questioning and transformation of existing institutions, or even the creation of new ones, applying some of the social creativity of the moment of madness to reform political parties constrained by existing norms and rules. Donatella Della Porta (2015), looking at this moment as 'windows of political opportunity,' emphasizes the emergence of party–movements when the protest cycle is declining, arising from those mobilizations and aiming to create new modes of doing politics.

Understood through this framework, Podemos could be considered as a party–movement navigating the transition from a moment of madness to one of institutionalization: rooted in the activities of the 15M Movement in 2011; made up of a remarkable number of activists who participated in the demonstrations; and experimenting with new modes of doing politics. While it would be wrong to identify Podemos simplistically with the 15M, there is a clear connection between the two. Podemos' leader Íñigo

Errejón, for instance, attributes to the 15M the transformation of 'common sense,' which contributed to opening a window of opportunity that later would be used by Podemos. Moreover, based on its demand for real democracy, the 15M was interpreted by the Podemos leaders as a political space for creating convergences between a diversity of identities, which were not necessarily strongly ideologically based in the distinction between the political Left and Right.

Therefore, the moment of institutionalization can be characterized by the development of new ways of doing politics, rooted in social protests and their demands, and the opening of a new political scenario, and consequently of political identities. However, this moment is not without contradictions. The tendency toward a centralized way of organizing, fostered by their leadership as a new electoral strategy after the European elections in 2014, has come up against internal resistance from those who aspired to constitute a party–movement linked to social movements and their ways of organizing. Despite such tension, Podemos chose to become an 'electoral war machine' since the window of political opportunity was mostly understood as a possibility of getting access and greater influence within the institutional realm, rather than redefining ways of doing politics learning from social mobilizations.

Only after two dizzy electoral years (two general elections, besides the European, municipal, and regional ones), when the "electoral war machine" strategy was considered over, did Podemos start to rethink its strategy. Indeed, Pablo Iglesias announced after the general elections of June 26, 2016, that the so-called 'Podemos hypothesis' had passed. He argued that while the blitz represented by the frontal war endured by Podemos during its first two years led the party to its electoral results, Podemos had now moved to 'war of position' or t'renched warfare' (Gramsci 1971) whose objective would be to forge a 'historic bloc'. The reconfiguration of the Parliament, that is the consolidation of Podemos as the third largest party and exhaustion of the traditional two-center-party system, represents for Pablo Iglesias the end of a political cycle and, consequently, the beginning of a new one. Although the meaning of such a new cycle is not specified by the members of Podemos, it is clear that it entails expanding the representativeness of the Spanish Parliament, opening up to social groups who felt excluded from or simply disenchanted by the two-party system, and attempting to do politics in a different way; meaning that more participatory politics or politics sensible to social demands are still to be tried within the parliamentary system.

So far, Podemos seems to perceive its official entrance into institutional politics as an opposition party, as a new phase of undetermined implications. When Podemos, on May 31, 2015, promoted a massive rally in Madrid with the only goal of celebrating the forthcoming political change (called "March for Change"), Iglesias referred to the moment as the beginning of a new political cycle. That was an interesting moment in which the 'electoral war machine,' centralized and aiming to gain institutional power, coexisted with the attempt to push forward political change from the streets and mobilizations. Therefore, the moment of institutionalization showed its direct link with the moment of madness and the need for politically developing social creativity and putting new and old forms of contention into dialogue.

The moment of madness is sublated rather than erased by the moment of institutionalization, and the new political cycle, converging symbolically the protests on the streets with the arrival into institutional politics, could evolve in different directions. First, it will be relevant to explore how the links with social struggles can be strengthened and how new ways of political organization can be implemented. After a first moment of imposition of a vertical and centralized organization (not without internal contestation), the possibility of incorporating more horizontal forms of participation still remains open. In our opinion, there is a need for maintaining openness around the organizational form in order to hinder full closure of the moment of institutionalization, which reflects the social creativity and innovation already initiated during the moment of madness. Second, it will be necessary to consider how the transition from the moment of madness to the moment of institutionalization will affect parliamentary politics and, particularly, the position of Podemos, and how such changes can also be applied to other new political parties (or ones under the process of redefinition) who will influence the space of the political Left, both the radical Left and social democracy.

1.3 Continuities and Ruptures of Podemos' Political Field

The experience of Podemos demonstrates how political theory and political praxis inform each other in indissoluble ways. In fact, the ongoing cycle of mobilization exemplified by initiatives such as Podemos—in addition to Syriza and MoVimento 5 Stelle (M5S)—has revived interest in critical literature inquiring about the conditions that allow progressive popular initiatives to emerge and challenge the *status quo*. Thus, the

political practices of Podemos significantly resonate with current theoretical debates on concepts such as hegemony and post-politics. At the same time, if history informs theory, it is also true that the current trend of political activism could not have been possible without the development of theoretical reflections and historical comparative studies on the political process. In this sense, an important goal of this edited volume is to use Podemos as a lens through which we critically examine broad issues such as competing understandings of political notions, and their practical feasibility in evolving historical scenarios.

In the specific case of Podemos, the intricacy between ideas and action seem to consistently gravitate around narratives of historical transition tied to the prefix "post," such as post-regime 1978, or post-hegemony, post-ideology, and post-politics. In all these dictions, "post" defines both the general historical context and the historical subject operating within it. Thus, on the one hand, it describes the present as being concurrently a rupture and continuity with the past. On the other, it describes Podemos' self-understanding and its capability to read and navigate highly fluid and contradictory circumstances.

For the intellectual founders of the group, Iglesias, Errejón, and Monedero, the notion of hegemony plays a key role in producing a diagnosis of the situation as well as indicating an answer to Lenin's question: What is to be done? They work with an understanding of the concept that draws both from Gramsci and posterior interpreters such as Laclau and Mouffe. On the one hand, Podemos seems to have internalized several Gramscian lessons on hegemony: the combination of the two political realms of political and civil society into the so-called "integral state"; the idea of politicizing the masses into a national popular movement; and, finally, the expansion of the struggle on multiple fronts, such as political, economic, cultural, and social. On the other hand, Podemos has also incorporated Laclau and Mouffe's post-Gramscian insights by disputing the primacy of class and orthodox Marxist political-economics; by defining hegemony as contingent, unstable, and rhetorically constructed; and finally, as we have seen, by proposing a transversalist vision that utilizes 'empty signifiers' working as synecdoche metaphors, which aggregate different identities into a common construct, the people.

Both Gramscian and Laclaunian/Mouffian perspectives regard crises as volatile but important occasions to challenge the existing hegemony. However, while for the former, still working within the boundaries of historical materialist categories, the opportunity lies in the capability to

gradually lead the mobilization from the primary field of the politico-economic to the ethical-political one, for the latter the terrain of confrontation takes place in the quasi-autonomous field of discourse. In fact, the Laclaunian/Mouffian position implies a vision of the struggle that has shifted the terrain of confrontation from relations of productions to the sphere of signification and rhetorical performance, according to which, in an occasion of representation crisis, the hegemonic structure loses meaning and consistency. Then, fissures appear in the form of empty signifiers, which remain temporarily available for alternative political subjects to be resignified.

Discursive hegemony assumes that social relations are inherently unstable and that meanings are relational and historically contingent. Such an understanding not only represents an ontology of the social and political that has given up fundamental tenets of traditional historical materialism, but also assumes that the recent history has witnessed profound transformations of national and supranational institutions, which has reallocated power among a variety of new subjects such as states, social movements, regional markets, transitional corporations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and international governance actors. In this highly mutated scenario, Podemos saw in the Latin American experience of Chávez in Venezuela, Correa in Ecuador, Kirchner in Argentina, and Morales in Bolivia an important repertoire of ideas and concrete political strategies that could be exported to the Spanish context, such as a new kind of Left-wing populism and a decisive embrace of mediated political communication strategies.

In this sense, Podemos' discursive hegemony cannot be completely understood without reference to its intensive use of media, because the construction of a people means also constructing a rhetorical audience and a community that share new kinds of linguistic practices. From this point of view, the so-called 'La Tuerka hypothesis' epitomizes those reflections. Originating from an intuition by Iglesias that most Spanish political discourse develops through audio-visual media, this posited that Podemos could reach and build its audience/constituency through TV programs such as *La Tuerka* and *Fort Apache*. Such a hypothesis draws from both Latin American extensively tested strategies and the Gramscian assumption that the media is one of the most powerful hegemonic apparatus. These programs function as particular kind of *tertulia politica* (political talk show) that gives an emerging group the opportunity to embrace the contradictions of the political field; that is, to dialectically confront both

internal tensions and opposing political forces. Therefore, Podemos' objective in using *La Tuerka* and *Fort Apache* has not simply been to voice points of view traditionally excluded from the public sphere, but also to allow its critical impetus to move from marginality to centrality by constructing aggregative discourses through persuasive, emotional, and rhetorically spectacular ways.

Podemos' vision about the possibility of using aggregative discourses to produce a collective will and an alternative hegemony also relies on a distinctive conceptualization of populism. Fighting the derogatory connotations coming from both classical liberal theory and classical Marxist theory, Iglesias, Errejón, and Monedero drew on Laclau's conceptualization of populism as a process of constructing the political field through binary oppositions such as *el pueblo* vs. *la casta*, 'us' vs. 'them' or 'moral integrity' vs. 'corruption'. Against classic liberal discourse that assumes that 'people' is an already existing entity and the Marxist fragmentation of the unity of people into classes, Laclau's populism envisions it as a constant, contradictory, and unstable process of constructing and reconstructing an articulated unity through discourse. In the case of Podemos, this construction has implied the constitution of the widest possible popular base and the mobilization of people through meaningful images, empty signifiers, and psychological investment that draw on Lacan's theory of *jouissance*. In fact, signifiers such as *la casta*, *el pueblo*, or even Iglesias as a charismatic leader, are capable of interpellating people as well as establishing a potential chain of equivalence between different social groups, circumstances, identities, and interests.

Thus, while, for instance, Negri's concept of multitude considers those fragmented social subjects as irreducible singularities, for Podemos, populism represents a way to create a collective will that unifies identities and reconstitutes the political field through dichotomizing narratives and psychological investment of militancy. Accordingly, Podemos is founded on the productive tension between the 'equivalence' and 'difference'of struggles. In fact, together with Laclau's idea of forcing the political field in binary opposition, Podemos also seems receptive of Mouffe's understanding of politics as both agonism and antagonism.

The redefinition of the political by Podemos also seems to draw from what Humphrys and Tietze (2015)define as "anti-political politics," which follows the early Marxian (and Autonomist Marxism) distinction between politics as activity that gravitates around the state and institutions, and politics as social struggle. Accordingly, anti-politics implies rejecting the

political representation for a direct and active fight for the interests of the subaltern class. In the case of Podemos, the compound nature of the organization, that is, being both party and movement, means it embraces anti-politics in interesting ways. On the one hand, strategically Podemos utilizes the ongoing legitimation crisis to problematize representative politics; to criticize professional politicians; and in support of transparency, accountability, more popular deliberation, and even the bypass of union bureaucratic organizations. On the other hand, tactically Podemos has turned into a vertically integrated party that aims at seizing power at the level of institutional politics. Errejón (2014) seems to confirm this vision of partial rupture with the traditional Left in his *Le Monde diplomatique* essay "What is Podemos?" by claiming that Podemos represents a project that boldly deals with three main taboos of the Left: the idea that a given political project had to start as movement and only then gets into institutional politics; the issue of charismatic leadership; and the adoption of political categories such as Left and Right or class analysis.

1.4 The Left Beyond Social Democracy

The electoral victory of Syriza in Greece presented several elements of interest about the redefinition of the political Left and, more specifically, Podemos. On the one hand, it connects from the beginning with the mobilizations against austerity and claims for more democracy; on the other, its electoral growth is produced together with the decreasing results of the social democratic PASOK. As shown by Yannis Stavrakakis and Giorgos Katsambekis (2014), this can be explained by the declining hegemony of PASOK and its shift in the 1990s, in line with other social democratic parties, from "populism to modernization." In other words, from social democracy to social liberalism; and by the construction by Syriza of a larger discourse addressing "the people" as a political subject. Syriza's objective consisted of convincing those who traditionally voted PASOK to believe in its capacity to defend Leftish policies and, not less important, of avoiding the traditional division within the radical Left which impeded obtaining better electoral results.

If we look at how the appearance of new parties or the renewal of older ones have influenced the political room of the Left, and the move to a political realignment, there are two points that can be learned from Syriza's experience and applied to other contexts: the relationship with social democracy and the redefinition of the radical Left. The two phenomena

cannot be dissociated. The aspiration of reaching a majority led by Syriza implies reworking again the identity of the radical Left (its anti-capitalist program) and its role as autonomous generator of polices or as corrector of the "Left deficit" of the social democratic parties. Social democracy has clearly abandoned space to its Left, which can be appropriated by the radical Left parties. Nevertheless, this works better in cases of strong social democratic crisis, like the PASOK in Greece. In most countries, social democratic parties are still the pivotal center-Left parties for the system and most of the radical Left parties are still far away from becoming majoritarian parties replacing the social democratic ones. Indeed, one of the paradoxes is that the radical Right parties have improved their electoral results and presence in the parliaments after the economic crisis more than the radical Left. Besides the contexts, it is relevant to look more closely at the occasions where the radical Left parties are challenging the social democratic hegemony of the Left, and to consider how it is affecting the identity, program, and relationship between all the center-Left and Left parties.

This dynamic has become manifest since the foundation of Podemos. When, quite surprisingly, Podemos obtained 1.2 million votes and five MEPs in the European Parliament elections in 2014, the first reaction of Pablo Iglesias was even more unpredicted, when he stated that: "Podemos was not founded to play a testimonial role; it was born to go for it and we are going for it." The willingness to win and become a majoritarian party seemed to be confirmed by the increasing results offered by the polls, including some placing Podemos as the most voted party in the beginning of 2015. The aspiration to become a majoritarian party implies a redefinition of the political space of the Left, particularly in relation with the center-Left, the social democratic PSOE, and the radical Left, IU, a former Communist Party.

The emergence of Podemos, particularly in its first moment, has broken the traditional division attributed to social democratic and radical Left parties: the former destined to deliver reasonable and plausible Left politics, and the latter fated to preserve the ideological identity with an ambivalent position toward social democracy (always critical but sometimes cooperative). New political parties such as Podemos, or renewed radical parties such as Syriza in Greece, or Left Bloc in Portugal, enter into electoral competition with the social democratic and (former) Communist parties. Whilst in other cases, such as the Labour Party in the UK, there is an internal competition led by Jeremy Corbyn, there are no significant parties to the Left the conjuncture does not open up political space for a new party. In the cases where the political space is open to realignment, social democracy,

weakened by its position during the economic crisis and the radical Left, moved toward a more pragmatic position. Moreover, the radical Left wing is facing difficulties in competing with the radical Right wing, which has gotten more successful at winning the support of the working class, which is in a state of fragmentation due to the crisis of the welfare state and the reaction against global neoliberalism. In this context, the strategy of Podemos must be understood as attending to three elements: populism, transversality, and the ambiguity of the social democratic project.

Even more explicitly than in other countries, Podemos assumes a populist strategy to interpret the political moment after the economic crisis. The political conflict was moved from the traditional ideological position Left–Right to that of people–elite. This division connects with the 15M mobilizations and their rejection of the economic and political elites—reinforcing the links with social movements in a way that the radical Left could not have done—and challenges the appropriation of the majoritarian Left electoral space by social democracy. The social democratic party, in this sense, should not compete against a party placed as a 'far Left party,'which could be marginalized politically, but against a party which reclaims the role of people as principal political subject. Furthermore, Podemos included PSOE in the political elite, which created a complicated categorization for PSOE.That is because although it insisted on the social democratic option as the 'reasonable Left,' it found it difficult to reject its contribution toward maintaining the interests of the establishment, that is, its functioning as a political class (preserving its own interests) as well as its relation with economic powers.

It must be emphasized that the assumption of a populist strategy operates mostly in the Left political space. In contrast with other countries (Greece, UK, France), Left populism appears and is developed in the absence of Right populism. This implies that Podemos' populism, and its conception of 'people' as a political subject, must not respond to essential identitarian issues such as the definition of 'us' community against 'them'migrants, or defend the core national values allegedly owned by such a community. However, in its construction of the people, Podemos does not avoid the struggle against the Right wing over the meaning of words associated with the Right tradition. Specifically, it is to notice remarkable how Podemos has reclaimed the use of 'fatherland' as one of its main central signifiers. It tries to fill in the traditional gap from the Left in Spain to shape a national project, which has been part of the Right patrimony related with centralization and monoculturalism. Besides, the recourse to 'national

sovereignty,' related to 'protectionism' from both the Left and Right in other countries, as a response to globalization, is used in a complementary way to ground a political and economic project.

As already mentioned,Intertwined with the populist strategy, Podemos deploys the notion of transversality. Being transversal entails a way of doing politics not restricted to the occupied political position. The leaders of Podemos quite often use 15M as an example of transversal politics, since its protesters have a sense of commonality around the defense of democracy and the rejection of the corrupt economic and political class despite their diversity (which includes different ideological positions). Thus, transversality moves beyond Left–Right politics precisely in the sense of appealing to individuals or groups whose identities do not correspond with a predetermined ideological identity. This idea coincides with the winning attitude expressed by Podemos from the very first moment and its intention to compete with social democracy and abandon the position of the radical Left. Additionally, transversality is sometimes understood as a characteristic of society, where multiple identities coexist, rather than a way of doing politics. In this sense, transversal politics would be reduced to framing the message to the widest range of voters, avoiding conflictual issues and ideological formulations, since the electorate, as well as society, is transversal. This entails the risk of understanding transversality as an electoral strategy for occupying the political center, stripped of its transformative potential as formulated previously by social movements such as the 15M and the Platform for People Affected by Mortgages (PAH). The latter is often highlighted as an example of transversal politics due to its capacity of including diverse groups around housing claims without imposing in advance the need for a strong ideological identity. Indeed, some of the most well-known Podemos political leaders come from that movement.

If the populist strategy and transversality have contributed to challenging the traditional division of the Left–Right field, this has not led to a clear differentiation between Podemos and the social democratic project. The ambiguity of Podemos' political program, which indeed was shaped during the constitution of the party, can be explained by a lack of concretion in the populist strategy. However, when policies have materialized (which allows us to talk about Left populism and not purely populism), they have been critical for the revitalization of a declining welfare state; as was particularly true in the case of the economic program. It raised a debate about the limits of the elaboration of a full alternative against the capitalist system. This debate intensified with the first measures adopted by Syriza in power, as a recognized

Podemos sister-party, but even more with the claims by Podemos' leaders of modernizing social democracy. These statements, of course, referred to classical social democracy moves represented by historic figures such as Olof Palme or recent ones such as Oskar Lafontaine, whilst Podemos has been very critical against the social liberal turn of social democracy—i.e. abandoning its ideological identity—and the role of the current PSOE.

1.5 Structure of the Book

As explained above, we situate Podemos in the broader context of a new political cycle, emerging from Spain but not limited to that particular context. After Part I, "Introduction," the book is divided into three main sections: genealogy, concepts, and comparative perspectives. Our intention is to address the multiple dynamics generated by Podemos as a new party born in the aftermath of the economic crisis and the structural crisis of social democracy as an incarnation of the welfare state project and generally of the Left.

Part II, "Genealogy," is dedicated to the formation of Podemos. Cesar Rendueles and Jorge Sola's chapter "The Rise of Podemos: Promises, Constraints, and Dilemmas" describes the impact of Podemos on Spanish politics, by assessing the structure of opportunities, to its ideology, organization, and the profile of its voters. With "The Podemos Discourse: A Journey from Antagonism to Agonism," Javier Franzé raises the question of whether Podemos represents a democratic regeneration or a refutation of order connecting Podemos discourse with the narrative of the Spanish Transition as a legitimatization of the political order and the 15M Movement as a moment of rupture. Finally, Susana Martínez Guillem's contribution "Podemos' Performative Power: Space Struggles and/as Political Transformation" reflects on the ability of Podemos to deploy different performative politics consisting of the reappropriation of institutional spaces, such as Parliament, as a manifestation of cultural production and potential political transformation.

Part III, "Concepts," includes three chapters which deal with some of the political and theoretical issues that Podemos has pushed forward into the public debate or that Podemos' practices have revealed as important. Marco Briziarelli proposes recovering a historicized Gramscian conceptualization of hegemony in "Podemos' Twofold Assault on Hegemony: The Possibilities of the Post-Modern Prince and the Perils of Passive Revolution." He argues that the practices of Podemos, based on Laclau and Mouffe's

notion of hegemony, potentially lead to what Gramsci depicted as the attainment of a passive revolution rather than the construction of an alternative hegemony. The chapter "Populism, Hegemony and the Phantasmatic Sovereign: The Ties between Nationalism and Left-Wing Populism" by Emmy Eklundh reflects on how Laclau's work has been applied, simplified, or even misappropriated. Together with the articulation of 'the people' as a counter-hegemonic force, the issue of national sovereignty becomes crucial, as a demand for national autonomy in response to the practices of the European Union increases. The last chapter of this section, "We the People or We the Republic? The Need for Republican Populism" by Óscar García Agustín, sets out the difficulties faced by the populist strategy when populist political parties become part of the institutional realm. This dilemma leads to a dialogue between two traditionally opposed theories, namely populism and republicanism, to offer an alternative to their shortages and explore its potential for a new political force such as Podemos.

Part IV, "Comparative Perspectives," relates Podemos to other cases from the Latin American and European contexts. Salvador Schavelzon and Jeffrey Webber's chapter "Podemos and Latin America" sheds light on how Podemos, since its foundation, has been deeply influenced by the experiences of progressive governments in Latin America and the debates generated around political proposals and forms of organization, as well as the tensions between the social and the political, the movements and the state. This chapter shows the possibilities and difficulties of building a progressive party in Spain. Alexandros Kioupkiolis and Giorgos Katsambekis, in "Radical Left Populism from the Margins to the Mainstream: A Comparison of Syriza and Podemos," explore the connections between two paradigmatic cases of new Left-wing populism: Podemos and Syriza. Using a discourse approach,they discuss the similarities and differences of these types of populist parties, as well as their development when they consolidate their political position or take power. Arthur Borriello and Samuele Mazzolini compare Podemos with Italian party-movement M5S, which barely can be considered a Left-wing populist movement. In "Southern European Populisms as Counter-Hegemonic Discourses? Podemos and M5S in Comparative Perspective," the authors apply Laclau's framework to prove that both parties pertain to the same political logic (a populist response that attempts to join a number of heterogeneous unsatisfied popular demands) but differ in the sense that only Podemos can be defined as a counter-hegemonic subject with a real possibility of impacting the politics of its country. In the last chapter of this

section, Michael De La Caridad Ledezma moves to the field of Right-wing populism, the National Front in France in "Between the Populist Left and Right: Discursive Structure and Ideological Interventions in Podemos and the National Front." Despite populism providing an invariant discursive structure that serves to integrate and organize meaning, the ideological differences substantially alter the conception of political antagonism and of participation, as well as the particular policy content. Finally, in the conclusion chapter titled "Left-Wing Populism and the Assault on the Establishment," Óscar García Agustín and Marco Briziarelli provide two main narrative threads and one "cautionary tale" to understand the book as a whole, which respectively gravitate around the notions of "anti-establishment politics," "populism," and "passive revolution."

All in all, the book offers a wide perspective on what is going on in politics, both in praxis and at the theoretical level, both in Spain and in other contexts, with the main focus on Europe, although not exclusively. By looking at the gaps, opportunities, and tensions between politics and dreams, we try to find out whether the winds of change are really blowing—and in which direction.

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PART II

Genealogy

CHAPTER 2

The Rise of Podemos: Promises, Constraints, and Dilemmas

César Rendueles and Jorge Sola

2.1 Introduction

On the morning of January 17, 2014, in a small theater in downtown Madrid, a new grassroots initiative for launching a candidacy to the European Parliament was presented. Its most recognizable leader was Pablo Iglesias, a thirty-six-year-old professor of political science, well

Much of this chapter is drawn from this previously published article: "Podemos and the Paradigm Shift" (*Jacobin Magazine*, 13 April 2015, available online at: https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/04/podemos-spain-pablo-iglesias-european-left/). Some excerpts of the section 5 are also drawn from the article: "Podemos, the Upheaval of Spanish Politics and the Challenge of Populism" (published in *Journal of European Contemporary Studies*, 23 March 2017, available online at: http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14782804.2017.1304899).

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known in Madrid social movements, and who, in recent months, had gained certain renown thanks to his appearances on widely watched TV programs. Iglesias did not present a party or a coalition in the traditional sense, but what he defined as “a participatory method open to all citizens.” He announced that the future of the initiative depended on the collection of 50,000 endorsements of support. They reached that amount in 24 hours. Podemos was born.

Three years later and a few kilometers away, in the sports hall of Vista Alegre, the second congress of this new organization was celebrated. In front of several thousand people, Pablo Iglesias defended his leadership against the factions leaded by the two long-time friends who had accompanied him three years ago: Íñigo Errejón and Miguel Urbán. Under the clamor of “unity, unity!” the results were announced: they gave him the victory with 51% of the votes against the 34% and 13% of their rivals. The internal dispute that had enlivened and exhibited the divisions in Podemos during the previous months came to an end (or reached a truce).

In the three years that elapsed between these two episodes, Podemos has shaken Spanish politics and captivated activists and observers from other places. The unique combination of discursive newness, organizational innovation, and electoral success seemed to provide a way to overcome the limitations of the old radical Left and to avoid some of its dead-end dilemmas. Exploiting the double economic and political crisis, and taking advantage of the mobilizing wave of 15M, Podemos represented a turning point in Spanish politics and a new hope for the European Left after the rise (and later setback) of Syriza in Greece.

However, the exhausting electoral sprint of these years and the pitfalls of the organizational institutionalization have also worn and aged this budding party. According to the metaphor of one of his leaders, they “have had to run and lace up [their] shoes at the same time” (Manetto 2015). This steeplechase has not been without damages. The initial enthusiasm has given way to a certain disenchantment. Podemos has managed to put a halt to the two-party system and to reshape political life in Spain. However, along this way, some of the limitations and dilemmas that Podemos has seemed to leave behind have reappeared.

The aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of the rise of Podemos in the light of its historical background. Our purpose is to sketch the main characteristics of this political force (its ideology, its organization, and its social bases) in relation to the constraints and dilemmas it has had to tackle. The second (and longest) section is devoted to portraying the

historical roots of the current economic and political crisis in Spain. The third and fourth sections explore the two main novelties of Podemos—the political discourse and the organizational functioning—while the fifth analyses its social bases. Finally, some concluding remarks about the dilemmas faced by Podemos are offered.

2.2 The Regime of '78 and Its Crisis

The Spanish political labyrinth can only be understood in light of the deep economic crisis that the country has experienced since 2008. The burst of the subprime mortgage crisis had a violent impact on the Spanish economy, which had experienced a massive real-estate bubble during the previous decade. The breakdown of the construction industry increased unemployment, decreased internal demand, reduced public income, and precipitated the insolvency of banks.

The delusion that this was a temporary rough patch soon vanished. In the recent years, the average unemployment rate has been more than 20%: around 5 million people, more than half of whom are long-term unemployed. Around 2 million people live in households in which all members are unemployed. Public debt doubled to reach 100% of the GDP, and inequality has grown in a greater measure than in any other European country. The poverty rate is around 20% (30% if anchored to 2004), and affects one in three children. Almost 100,000 evictions have taken place yearly, in some periods over 500 a day. As the real-estate boom ruined the natural landscape, so the crisis has devastated the social landscape (see Fig. 2.1).

The economic crisis soon translated to the political sphere. The inability of the socialist Zapatero (2004–2011) and the conservative Rajoy (2011–) governments to sort out the economic imbalance broke the dynamics of bipartisan alternation characteristic of Spanish politics. Traditionally, punishment of one of the two main parties—PSOE and PP—takes the form of support of the other one in the elections. However, from 2008 onwards, citizens started to challenge not so much one electoral option or the other, but rather all political agents and institutions, the democratic flaws of which have been accentuated by the crisis and the continuing corruption scandals (Sánchez-Cuenca 2014). For the last few years, Spaniards have considered that "politicians, political parties, and politics" and "corruption" are the most important problems of the country, following only unemployment and the economy (see Fig. 2.2).

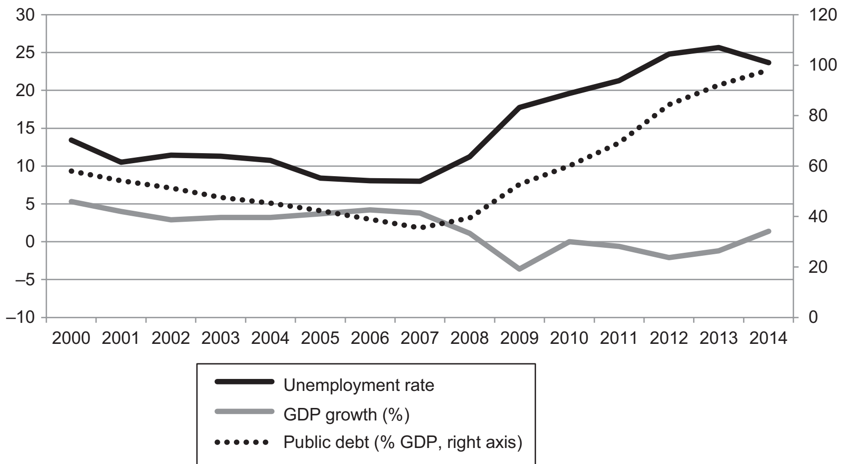

Fig. 2.1 Indicators of the economic crisis (Source: Instituto Nacional de Estadística [INE])

This deep malaise reflects the crisis of the so-called Regime of '78 (the year in which the Spanish Constitution was approved): a set of political, economic, and cultural accords that came into being with the transition to democracy in Spain, and which for three decades allowed the economic and political elites to manage social, territorial, and cultural conflicts with relative success. Between 1975, when dictator Francisco Franco died, and 1982, when PSOE won its first electoral victory, a power structure was consolidated—a power structure that defined what was considered politically feasible and prevented a more democratic and egalitarian development.

The weight of the Francoist dictatorship in recent Spanish history is hard to overstate. The main goal of Franco's coup against the Second Republic (1931–1936) was to stall the process of redistribution of power and wealth in favor of the popular classes that the Second Republic had set in motion. The fascist side won the Civil War (1936–1939) and established a culture of fear that almost completely destroyed the labor movement (Fontana 2000). Franco himself summarized perfectly the dominant political culture: "Follow my lead, and do not get involved in politics." The fascist victory was, thus, the victory of landowners and capitalists who did not have to accept any kind of capital–labor pact such as the one that

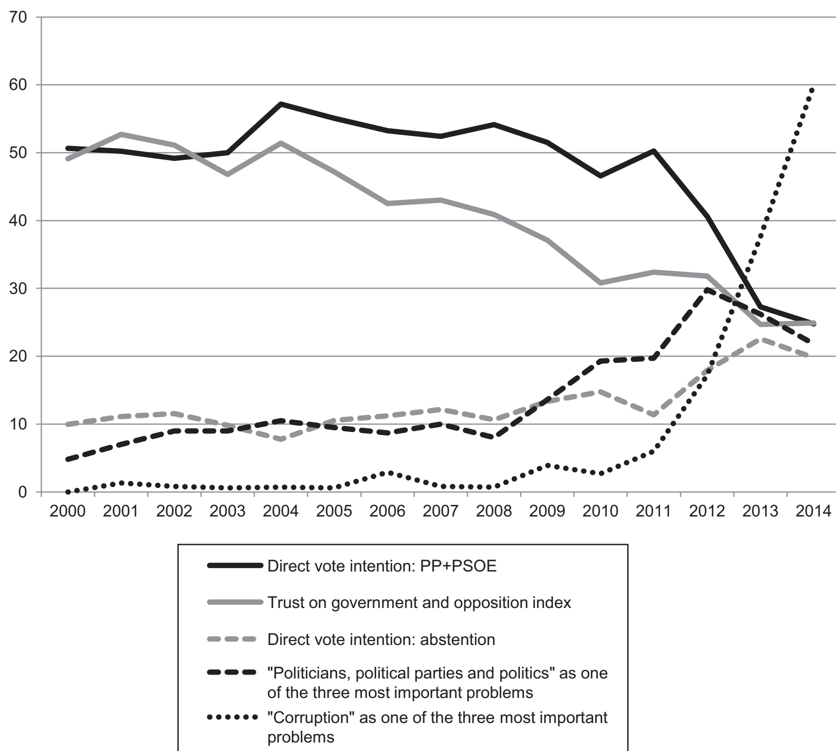

Fig. 2.2 Indicators of the political crisis (Source: Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas [CIS])

shaped post-war Europe (Carreras and Tafunell 2007). In the following decades, a model of growth based on the economic and political subordination of labor (low wages and lack of freedom) prevailed. This model generated a reversal of the Keynesian program prevailing in the rest of Europe in those years: a "resurrection of the rentier." For all its political authoritarianism, the Francoist state was rather rickety, socioeconomically speaking, and confined itself to zealously fulfilling the role of night watchman of property.[1]

After Franco's death in 1975 the transition process to democracy led Spain to a situation comparable to that of the rest of Western Europe. However, Francoist elites managed to run the process in such a manner

that many elements were maintained: in the political arena, neither a cleansing of the state apparatus nor recognition of the victims occurred,[2] whereas in the economic sphere, the model characterized by a weak economic structure embedded in a milieu of clientelism was left unreformed. The opportunity for a more democratic and egalitarian development [which neighboring Portugal managed to get closer to (see Fishman 2018)] was wasted. Workers and unions became, according to a phrase that caught on, "the poor relatives of the democracy." The Regime of '78 unfolded in two distinct stages: up until 1995 PSOE governed in a context of crisis, suffering the last throes of the labor troubles; and from 1995 onwards, PP governed amidst economic boom and social peace.

The governments of PSOE (1982–1996) consolidated the transition model. Its long political hegemony can be considered a pioneering example of the social-democratic path to neoliberalism. From almost the first day, the government of Felipe González locked its Keynesian program in a drawer and handed economic policies over to ministers linked to the banking elites. The result was the application of orthodox prescriptions to adjust and reduce inflation in a much more determined way than in the rest of Southern Europe (Merkel 1995). With the unemployment rate above 20%, Spain became a neoliberal laboratory in the South of Europe.

The price for Spain's celebrated entry into the European Community in 1985 was the dismantling of the industrial tissue, but the most negative aspect of the socialist party's economic policies was undoubtedly the deregulation of the labor market (Recio and Roca 2001). A few years after the labor reforms, a third of the workers held temporary contracts and the unions had lost an important share of their influence. At the same time, housing rentals were deregulated, dramatically heating the real-estate market and paving the way for the future real-estate speculation bubble. These policies were accompanied by some progressive achievements in healthcare and education systems, but even these advances were surprisingly timid: public spending grew more in the seven years of center-Right governments (1975–1982) than in the fourteen years of socialist governments (Espuela Barroso 2013).

These policies had not only material effects, but also symbolic ones. The statements that made Solchaga famous—"Spain is the country in the world in which it is easiest to become rich quickly" or "the best industrial policy is the one that does not exist"—summarize the spirit of celebration of wealth and distrust toward the state: what would later be known as the

Third Way. Socialist governments decisively contributed to tilt the debate to the Right, reducing what was considered politically feasible.

PSOE was able to make this political swerve due to the lack of internal and external opposition. Internally, the party took the shape of a heavily hierarchical electoral machine based on the charismatic leadership of Felipe González, but with a scanty and obedient social base. To the left of PSOE a process of desertification took place. On the one hand, the Communist Party of Spain (PCE) plummeted electorally and fell into a deep crisis, out of which it only emerged after its reconstitution as Izquierda Unida in 1986. On the other hand, a huge part of the political and social activists ended up being absorbed by PSOE, which had the effect of demobilizing the Left. Spain's entry into NATO after a 1986 referendum completed the defeat of the radical Left.

The most serious opposition came from the unions. They called for three general strikes (1988, 1992, and 1994) to stop the labor deregulation and were demonized as being "old-fashioned." With a reduced base of cardholding members (around 15%), punished by deindustrialization and precariousness, they ended up losing their challenge to the government. Starting in 1995, the unions renewed their leadership and turned toward a stance favorable to social peace that has lasted until today.

The arrival of PP in government, eased by the corruption scandals that hounded PSOE, inaugurated the second stage of the Regime of '78. The very favorable international economic situation allowed it to maintain a productive model based on tourism and construction without altering the main lines of the economic policy. The result was a gigantic real-estate bubble that fueled the image of a Spanish economic miracle. In Spain, more jobs were generated than in all the rest of Europe, and the annual GDP growth was of 4%. However, real wages stalled downward and their participation in national income fell by several points. The key to the wealth effect perceived by the population can be found in what has been termed "asset-price Keynesianism" (Brenner 2006; López and Rodríguez 2011). The overvaluation of real estate in a country in which 85% of the population owns their housing, and the possibility of getting into debt, thanks to cheap credit, created the collective delusion of a popular capitalism in which scarcity had given way to abundance—even though, among youngsters, unemployment and temporary employment rates were still around 20% and 50%, respectively.

The neoliberal cocktail of precarization, deindustrialization, and financialization completed the dissolution of class as a fundamental cleavage of

political mobilization. Spain had finally become a "country of proprietors, not proletarians," as was the wish of the Francoist minister who, in the 1950s yearned for a housing policy that anticipated that of Margaret Thatcher by several decades. With a weak civil society in terms of associational levels (Morales and Geurts 2007), family networks were the only defense left against individualism, social atomization, and poverty.

The rise to power of Zapatero in 2004, provoked mostly by the arrogant warmongerism of PP in Iraq and its manipulative management of the Islamist attacks of 11-M (March 11, 2004), constituted the peak of this *belle époque*. Spain was not only an economic giant, but also a civic role model: in an Italy weary of Berlusconi a film entitled *Viva Zapatero!* premiered, and the renowned academic Philip Pettit sang a praiseful philosophic audit of his policies (Martí and Pettit 2010). Zapatero attained real achievements in matters of civil rights that must be recognized, but in economic, social, and labor policies any change was superficial.

In any case, the burst of the bubble in 2008 brought these illusions to an abrupt end. But it would be necessary to wait three years, until May 15, 2011, for a spark to light the prairie of social malaise and give it a specific political articulation. The outbreak of 15M or Indignados Movement was the turning point of Spanish politics.[3] After a massive demonstration under the motto "We are not merchandise in the hands of politicians and bankers," after which followed some police charges, many protestors camped in the center of Madrid. The occupation had a spectacular snowball effect: it soon attracted more people and spread to other cities. Citizen assemblies were constituted, and numerous committees and work groups were created. The shared principles were a deep rejection of *bipartitism*, the demand for a democratic deepening, the condemnation of austerity measures, and the criticism of financial speculation. The movement was organized in horizontal assemblies and lacked recognizable leading figures: it emphasized democracy, rather than class antagonism, direct participation and consensus against party politics, and the centrality of an enhanced notion of citizenship, instead of the conventional axes of Left and Right.

The 15M combined, in a peculiar way, the new and the old (for two overviews, see Rodríguez 2017; and Romanos 2016). For many activists, it was their first political experience, but the door was also opened to the re-enlistment of old activists (some coming from anti-Francoism). Their presence provided 15M with organizational skills and elaborate discourse. As for its social composition, two features stood out: the prominent role of young middle-class college students with career-frustrated expectations,

and the relative absence of non-European immigrants and working-class groups. The indignant protestors awoke intense sympathy among the majority of citizens. The success of Podemos is surely related to the way in which 15M operated a change in the political common sense, a shift in what the social majority considers to be necessary, desirable, or, at the very least, possible.

Despite its polyphony, two axes—that will later reappear in Podemos—can be distinguished in the views of the 15M, branching out in more moderate or radical nuances: criticism of the political system (corruption, transparency, responsiveness, etc.) and criticism of the economic system (finance, inequality, budget cuts, etc.). The 15M managed to frame the political debate in progressive terms, offering a vocabulary with which a broad social majority could identify. Its diagnosis and proposals revolved around the idea of democracy, its absence and its redefinition.

This expressive success contrasts its instrumental failure. The 15M was unable to put an end to the budgetary cuts and it did not manage to consolidate in organizational terms. The widespread diagnosis among activists was that 15M had managed to initiate the crisis of the Regime of '78, yet had been unable to overcome the institutional deadlock. The absence of a response on the part of the party system led many activists to revise their initial rejection of institutional politics and to consider the need to find organizational tools to intervene in it (Fernández and Portos 2015). The idea of a Spanish Syriza—party whose rise had awakened admiration and hope—started to circulate as a desirable aim for the next electoral cycle that started with the European elections of 2014. These were the circumstances in which Podemos was born.

2.3 From TV to Left-Wing Populism

Podemos started out with a fundamental asset that determined its discourse—both the message and the medium—during 2013, Iglesias had become a very popular TV figure. Since the beginning of the crisis, political talk shows had experienced a certain boom on Spanish television. Iglesias managed to carve out a place for himself on TV: audience rates rocketed when he appeared on screen. His secret was a critical discourse, not too original, but straightforward, empathic, and down-to-earth, perfect for intervening in heated discussions.

This television strategy was not improvised, but responds to a long-term project that Pablo Iglesias and its entourage devised against the

grain. The prevailing idea among the Spanish Left was that conventional media was either inaccessible or technologically obsolete, and therefore the most favorable battlefield was that of Internet and social networks. However, in spite of all the cyber-activist rhetoric that had also surrounded the 15M, the fact is that political consensus was built via traditional media: about 60% of the population favors television as the source of political information.[4] *Homo videns* (Sartori 1997) still ruled the Spanish political sphere.

Pablo Iglesias was aware of this and created a counter-hegemonic television project: *La Tuerka* (The Screw), that spread the ideas of the Left in a language geared toward the common sense of the social majority. While *La Tuerka* was only broadcast in a small community TV station, it provided a school for Iglesias to learn some of the communicational strategies that turned him into a celebrity. *La Tuerka* was also the springboard to make the jump to the mainstream talk shows—a jump viewed with disdain by much of the radical Left.

If Iglesias' media celebrity was the main asset in the first steps of Podemos—to the point of printing his face in the voting ballot for European elections where normally the logo of the party would go—the TV became its favorite battlefield in the following years.[5] Behind him were emerging other figures who began to work with the medium, as well as teams carefully planning the arguments to wield—this systematic communicational strategy was then extended to social networks, with a similar success.

Even the biggest critics of Podemos acknowledge its feat in this arena. However, such a communicative gamble has been the source of some relevant contradictions. Podemos presents itself as a project of democratic depuration and deepening, but it seems to be perfectly comfortable in a hypertrophied version of the "audience democracy" (Manin 1997) in which charismatic personality takes precedence over party, performance over program, and authenticity over competence. The urgency of elections and the joy of success have tended to eclipse these concerns. The intensive use of the media, however, has ended up turning against Podemos: the media overexposure not only seems to have contributed to the deterioration of Pablo Iglesias' image in the polls, but also has amplified the internal crises within Podemos, which have received unparalleled publicity.

The discourse of Podemos has been depicted as Left-wing populism, an ambiguous—if not confusing—label that deserves clarification. In the

growing literature on this buzzword, we can distinguish between "substantive" and "formal" approaches depending on whether populism is considered a *content* (be it an ideology, a movement, some policies …) or a *form* (be it a discursive logic, a mode of mobilization, a communicative style …). We stick to this second approach and consider populism as a discursive frame: namely, "an anti-elite discourse in the name of the sovereign people" (Aslanidis 2016, 96; see also Sola and Rendueles 2017).

Following the theses of Ernesto Laclau (2005), Podemos attempted to divide the political space into two opposing fields: the *people* versus an *elite* who had taken over the institutions. The general impeachment of the establishment opened up the possibility of articulating an encompassing and inclusive popular front overcoming any pre-existent allegiances. According to Laclau, the articulation of the amorphous social malaise required the use of "empty signifiers," with few connotations that, by avoiding pre-existing divisive allegiances and cutting across them, would permit the mobilization of a diverse social majority.

Drawing from the recent experiences in Latin America and the material left over by the 15M, Podemos adapted this strategy to the Spanish context. Despite the enormous discontent and the lack of political legitimacy provoked by the crisis, it was not easy to create a new "us." The creation of an inclusive national-popular identity could not resort to the memory of anti-fascist republicanism, which evoked defeat and division, and had to deal with the delicate pluri-national Spanish reality, with disputed identities and territorial conflicts in places like Catalonia and the Basque Country.

In these circumstances, the signifiers chosen by Podemos were "the people" against "the caste." The "caste" was a fuzzy collective made up of politicians, big corporations, the media, speculators, and other privileged groups. It is a diffuse category—a floating signifier—at the disposal of anyone, from those who have a certain class-consciousness to those who embrace anti-politics in order to express their outrage toward the establishment. It names the enemy against which Podemos' supporters define themselves. The "people" picked up the baton of 15M and their ability to appeal to ordinary citizens over any type of ascription or identity.[6]

Podemos also resorted to other dichotomies ("those below" against "those on top" and "new politics" against "old politics") and over time ceased to use the term "caste." Thanks to its contentious nature, it was a proper weapon to open the gap, but it proved less useful to take further steps in a different context: once Podemos entered the institutional realm of politics, the design of specific policies gained prominence and the image

of political outsider had to be reconciled with the negotiation of pacts to support Left-wing regional governments. In this evolution, the populist frame itself has tended somewhat to fade—though it could re-emerge in the future.

This populist form harbored a Left-wing ideological content. The proposals, from restructuring external debt to progressive state intervention in the economy, from to tax reform to women's rights, were part of the heritage of this political tradition. The majority of its leaders and rank and file came from activism and the radical Left. Nevertheless, Podemos' strategy was precisely *not* to appear Left wing. The public image of "the Left," partially associated with the establishment of the old regime (in particular, in the case of PSOE), lacked mobilizing ability. The objective of Podemos was not to occupy the Left flank of the political scene, but to clean the space and play according to new rules. As often repeated by Iglesias: "Power is not afraid of the left, but rather of the people." Somehow, Podemos adopted a Left-wing populist strategy precisely by avoiding any reference to populism and to the Left.[7]

This peculiar combination has not been without tension. Initially, systematic efforts to dodge or contain any left-hand references or symbols that might spontaneously slip into its discourse received criticism from the traditional Left. Later on, the moderation of its discourse and the circumvention of conflicting issues also sparked controversy within Podemos: the so-called transversality could clash with contention and antagonism. At a deeper level, the emphasis on the discursive construction of "the people" has tended to overestimate the power of political communication, favoring the top-down making of a social bloc and depriving social structure and conflicting interests at stake of importance.

2.4 Movement–Party or Electoral War Machine?

Along with discourse, the other great innovation of Podemos has been its organization. From early on, it has combined a horizontal, grassroots discourse that appeals to people (whose banner has been the open primaries) with a clear aspiration to promote political change from the top down, driven by an "electoral war machine."[8] This tension has been the common thread in these two distinct stages—before and after its first congress in the fall of 2014—and illustrates another ambivalent facet of Podemos' strategy.

One of the reasons why Podemos managed to connect with the social malaise mobilized by 15M was its insistence on grassroots participation as a central element of the reconstruction of the political space that had been hijacked by the markets and the establishment. Podemos generated a great social effervescence: hundreds of circles (local groups) were created in the first months, an intense public scrutiny of the different programs and projects of the organization took place, and tens of thousands periodically participated in votes through the Internet. But under the participatory rhetoric there was a cohesive leadership informing a previously designed strategy. In his first months of life, Podemos was basically an election-campaign team whose Leninist centralism was key for its successful rise.

The electoral carousel of 2015–2016—municipal, regional, and general elections—accelerated this central contradiction. Podemos had to build, at a high speed, an organization and a program able to seize the immense, but fleeting, electoral opportunity that opened up. This damaged the project of creating a popular counter-power, the construction "from below" of a sociopolitical tissue able to directly empower the people. Errejón (2014) himself explained in an interview that it was delusional to delegate a major role to social movements and that the priority then was the "political-electoral battle" and "to put up a fight in the State."

In fall 2014, Podemos celebrated its founding congress, in which the political and organizational principles were established and its leaders were chosen. Certainly, the circumstances for the creation of a party from scratch were far from ideal. Podemos had no experienced cadres, its territorial articulation was scanty, and its activists lacked a common culture, not to mention the continued harassment it suffered on the part of most media. The organizational debate, in which thousands of people participated, in person or online, was intense and transparent. But the method of decision-making did not really help deliberation and agreement: documents were voted through as a whole, in one vote, with no possibility of partial amendments. The fact that the voters were not only the activists who participated in the circles, but any supporter who had a few minutes to spare to register online, also favored the plebiscitary touch. The "official sector" led by Pablo Iglesias swept the board. In the election of the documents and directive bodies it prevailed over the "critical sector" with 81% and 89% of the votes respectively. Around 100,000 voters participated, from a total of around 250,000 people registered to vote.

The organizational model chosen was fairly conventional but contained striking innovations. Alongside the "circles" (local groups), at each level

(local, regional, and state-wide) there was a citizen council (a committee) and a secretary general. And for the election of both these bodies, as well as the electoral candidates, *fully* open primaries were employed, since the figure of the fee-paying member did not exist, only that of the online registered. The method for the primaries was de facto majoritarian, since the vote was for a single name (open to the presentation of lists to guide the vote) with equal numbers of votes to positions to fill foreseen seats. That is, the winner took all. The result was ambivalent. Direct election, mostly decentralized and inclusive, resulted in massive participation. However, it could weaken the organic links (between the party's grassroots base, the leadership, and the public officers) and gave great power to the directive that, thanks to charismatic leadership and the control of the organization, had a lot of influence to configure the nominations. Yet, this power was not total: the critical sectors managed to get the secretary general in four regions.

This choice opened a debate about which model was more democratic. The lack of symmetry between the intense activism of the members of the circles—relatively few in number—and the great mass of sympathizers—not very committed on a day-to-day basis—posed an uncomfortable dilemma. One of the signatories of the foundational manifesto of Podemos suggested that privileging the interventions of grassroots party activists over the wishes of the party's mass support could result in a "democratic elitism" aiming to "turn every citizen in a permanent activist and privilege minoritarian activism as a source of sovereign decisions" (Alba Rico 2014). In this manner, a social majority devoid of the resources at the disposal of activists (time, skills, interest, etc.) could be marginalized from decision-making. However, the power removed from the most active members was not in fact handed over to a wider layer of sympathizers, but rather to the party's leadership—as it could be expected in the light of recent experience of party politics (Katz 2001; Scarrow 1999; Scarrow et al. 2000). In other words, this model reinforces some plebiscitary trends.

It is true that constraints of Podemos were quite specific. Podemos was facing the challenge to build *ex nihilo* a party at a great speed. It lacked a cohesive grassroots base—regarding political culture, practices, or ideology—as well as experienced cadres and regional leaders, which is a particularly serious handicap in such a decentralized country as Spain. In this predicament, the leadership-structure dilemma presented, in the eyes of its leaders, a manifest danger.[9] If power was given to an inexperienced, unpredictable, or reduced base, there was the risk that several groups of Leftists,

careerists, or eccentrics would acquire an excessive role that would hinder Podemos' strategy and would weaken its credibility. The leadership chose to strengthen its control at the expense of a greater plurality in order to maximize its chances of success in the upcoming elections.

This choice had some costs. While it was relatively successful with regard to facing the electoral sprint, it did not contribute to a respect for the internal pluralism, to a distribution of power, or to a reinforcement of grassroots structures. The pernicious effects of this model appeared more clearly after the split between Iglesias and Errejón circa the spring of 2016. The winner-take-all model paved the way for a zero-sum struggle for internal power, and the use of plebiscitary mechanisms hindered the possibility for a richer deliberation. The divisions were exacerbated and put the organization under great pressure in the months prior to Podemos' second congress, held in February 2017.

2.5 We the People… But Which People?

While the commitment to transversality has been the keystone of Podemos' strategy, it has come up against important limits. It is possible that Podemos had occupied the "central spot" of the political scene by shaping the political agenda, or that its appellation to the people had mobilized different groups hit by the crisis, but at the end of the day its constituency is basically Left-wing and does not exactly match up with "those below." Let us look at the profile of its voters in order to better understand the strengths and weakness of Podemos in the task of building a new historical bloc.

Regarding voters' sociodemographic profile, it is well known that Podemos' performance is better among young, educated urban dwellers. Age or cohort is the most relevant factor, since it reveals the generational cleavage that structures the current political cycle in Spain. Podemos, in the wake of the 15M, obtained the support of the generation that was not involved in the democratic transition. The generational cleavage has also a material aspect, besides the dissimilar ways of political socialization or party loyalty. The younger generations are the victims of a deregulated labor market and a welfare state more addressed toward the elderly. On the other hand, Podemos also obtains higher support among voters with a university education and from an urban milieu. Lastly, Podemos achieved better results in the north and the east of Spain.

The results are more striking regarding voters' ideology. Despite its "beyond-Left-and-Right" discursive winks, Podemos can be undoubtedly located on the Left, and is voted for by the Left. On the one hand, voters locate Podemos around 2.3 in the Left–Right scale (that ranges from 1 to 10), further Left than PSOE (4.5) and even than IU (2.5).[10] On the other hand, the majority of voters of Podemos (around 70%) place themselves on 1–4 (Left wing) of the ideological scale, whereas around 18% are on 5–6 (center), and 10% do not respond. Only an irrelevant 1.5% place themselves on the Right wing (7–10).

These data requires us, therefore, to be cautious with the idea that Left and Right are obsolete categories. Indeed, the share of "neither-Left-nor-Right" people (those who place themselves on 5–6 of the ideological scale or do not respond to this question) has barely changed for three decades: the former grew in the 1990s from 25 to 30% and the latter went from 27% in the 1980s to 22% today. That being said, it would be hasty to conclude that the aim for so-called "transversality" has been a completely useless detour. Or, in counterfactual terms, that Podemos would have achieved the same success by outspokenly using a radical Left-wing discourse. The "transversal" strategy unexpectedly modified the political framing, placing the new formation both against the traditional parties (PSOE and PP), without being cornered in a position to the left of the former. It also allowed Podemos to gain the support of Left-wing voters for whom that category lacked any mobilizing power, due to its identification with part of the establishment, as well as to attract many "apolitical" voters.[11]

The thorniest question arises with the social stratification of Podemos' voters. As to this point, the picture is less clear. Figure 2.3 includes four alternative indicators of the class variable. The first is based on the occupational class (a version of Goldthorpe and Erikson's scheme). According to this classification, Podemos' support is similar among the service class, non-manual workers, and skilled and unskilled workers (four approximately equal groups that together represent 80% of the population), but it obtains much lower percentages among owners and supervisors, agricultural workers, and, to lesser extent, the self-employed. The second indicator is employment status. In this case, the greatest support comes from outsiders (unemployed and temporary workers) and students, whereas it falls by half in the case of housewives and retirees. The third indicator is based on personal income, where the relationship is anything but clear. The clearest relation between class and vote is the most paradoxical. It can

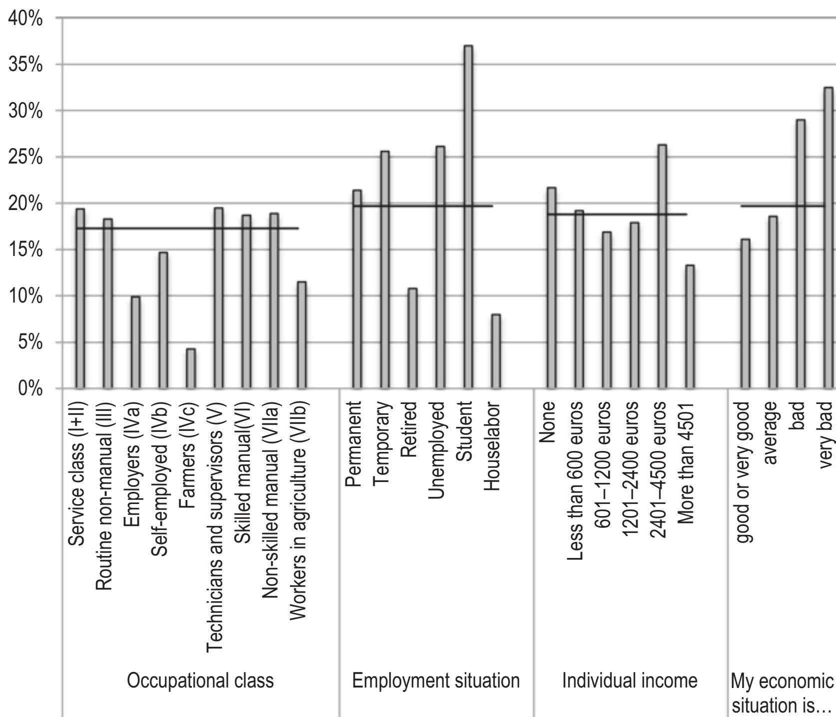

Fig. 2.3 Podemos' vote by class and economic situation (Sources and notes: CIS [Post-electoral Study 3126]. The four indicators of class and economic situation are: occupational class [Roman numerals between brackets refer to the Erikson–Goldthorpe–Portocarero (EGP) scheme], employment situation, individual income, and subjective assessment of the personal situation)

be seen in the last indicator, which is precisely the most subjective: support for Podemos increases as (the personal *perception* of) the economic situation worsens.

Although we cannot draw any firm conclusion, it could seem that Podemos has enlisted, to a certain extent, the support of the economically harmed groups, such as the unemployed or the precariously employed, and more specifically, of those who *feel* as such. However, among those who feel that way, there are also middle-class youths whose expectations have been let down. As explained above, this group led the 15M mobilizations and the subsequent political cycle (including the leadership of

Podemos). The subordinate role of the popular classes is a matter of concern for the making of a "historical bloc" and the scope of the political change.

At this point, Podemos has inherited an historical legacy: the hegemony of the middle class in Spanish politics and society. The ambivalence of the appeals to "the people," "those below" or "the 99%" has allowed a coexistence of this legacy with more radical aspirations of social change. But it has not been a balanced coexistence. The effects of "middle-class politics" can be recognized both in the social background of political leaders and in public discourses. The idea that "the middle classes had paid for the crisis" was circulated successfully (and without discussion), despite the fact that, in terms of income distribution, the lowest strata had lost considerably more than intermediate ones. The recurrent figure of the victim of the crisis was the young man with several careers options and a Master's degree, who has to go abroad in search of work. Being relevant, this figure is a minority (only a third of young Spaniards go to university, and of them only one of every eight ends up doing a Master's degree). Unskilled workers have merged into the background in the imagined "people."

One of the factors that explains the centrality of middle-class politics is the decline of the labor movement. Despite being a decisive force in the struggle for democracy and having played the opposition role of neoliberal politics in the 1980s, the unions ended up accommodating themselves to subordination. Little by little, various structural changes (precariousness, fragmentation, deindustrialization, etc.) have eroded their social base and their real anchorage. Its leaders and cadres have grown old without a relay of new leaders in a post-Fordist environment. Thus, the world of work has been the great absentee in this cycle of mobilizations. One of the implications of this absence is that labor militancy has ceased to be a way of access to political life for workers. With this blocked off, most political leaders and cadres come to politics via college activism.

These circumstances explain, for instance, the paradoxical use of "meritocracy" as a progressive political weapon. In a context of crisis in which the elites had broken the social pact and did not even reward the merit of those who had worked harder, the elitist-ridden idea of meritocracy can serve as a sword against the establishment. But it was a double-edged sword. If the "99%" or "the people" rhetoric ran the risk of making certain social divisions invisible, the meritocratic ideology can lead to its justification. The undoubted success of these categories—their ability to

articulate an appealing and mobilizing discourse—must not conceal the hindrance they can impose.

2.6 Promises, Constraints, and Dilemmas

The rise of Podemos can be interpreted as the domestic expression of the "double movement" that is haunting the world. Most of these reactions to the neoliberalism in crisis are usually grouped under the banner of populism—a buzzword that often obscures rather than clarifies. As mentioned above, the populism of Podemos would undoubtedly be a Left-wing populism: a way of renewal of progressive politics that has aroused the expectations of activists and observers in search of political inspiration.

However, despite the commonalities that it shares with other contexts, the case of Podemos also responds to the particularity of the Spanish background, as explained above. The so-called Regime of the '78—its roots, its development, and its effects—is key to understanding the unfolding of Podemos. The new party has had to manage its legacies well, has tried to challenge its power dynamics, and has had to deal with the reappearance of some inertias within itself.

That being said, some issues apply to other contexts. The experience of Podemos leaves us facing certain dilemmas that any attempt of political renewal would have to deal with. In general terms, the critical feature of Podemos has been its effort to shed certain habits of progressive politics in order to overcome its limitations and garner more popular support. That commitment to "the new" has not been free of tensions with "the old." These tensions—to a large extent unavoidable and often solved by trial and error—explain the harsh, virulent tone of the controversies about Podemos in Spain. Whatever the position adopted in such controversies, the truth is that some dilemmas did not admit an easy solution.

In the discursive field—perhaps the most novel and successful aspect of the party— Podemos has tried to purge the clichés of the Left to get the support of broader social groups. The success in the careful elaboration of new frames has been accompanied by some blunders (for example, the relegation of feminism in its initial steps), and it has often been criticized for moderating or emptying its discourse. Paradoxical as it may be, such success has also turned against Podemos, inasmuch as it has contributed to magnifying the power of the communicational strategy (and the media) to the detriment of certain structural and organizational realities. The intensive use of TV, with all its political ambivalence, may be the best example.

On the organizational side, Podemos had the twofold task of running an electoral sprint and building an organization *ex nihilo*. Faced with the dilemma of creating an effective electoral war machine from above or forging a more democratic party–movement from below, Podemos opted for the former. The electoral success of this option cannot conceal its political costs (aggravated by how this model was managed and unfolded), which have become more visible as internal conflicts have grown. Behind the participatory and inclusive rhetoric, a hierarchical organization and an unfriendly political culture have been created. Its future effects are not very promising in the democratizing terms of the project championed by Podemos.

Regarding its constituency, Podemos' gamble to go beyond the Left and Right has come up against certain limits: put simply, its voters are mostly Left wing (and the electorate, in general, located the party on the Left). Faced with the dominance of middle-class politics and the weakness of the labor movement, Podemos has assumed many elements of hegemonic discourse and has avoided conflicting issues in terms of class. This option was electorally profitable, but runs the risk of perpetuating the dominance of middle-class politics, especially since most of the leadership of Podemos has that social background. Without the political articulation of the popular classes and the reactivation of the labor movement, the making of a "plebeian" historical bloc is fatally flawed.

The answers that Podemos has given to these dilemmas have been relatively successful in the short term, although its self-defeating effects in the medium term begin to be apparent. In any case, when assessing the experience of Podemos in order to draw some insights, it is important not only to demarcate rhetoric and reality, but also to realistically examine the possibilities at hand. If, in these three years, Podemos has had to run and lace up their shoes at the same time, the electoral undertow allows more dispassionate discussions on its successes, failures, and prospects. For that, it is advisable not to be blindly captivated by the promises of Podemos nor blithely lose sight of the constraints that have shaped its rise.

Notes

1. In 1975, public spending in Spain as a percentage of the GDP was of 26%, almost half of that of the United Kingdom (49%) or Sweden (47%), according to Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) data. Defense spending, as a percentage of the total public spending, went from 16% in 1935 to 43% in 1945 (Comín and Díaz 2005).

2. In this regard, the Spanish case is practically unique in the history of transitions into democracy (Elster 2004).
3. In Spain the 15M Movement has never felt identified with the term "indignados" (outraged), despite the fact it has found popularity in the rest of the world. Stéphane Hessel's work titled *Time for Outrage: Indignez-vous!*, for example, has had an entirely marginal influence on the 15M Movement.
4. CIS study 2981 (March 2013).
5. The rationale was simple: according to the studies undertaken by Podemos, only 5% of voters recognized the name of the formation, whereas over 50% knew who Iglesias was. The decision ultimately proved to be successful, but many ridiculed it as a sign of narcissism.
6. In Spanish, "the people" translates into two different terms, *el pueblo*, the classical subject of the Left and nationalism, and *la gente*, a much less politically charged term, which is the one used by Podemos.
7. Despite the fact that Podemos has never publicly defended populism, its leaders have theorized this strategy in a number of articles and interviews. A very interesting debate on this topic among leaders of Podemos and IU can be found in the TV program *Fort Apache*, hosted by Pablo Iglesias himself: "Podemos y el populismo," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-q9oxr54X_Y.
8. The expression was coined by Íñigo Errejón (2014) himself.
9. Bolleyer (2013: 21) defines the leadership structure dilemma as "the tension between the interest of the founding elites to protect their own position and pursue their immediate interests in the newly formed party structure and the anticipated (individual and collective) benefits and costs of future party institutionalization."
10. Data from CIS surveys.
11. The majority of Podemos' voters are ex-voters of IU and PSOE, but one in three are new voters or previously did not vote, and around 8% previously voted PP.

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CHAPTER 3

The Podemos Discourse: A Journey from Antagonism to Agonism

Javier Franzé

3.1 Introduction and Focus

This chapter aims to analyze the Podemos discourse and to consider whether the party's relationship with Spain's democratic political order is antagonistic or agonistic, whether a political boundary is drawn that makes its relationship with this order incompatible, or whether the relationship is a compatible one in spite of the differences between the two.

The time period chosen for the analysis is from Podemos' appearance in January 2014 to Mariano Rajoy becoming prime minister on October 29, 2016, due both to the impact of the emergence of the new party and the unique nature of this time span, which includes two general elections, the king's abdication, changes in party leadership, and the unprecedented indirect support of the socialist party (PSOE) for the popular party (PP) candidate for prime minister. The object of analysis is the national discourse of Podemos as uttered by its leaders, that is, its discourse on matters relating to Europe and to Spain as a whole, taking into account local and regional issues only where they have a bearing on the wider picture.

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3.2 Basic Concept and Assumptions

Since the principle characteristic of discourse is its ability to produce and assign meaning, it should not be viewed—as certain commentators do—as that which is spoken or written, but rather in terms of linguistic and extra-linguistic features. From a discourse perspective, elements (social actors, circumstances, data, social settings) should not be considered a priori, or pre-discursive, but as existing and making sense as they acquire meaning. Discourse is not the expression of a real movement that is constituted outside of the discourse itself; it is, and acts, as a real force that shapes and constitutes social relations. In its widest sense, discourse is where "social reality," as such, is constructed. This perspective breaks down the traditional dichotomies between theory and practice, words and things, objectivity and subjectivity, ideality and materiality, and thought and reality. Discourse becomes a (social) practice that produces meaning and, hence, also produces the political community, institutions, and relations in which it is embodied, and takes on objectivity and materiality (Laclau 2005).

The above does not invalidate the distinction between the object of discourse and "facts" external to the will. What it does call into question is whether such facts can be fully constituted outside of discourse (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). This posits politics as a struggle for meaning or as a historical, contingent struggle for values that is not resolved through any objective truth but only provisionally through the hegemony of an inevitably specific perspective that manages to become a general one. In other words, it is through a political struggle for meaning that the political community and its order and actors themselves are constituted (Castoriadis 1975; Foucault 1983; Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Weber 1992a, b; Schmitt 1991a, b; Bourdieu 2000, 2001; Rancière 2006a, b; Sorel 1976).

To say that politics is a struggle for the discursive construction of meaning does not mean that there is no definition of or limit to this creation, which is another habitual criticism. There is no definition in the essentialist classical mode of understanding (materialist, historicist, religious, or biological), as an external a priori meaning that is imposed on subjects. What conditions this production is sedimented meaning (Laclau 2005), a contingent coalescence of meaning, resulting from historic struggles for hegemony, which, as such, lack any teleological features.

By taking politics to be the establishment of order by way of a struggle for meaning, this study assumes that Spain's hegemonic political order is the democracy constructed and legitimized by the Transition narrative. As

there is *no single*, pure Transition discourse that transcends historical contexts, the study takes that which was evident at the start of the period of analysis and which had developed in the light of parliamentary debates on the so-called "historical memory" law (*ley de la "memoria histórica"*) and the statute of autonomy for Catalonia, which many political actors feel called into question the Transition itself (España, Congreso de los Diputados 2006a, b, 2007).

The analysis of the relation between the Podemos discourse and the existing political order is not based on its content, as represented by its political platform or ideology[1]; rather, it is based on the *form* in which it posits the relation between its political ends—demands and values—and the order. Key to this is the way in which the discourse represents the order: Is it an insurmountable obstacle to the achievement of its aims, an existential other with which it is impossible to coexist politically, or an other with which coexistence is possible, with compromise, even if on substantial points? (Schmitt 1991a).[2] This approach avoids the use of a substantialist perspective of "the political," which gives considerably more weight to certain political objectives in the assessment of the radicalism of a discourse, as if they had an intrinsic property of rupture, beyond the specific context in which they are situated.

Antagonism refers here to an incompatibility that results in political actors being unable to coexist within the same community because of their existential differences. Based on an understanding of identity as difference, it implies the construction of an us versus them, understood as a difference that negates one's own identity. The origin of this existential difference can be diverse (religious, ethnic, economic, etc.), but it becomes political as it develops the necessary intensity to build community on this basis (Schmitt 1991a; Laclau 2005). This ultimately constitutes the friend–enemy relation that makes counter-hegemonic demands incompatible with the existing order, and means that the latter must be recast for the former to exist and be met.

Chantal Mouffe's agonism also has its theoretical basis in the notion of identity as difference and in a recognition of antagonism as an ontological trait of the political, but it recognizes that this difference between hegemonic projects does not necessarily have to be antagonistic nor incompatible with coexistence in the political community. What brings together these opposing actors are the rules of the game and the values along which the community is organized, and this enables the relation of enmity that is intrinsic to antagonism to be sublimated into an adversarial one. Agonism's

key difference with antagonism lies in the fact that in agonism the adversaries acknowledge the legitimacy of each other's demands and establish a shared "us," thus moving the political boundary to outside of the political community. Counter-hegemonic demands are not incompatible with the democratic order; rather, they can be accommodated by it because of its very democracy (Mouffe 1999, 2014). This prevents an internal boundary from existing, because if the rules of the game and values are shared—even if they are interpreted differently—what results is a friendship with differences (Castoriadis 1998; Schmitt 1991a).

Agonism occupies the middle ground between the consensualist and antagonist notions of democracy. It shares with antagonism the idea that conflict cannot be eradicated from politics and, with consensualism, the notion of there being a common ground of certain values—shared, however, on the grounds not of agreement but of conflict, because of the distinct ways in which the rival actors interpret them (Mouffe 1999, 2014).

3.3 First Phase: The Antagonistic Podemos

The defining feature of the period under study (January 2014 to October 2016) is the democratic system's growing struggle, in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis and in the context of open politics, to maintain the four pillars on which the Transition was built: elitist politics, the welfare state, the state of the autonomous regions, and the forgetting of the Francoist past.

Against this background, Podemos emerged in January 2014 as a new political force, with the immediate aim of presenting a party list for the May 25 European elections. It, surprisingly, gained almost 8% of the vote, and, along with this, a place at the center of Spanish political life. For the first time ever, PP and PSOE did not even poll 50% between them. The Podemos discourse went increasingly on the offensive, making its mark on the political agenda and introducing new terms into the everyday language of politics (most notably, "caste," which is the name that was given to the economic, political, and cultural elites who played a leading role in the Transition and established "the '78 Regime"). The dominant political and media discourse, lacking a coordinated response, went on the defensive, exemplified by its inability to portray Podemos in a way that would shore up its own hegemonic interests: successively and/or simultaneously, it linked the party to the "radical Left," the regime in Iran, Basque Country

and Freedom (ETA), populism, Beppe Grillo's Five Star Movement in Italy, Marine Le Pen's National Front, and Chavism. Chavist was the hegemonic discourse's preferred label, because it enabled it to call into question Podemos' democratic credentials by setting them against European notions of democracy. This initial reaction also led to the leadership of some of the country's main political actors being called into question. In June, the king unexpectedly abdicated in favor of his son, and the socialist party's general secretary resigned.

A precursor to this defensive action occurred in February of the same year, when, soon after the emergence of Podemos, the alliance of Leftist parties United Left (IU) declared that its own prime ministerial candidate would also be a young leader. This impromptu act was intended to place the party in the limelight, although, in practice, the focus fell on the party's federal coordinator. Later, in March 2015, the death of the former prime minister, Adolfo Suárez, brought about a revival of the "spirit of the Transition" and calls from the dominant political parties and the mass media for a "Second Transition."

Between January 2014 and May 2015, the number of cases of corruption that came to light increased, and this had an impact on key political and social actors. The cases had the effect of "confirming" the interpretive framework of the Podemos discourse, in which the above–below polarity was more important than the Left–Right one. The most notorious of these cases was that of the so-called "black" Caja Madrid credit cards, which involved individuals from across the whole political spectrum.

Between June and November, Podemos finished setting itself up as a party by means of an open electoral process in which any citizen could participate, which resulted in Pablo Iglesias being declared general secretary, with 88% of the vote. This attracted the media and helped the party to become the third largest in terms of members—some 200,000 of them.

Toward the end of 2014, the traditional mass media to some extent changed their strategy with regard to Podemos. As they had not managed to erode the party on political-ideological grounds, they turned to accusations of corruption aimed at its top-level leaders: Pablo Iglesias, Íñigo Errejón, and Juan Carlos Monedero. The most publicized "case," and the one that went to have consequences for the party, was that of Monedero, who was "accused"—among other things—of receiving party funding from the Venezuelan government.

From January 2014 to January 2015, the Podemos discourse stood in direct opposition to the Transition narrative (España, Congreso de los

Diputados 2006a, b, 2007). Whereas the latter is based on the present/Transition–past/Civil War dichotomy, the Podemos discourse is based on that of new/below/democracy versus old/above/oligarchy (Podemos 2014a, b, c, d).

The main implication of the Transition discourse's key polarity is that democracy and Transition are inextricably linked: there is no better form of government in the present, and there was no real form of democracy in the past before that which was established during the Transition. The discourse achieves this by representing the past as an indistinct whole—it does not distinguish between dictatorship and democracy, Republic and Francoism—and also as a painful time, at the end of which all the actors—reduced to the leveler of s*ides* (*bandos*) in the Civil War—lost, because they wanted to *impose* their own views.

A further element of this depoliticization (Schmitt 1991b; Weber 1992a, b) of the past is the key role given to an assumed fratricidal and factional national trait, which preserves the past as a kind of state of nature to which there is always the chance of returning. The danger of this happening is often used by the narrative as a reason for rejecting any demands that would imply changing the 1978 pacts. Hence, in the Transition discourse democracy equates to consensus. All of this ultimately confirms that the only thing to do with the past is to not repeat it. It also implies that democracy should be valued for its ability to avoid fratricide and for its material results, rather than in and of itself. The main argument used in favor of the Transition to democracy is that it represents "the period of our history during which there was the greatest freedom, prosperity and democracy" (Author's translation. España. Congreso de los Diputados, 2006b: 11,270). Social cohesion is central to this discourse, and its importance in the hegemonic parties' arguments is never explicitly diminished. Even when initiatives that could be seen by society itself as socially detrimental are implemented, they are justified on the basis of the need to *preserve* social cohesion (España, Estado 2010: 79,279; 2012: 12,484; Partido Popular 2011: 106, 115, and 116).

As with all political identities, the Transition discourse draws a boundary that delineates friendship and enmity in politics (Schmitt 1991a; Laclau 2005). Whereas Transition/present represents the field of friendship, because it implies the coexistence of the two Spains in the context of a constitutional consensus, Civil War/past denotes that of enmity, implying, as it does, the reinstatement of fratricidal warmongering. The Transition discourse does not acknowledge the political nature of this

boundary. It perceives of it as a moral, rational, and humanistic frontier, and neutralizes it by denying it the ability to make decisions about contingent values. It assumes that the boundary does not *decide* who its political enemies are; rather, it sees them as those who place themselves in opposition to universal humanitarian values (Schmitt 1991b).

For its part, the dichotomy at the heart of the Podemos discourse serves, first and foremost, to sever the link between democracy and transition in the Transition narrative and to highlight that true democracy can exist only if it is freed from its "hijacking" by the '78 Regime. Podemos resignifies the Constitution, democracy as a way of avoiding civil war, the spirit of harmony, and the consensus as oligarchic politics far removed from popular sovereignty, resulting from high-level pacts between Francoist families and the new reformist leaderships.[3] In this politics, the center-Left and center-Right share out the political space among themselves, with the aim of guaranteeing a kind of political alternation (the word *turnismo*—turn-taking—is also used, in reference to the Bourbon Restoration after the First Republic) that leaves the political and social order fundamentally untouched. Democracy is considered to be hijacked because, in the two-party system, those who have not been chosen by the people are in government, which runs counter to popular sovereignty. The system runs on corruption, with the economic elites—who are powerless but greedy—using the political elites to pursue their interests. This order is a regime rather than a political system; it is a closed system, dominated by a "caste," which excludes the popular majorities.

The Podemos discourse, therefore, principally associates the Transition with the old, those from above and the oligarchy. The past is no longer seen as the fratricidal spirit of the Second Republic and Franco's dictatorship as in the transition discourse; it is resignified in the light of the democracy/the people–oligarchy/the caste dichotomy. With democracy in this leading role, the historical context of the Transition discourse is diluted by another: that framed by the interests of those from below or those from above. The Second Republic is reclaimed as a time when popular-democratic politics has come to the fore, while the Transition is linked more to the Civil War in terms of the defeat of the people and the hijacking of democracy.

This resignifying of the Second Republic, which links democracy with the empowerment of those from below rather than with anti-monarchism, denotes another defining characteristic of the Podemos discourse during this phase: the way in which it distances itself—in the light of 15M—from

the traditional Spanish Left, with its strong attachment to the Left–Right dichotomy and, at the same time, from the monarchy versus republic, secularism versus confessionalism, and proletariat versus bourgeoisie debates (Franzé 2015). Podemos sees the traditional Left as part of the political game board of the Transition, on which everything is divided up between Left- and Right-wing positions, reducing certain demands seen as too "clamorous" to a token role, although including them as "evidence" of the "pluralism" of the *regime*.

Podemos' breaking of ties with the traditional Spanish Left can also be seen in its symbols. The name of the party, its internal organization, its emblems, and its colors are all representative of what, on a theoretical level, would be defined as post-Marxism, and what in political practice is related to new social movements. In addition, the party's color (purple) has historically been associated with feminism. Using a circle as its emblem distances it from the Jacobin and centrist traditions of Marxist–Leninist parties, but also from both social democrats and intellectuals, because the "us" takes precedence over the "avant-garde," the body over the head. The circle prioritizes the world of the citizen over the world of the worker; the latter dominates the symbolic repertoire of the traditional Left, with its images of tools of production and instruments of culture, understood as routes to "enlightenment" and social "improvement." The circle also references the internal organization of the 15M working groups (Vélez 2016: 68). Through its name, Podemos sets itself apart from the party that represents the material class interests *that already exist in the social structure*, in order to move toward becoming an open movement, which, in highlighting the signifier "demos," performatively evokes the construction of a new subject as both contingent and hegemonic: *the people*. Here there is also an epistemological distancing from orthodox Marxism: recognizing political action as a performative practice means moving away from the mechanistic base-superstructure theory and acknowledging the constructive capacity of the political. The word "Podemos" also brings to mind the task of "cleaning up the environment" (in Spanish, one meaning of *podemos* is "let us prune") (Millás 2014).

In resignifying *patria*—fatherland—and "patriot," Podemos exemplifies how it distances itself simultaneously from the discourse of both the Left and the Right. The notion of "national" in Spain is generally associated with Francoism, with its centrist, Catholic ideology, and only "national" in the context of the so-called historical nationalities (those of the Basque Country, Catalonia, and Galicia). It has had a place in Left-wing thinking because of

its opposition to this concept of *españolismo*—Spanishness. This resignification begins with the signifier itself, since "fatherland" and "patriot" are not part of present-day political language in Spain: those on the Left prefer to use "state" or "country," while the Right uses "nation." "Patria/fatherland" is reminiscent of the Third World liberation struggles of the 1960s and 1970s, and of nationalist-populist ideology in Latin America. In this first phase, Podemos associates popular sovereignty with national sovereignty and contends that Spain has become a German colony.

Fatherland is resignified by Podemos as the defense of the welfare state; the two are seen as equivalents and intrinsically linked. This, according to the party, is the opposite of how it is viewed by the Right, which is in terms of controversial symbols, such as the country's flag, Castilian Spanish, and national traditions. Rather than defending that which is public, the patriotism of the Right appropriates and privatizes it, evading taxes and building up capital in tax havens. Podemos views Spanish nationalism as an excuse for the Right to impose its preferences (language, culture, and history) on the nations that make up Spain. The new/below/democracy versus old/above/oligarchy dichotomy seeks to redesign the symbolic universe that Podemos believes the Left and Right in Spain have shared since the Transition. This new axis creates an us versus them dichotomy, "the people" against "the caste."

In this first phase, Podemos believes that at both national and European level the problem is not only the behavior of the elites but the form of institutional design that facilitates it. Behavior and institutional life are interwoven. The Transition *is* "the '78 Regime," and this is why one of Podemos' key proposals is to open up a constituent process that would "break the stranglehold" of the 1978 Constitution and discuss "everything with everyone." A similar process is underway at European level, with those who criticize the present-day elite calling for the reinstatement of the post-Second World War European social pact and proposing a constituent process through which to relaunch the Union (Podemos 2014a: 3, b: 14, 23 and 28; c: 5 and 13; Programa El Objetivo 2014; Iglesias 2014d; Errejón 2014; Monedero 2014).

In Podemos' 2014 European election manifesto (Podemos 2014b), democracy appears as something that must be built, which implies that the fact that it has been "hijacked" means that it no longer exists. At the same time, equality, freedom, and sovereignty, which are the pillars on which democracy is built, are seen as things to be won.

This emphasis on deep-seated criticism of the Transition and its institutions has resulted in Podemos drawing a political boundary between an

"us" and a "them." This encompasses more than just the behavior of the political and economic elites, because this behavior is the product of an institutional framework and, ultimately, of a political order: the '78 Regime. The proposed constituent process is a logical and coherent complement to this.

In this first phase, then, the discourse of Podemos—like that of 15M (Franzé 2015)—repoliticizes that which the Transition discourse depoliticized: the existing traditional political identities, the history of the shaping of the Spanish and European political orders, and the crisis and its political management.

Podemos, however, partly depoliticizes its own identity, not by dismissing the Left–Right axis and substituting it with the above–below one that is encountered much less in Spanish political culture, but by not making it explicit that the latter cannot be understood outside of the context of the former. In fact, Podemos rejects the Left–Right axis that exists *in the Spanish political system* because it sees it as serving to legitimize the two wings of a single party. The truth, however, is that the proposed above–below axis, representing as it does the dichotomy between democracy as the government of the people and democracy as competition between elites, cannot be understood outside of the Left–Right axis that represents the tension between equality and hierarchy, created in 1789. In not making this explicit, Podemos contributes to the historically particular dragging with it and erasing the historically abstract, depoliticizing, in part, its own identity. This is accompanied by another self-depoliticization, that of Podemos presenting its demands as "common sense."

In this first phase, therefore, the Podemos discourse represents a challenge to the political order, because the success of its demands is incompatible with the make-up of the order. In addition, it calls into question the legitimacy of the Transition narrative and repoliticizes the face of the Spanish political community.

3.4 Second Phase: The Agonistic Podemos

3.4.1 First Juncture: Recognition of the Institutions That Were Established in 1978

The second phase encompasses the period January 2015 to October 2016 and is characterized by Podemos' relation to the political order changing from antagonistic to agonistic, from a relation of enmity to

one of friendship, in spite of the significant differences therein. The political boundary moves from inside the political community toward its borders. This phase has three distinct junctures, at each of which both the agonism and the degree of compatibility with the order increase.

The first juncture begins in January 2015 and continues up to the local and regional elections in May of that year. January 2015 marked, in fact, a political tipping point, to some extent, with Podemos' landmark mass demonstration in the Puerta del Sol but, at the same time, the hegemonic discourse's response was evolving.[4] Accusing Podemos of receiving funds from Venezuela enabled the discourse to "confirm" the party's allegiance to Chavism and position it alongside "the caste." The hegemonic discourse also launched a counter-attack in the electoral politics sphere, putting forward the Ciudadanos party as the moderate choice for the *necessary* modernization of the political class. This strategy placed Podemos on the defensive for the first time, and it suffered in the polls, beginning to descend from the height of its support.

In March 2015, at a time of stagnation in Podemos' hitherto constant growth, the party came third, with 15% of the vote, in the regional elections in Andalusia—a good result but not as good as it had expected. On April 30, Juan Carlos Monedero resigned from the Podemos leadership, with an explanation that did not really satisfy people's curiosity. Hence, a few days before the launch of the regional and municipal election campaigns, Podemos found itself at the most difficult point in its history.

The January 2015 Puerta del Sol rally can, therefore, be taken as the start of a second phase in the Podemos discourse. In this phase, the dominant polarity continued to be that of new/above/democracy versus old/below/oligarchy but, although an "us" and a "them" persisted, the latter was embodied more in the *political behavior* of the caste and less in the 1978 institutions. The "caste" and the institutions were no longer interwoven. The elites came to be seen as the usufructuaries of an institutional structure that had to be taken back by the people. The underlying assumption here is that the institutions themselves are neutral and that their political meaning depends on their use, whereas in the first phase they were seen as extremely favorable to the elites, the sponsors of the "hijacking" of democracy. As a consequence, the calls for a constituent process became less frequent, and such a process stopped being cited as a prerequisite for true democracy.

The diminished importance given to a constituent process was accompanied by the aim of *restoring* the '78 pacts, which had been misused and

then broken off due to the *behavior* of the caste. In addition, the chronology of the crisis was changed: it was seen as having started not in 1978 but with the management of the crisis that began in 2008. The problem was no longer the Transition itself but the openly neoliberal politics of the crisis (Iglesias 2015a; Errejón 2015; Diario El Confidencial 2015).

Another new element of the Podemos discourse in this second phase—although it had already made an appearance at the end of the antagonistic phase, in November 2014—was its revindication of social democracy. This started with a recognition of social democracy's historical role in post-Second World War Europe (Monedero 2014) and in Spain during the Transition (Diario 20 Minutos 2014), and ended with it becoming the hallmark of the party's political platform (Diario 20 Minutos 2014; Programa La noche en 24 horas 2014; Diario El Mundo 2015; Iglesias 2015b), passing, on the way, through Pablo Iglesias' plea during the regional and municipal election campaigns to the "socialists at heart": "Voting socialist today means voting for Podemos" (author's translation). This is not significant *in terms of the political platform*, but it is important in terms of the notion of *place* in the political order of the Transition, which Podemos had initially portrayed as a game board with two players, placed to the left and the right, who were, in fact, just one (the two-party system). The social democrat space is one of these *places*.

This reclaiming of the social democratic place, the increasing absence—in particular from public political events—of the notion of "the '78 Regime," the replacement of 1978 with 2008 as the year the crisis began, and, above all, the backgrounding of the calls for a refoundational constituent process, all pointed in the same direction: the exit from center stage of the confrontation with the Transition discourse and a shifting of the problem from the order itself to its *use* by the dominant political elites. According to Podemos, the problem was that the elites considered themselves above the institutions.

What can be concluded from this is that there is no political boundary if the *behavior* of an elite is seen in isolation from the order. Behavior alone does not imply that demands are incompatible with an order, nor that they represent a political project with which coexistence is not possible, but rather that it is necessary to replace the elite in order to reclaim the political order from which it has benefited. Seen in this way, the elite cannot be "an institutionalized 'other'" (Laclau 2005: 117); rather, it becomes a *deinstitutionalized* other—in short, a non-other.

In its first phase, the Podemos discourse talked about *recovering* social rights, about the *loss* of sovereignty, and about using Article 128 of the Constitution in the interests of the people (Iglesias 2014e), but this was all within the context of a refoundational constituent process. Swearing on the Spanish Constitution as a new MEP in June 2014, Pablo Iglesias stated: "I will abide by the Constitution until the citizens of my country change it in order to recover sovereignty and social rights," (Author's translation) making it clear that the current one was not capable of meeting these demands.

In a similar vein, in an academic speech in July 2014 Íñigo Errejón spoke about the Transition in terms of the Gramscian notion of passive revolution. Although he accepted that the '78 Regime had taken on board some popular demands and that this could be seen as progress in contrast with how things had been under the previous political order, he insisted that the Transition—just like the Civil War—had involved the defeat of the people and that the political system was under too much strain to deal with any new demands. Errejón concluded that the situation would, therefore, only be resolved by way of complete change brought about from above or a refoundational constituent process from below.

In this second phase, the calls for a refoundational constituent process were given less weight and, in the main party document at the time—the manifesto for the municipal and regional elections—Podemos acknowledged, for the first time, the 1978 institutions: "We have institutions that we view with pride; we have come a long way. We have the pieces in place, but we need to organize them, adjust them, balance them. Even though we have good quality material, it has fallen into the hands of inept, shortsighted, spendthrift governments" (Author's translation. Podemos 2015a: 11). The document also states: "we will reclaim the institutions for democracy … we can do it from within the institutions themselves: we are going to win this fight and reclaim democracy, sovereignty and the ultimate meaning of democracy, which is none other than to serve the will of the people and meet their needs" (Author's translation. Podemos 2015a: 13). In the meantime, the call for a constituent process is silent. Consistent with the burden of proof being shifted from the political order to the elites, democracy is now seen not as something to be built but as something to reclaim.

Finally, for the first time the aim of building a "modern" country is mentioned: this is the signifier that has the function of binding together the different elements of the Transition discourse and, hence, of legitimizing the current Spanish political order. Another term that is symbolic of

the Transition, the call for "change," became, at this juncture, part of Podemos' own language, and was used in the title of its 2015 regional election manifesto ("The Program for Change") (Podemos 2015a).

3.4.2 *Second Juncture: The Second Transition*

May 2015 to May 2016 marks the second juncture. In the municipal and regional elections, which took place on May 24, 2015, Podemos performed well in the country's main cities and formed part of a number of the coalition governments that were established, including the three largest of these, in Madrid, Barcelona, and Valencia. Even though, for Pablo Iglesias, these results signaled the end of the political system of the Transition, the end of the two-party system, and the "historic exhaustion" of IU, he paid an unexpected tribute to the Transition process, painting it not as incompatible with Podemos' project but, in fact, the opposite.

Iglesias declared that the Transition was not only a pact between the elites but also the result of an "impetus created by what is best about our country," and acknowledged its success in modernizing, in democratizing, and in creating a welfare system (Author's translation. Iglesias 2015d, e, f). However, it did not, he concluded, go as far as to touch the power held by the Francoist economic elites.

Iglesias announced that Podemos was proposing a change that consisted not of breaking off from the Transition, but of a new or second Transition, something that had, in fact, already been initiated by 15M. What would be at stake at the upcoming general elections, said Iglesias, would be how to resolve the organic crisis of the '78 Regime (2015c). The Podemos general secretary put forward a new "historic compromise"—based to a large extent on the alliance between Berlinguer's Italian Communist Party and the Christian Democracy Party that steered the former away from an internal split—over constitutional reform that would regenerate the institutions and establish a new model of coexistence on the basis of various elements of the 1978 Constitution, for example that of wealth serving the public interest. This new compromise would lead to the institutions being given back to the people and the elites being brought inside the law.

The campaign and manifesto for the general election on December 20, 2015 (20D), were underpinned by the key notion of this second, agonistic, phase, that of reclaiming those institutions that had been placed at the service of the interests of the powerful, and also by the idea of democracy

as the solution to Spain's problems of political, social, and territorial equality (Podemos 2015b: 9–13). The results of these elections, in which the "purple party" came third, signified for Podemos the end of the two-party system, the end of *turnismo*, and, therefore, the end of the political system itself (Iglesias 2015c, 2016a; Errejón, 2016a, b; Podemos, En Comú Podem, En Marea 2016). This "catastrophic stalemate" between the old and the new, neither of them with enough strength to reshape political life, marks a "transition" between two eras (Errejón 2016a).

During the negotiations to form a government after 20D, Podemos (and its allies En Comú Podem, En Marea, and Compromís) pushed for an alliance with PSOE and IU, producing, in February 2016, a document entitled "Un país para la gente. Bases políticas para un gobierno estable y con garantías" ("A country for the people: The political basis for a stable government, with guarantees"; author's translation). In the context of the principle elements of the second, agonistic, phase (chronology of the crisis, the relation between the institutions and the elites, and constitutional reform), this publication interestingly presents something approaching a consensualist idea of democracy, somewhat removed from agonism. The document states that the causes of the legitimacy crisis in the Spanish political structure are both the lack of a proper system of checks and balances and absolute majority governments that hinder accountability. As a solution to this, it proposes the model used in most European governments—a coalition—which will guarantee stability, proportionality, and efficiency. Podemos based its proposal on the work of political scientists such as Arend Lijphart, who has focused on consensualism and is critical of majority electoral systems (Podemos, En Comú Podem, En Marea 2016). Nevertheless, it is important to point out that consensualism is partially mitigated here because the proposed alliance is not "centrist," but made up of Left-wing political forces.

Framed within the central notions of the second, agonistic, phase (Podemos, En Comú Podem, En Marea 2016), the idea of a Second Transition that builds on the historical Transition and is aligned with 15M, constitutional reform as a "historic compromise" that moves away from the rupture suggested by the first phase's key idea of a refoundational constituent process, and coalition as a common European guarantee of stability all bear witness to the beginnings of an entrenchment of agonism in January 2015: the institutions are compatible with Podemos' demands and they must, therefore, be *reclaimed* for the people (Iglesias 2016b).

3.4.3 *Third Juncture: Alliance with IU*

The third juncture begins in May 2016, when Podemos forms an alliance with IU, and continues until the general election on June 26. Two features of this continuation of the agonistic phase (Programa La noche en 24 horas 2016; Radio Nacional de España 2016) develop the idea that the political order and Podemos' demands are not incompatible.

The first is the alliance with IU, which Podemos justifies as being necessary to "break the stalemate" of the 20D elections, the "second round" of which took place on June 26 (26J) (Errejón 2016d). Podemos had always viewed IU as typical of the parties on the Transition's political game board, part of the old, and of the Left–Right axis that inadequately captures the situation in Spain. Podemos had also stated that 15M had achieved the exact opposite of what the Left had been doing for decades and that the very success of Podemos was due to it having continued in the same vein: "those in power do not fear the left, they fear the people." The elites were happy with the tokenistic role of the traditional Left, which was interested not in gaining power but in staying in a subordinate position from which it could cultivate its identity and maintain an image of purity (Author's translation. Iglesias 2014b; Diario Público.es 2015).

The second element is the strengthening of social democracy as an identifying feature of Podemos. Even though Iglesias (2016c) spoke of a new, fourth, social democracy, he linked it with the historical one, citing the need to occupy the place left vacant by PSOE. In fact, although it was not made explicit, the objective of the alliance with IU was to surpass PSOE.

During the electoral campaign, Iglesias said that Zapatero was the best democratic leader Spain had ever had. Podemos offered PSOE the chance to present joint candidate lists for the senate, but the offer was rejected. Iglesias' harsh words about Felipe González during the failed attempt by the socialist leader, Sánchez, to form a government did not contradict Podemos' commitment to the revival of social democracy, because he was not reffering to the *genuine* PSOE, but to the one represented by *felipismo*.[5]

In the context of Podemos gaining seats in Parliament and the, finally, failed attempts to form a government that would revive the Left–Right axis, the alliance with IU and the reclaiming of social democracy contributed to the tendency to background the above–below or new–old axis that had characterized the Podemos discourse up to this point.

3.4.4 *Fourth Juncture: End of the* **Blitzkrieg**, *and Institutional Routine*

From 26J to the end of the period under study marks a fourth juncture in the agonistic phase, which is characterized by internal party debate about future tactics and, since the difference between tactics and strategy is slight, this has the potential to inadvertently affect the latter also.

The general secretariat's position (Iglesias 2016d, e, f) is that the current political task is to make visible the damage ("politicize the pain") that austerity has wreaked on the different social sectors represented by the social movements (evictions, pensions, salaries, education, health, etc.) to which Podemos needs to connect in order to serve as a channel for their demands. This view is underpinned by a fear of party bureaucracy and of political impotence, both of which would increase once Podemos found itself on the inside of state institutions, especially if in opposition rather than in government. Therefore, it is important that it is those on the ground rather than the officials who are in control of the party, and this means that the alliance with IU needs to continue.

The view of the political secretariat (Errejón 2016c, e, f), while not denying the need for the link to the social movements, emphasizes some of the difficulties in the party's relationship with them. One of these is that the professionalization of politics has brought with it benefits to becoming a party official or leader—as Podemos' own history testifies. For those who hold this view, the only possible relationship with the social movements is one in which the party takes the political initiative, not because it wants to but because of the way present-day politics is organized.

The fundamental difference between these two stances seems to lie in the fact that for the general secretariat the aim is to give a voice to a society *that already has* transformative agents that have been rendered invisible by the dominant political system and the media. In contrast, the political secretariat's position is that this sedimented discourse is resistant to Podemos' proposed transformations, but that—as with everything in the social sphere—it will become more malleable in the medium to long term. It therefore focuses the internal battle on how it can transform the existing political game board, rather than seeing it as a dispute in which one side or the other wins. It rejects the term "social democrat" as not representing Podemos' new identity, and it also refuses the "Left-wing populist" label, preferring simply to use "populist."

This lead us to a third, and perhaps the most important, difference, which is that concerning notions of representation. The general secretariat's position appears to correspond to a more traditional/classical concept: representation as a reflection in politics of that which is already constituted in society. In this formulation, the party needs to be a channel for the social movements, because they represent the place where demands are formed and where they exist. The political secretariat's position is based on a more post-structuralist notion, that of representation as a simultaneous performative formation of both the represented and the representers, not as an effective confirmation of what already exists.

This debate about tactics reveals two way of understanding Laclau's populism (2005). The general secretariat's populism prioritizes challenging the elites and understands transversal politics as both the sum of existing demands represented in the social movements and a way of preventing institutional collapse, whereas that of the political secretariat perceives of it as a means of building a new people and a political culture capable of recycling existing Left-wing material and merging it with other material to create a new hegemony. It is a matter of emphasis: one sees populism principally as antagonism between existing actors and the other as a reconfiguration of the legitimate "demos" in order to create a new hegemony. If we see this tension as one between reactivating what is latent and reconfiguring what is given, the former prefers to emphasize how the Left–Right axis can embody the below–above polarity, while the latter does the opposite.

3.5 Concluding Remarks

This discourse analysis of Podemos has considered the relation between the party's demands and the political order so as to determine whether meeting the former implies incompatibility with the latter. Taking as a starting point the question of whether Podemos' relation with the hegemonic order is antagonistic or agonistic, whether it involves contestation or regeneration, two main phases were identified.

The first phase (January 2014 to January 2015), characterized by the new/below/democracy–old/above/oligarchy opposition, is antagonistic, because the party's demands appear to be incompatible with the political order that was established during the Transition. The second phase (January 2015 to October 2016) is agonistic, erasing, as it does, the previous phrase's political boundary between order and demands.

The main effect of this move from antagonism to agonism is that the original disconnect in the Podemos discourse between democracy and Transition becomes very nuanced, with the Transition no longer being seen as part of the old, but rather as reconnected with the new through a "Second Transition."

The Podemos discourse is more concerned with the revival of democracy that with challenging the political order. It creates room for more and new democratic demands, but to do this it needs to depoliticize democracy, which it achieves by politicizing the political behavior of the elites as the sole problem and as a constraint on democracy, thereby reducing political order to government and institutional life to democracy.

Taken as a whole, the Podemos discourse equates to an opening up of politics—in the narrowly defined sense of politics as the state and the political system that have prevailed since the Transition—which can be seen as a result of pressure on the part of the political—the demands and actors that emerge outside of the institutional system. This opening up serves to incorporate new demands and then politics is once more closed down, thanks to a new depoliticization, whereby democracy is considered to be a political order that has no need for any kind of internal boundary and the split between the new and the old is rendered redundant. This framework has the capacity to accommodate a process of hegemonic change without needing to make any changes to itself.

This discursive journey would be of little interest if it were viewed in radicalization–moderation terms. Although politics is the radical creation of meaning, it is carried out in a sedimented space, not an empty one. All forms of hegemony include that which is counter to them, and the historical struggle for meaning, in spite of moments of coalescence, never ends. Therefore, using the language of hegemony does not constitute "moderation" per se; it also belongs to a discourse in pursuit of resignification. A discourse that is radically exterior to sedimented meaning cannot become its interlocutor and because of this cannot reorganize it. Rather, it asserts itself by way of the disconnection itself. In any event, it is more appropriate to talk about the discourse in terms of the effects of that which is spoken than of the intentions of the speakers.

The move from antagonism to agonism is a result of sedimented semantic power relations, which comprise not only the power of the hegemonic discourse itself—in this case that of the Transition—but the contexts, rules, and logic of the political field in which the battle takes place. The move can be seen as a result of Podemos' entrance into the logic of the

existing political struggle, which determines which forms, rhythms, styles, logics, topics, and words are permitted. Any such entrance is a rite of passage and necessitates a degree of adjustment; this does not, however, imply an abandonment of a party's own standpoints, but rather an adjustment to a field that has already been constructed and is therefore part of the hegemony and not, therefore, neutral. For this very reason, some utterances are heard only as noise. The political field demands that one translate one's language in order to take part in the battle (Bourdieu 2000).

This move from antagonism to agonism can also be seen as a result of Podemos testing the state of the power relations between its discourse and that of the Transition, that is, as an acknowledgment that the crisis in the hegemonic order was not as serious as it had thought. The party had described the crisis of the '78 Regime as organic, as the increasing difficulty of the elites to maintain and re-energize the support of subordinate social groups. For Podemos, however, there was no crisis of the state, because the country's institutions were still functioning and people were still trusting of and loyal to them (Podemos n.d.: 1–5). In any event, if there had been an organic crisis, it would have been consistent with its position for Podemos to have proposed a war of movement. It voiced it in these terms, however, only retrospectively, after 26J, preferring to talk of a "*swift* war of position" (a *blitzkrieg*), which, in Gramscian terms, is an oxymoron.

It is worth highlighting that Podemos did not suggest that the absence of a crisis of the state indicated that the crisis was not organic but one of representation, describing, as it did, the state as an apparatus of power but also of consensus. Nor did it suggest that the loss of the support of the traditional parties necessarily called into question the political project of the Transition. Rather, Podemos proposed that this was a criticism only of the leadership of the parties, of their *not being up to the task of the Transition project*, leaving the credibility and legitimacy of the project untouched and allowing it to continue to function as a political identity that defines the horizons of meaning.

At times, the Podemos discourse itself revealed cracks in its diagnosis of the situation. For example, 15M went from being symptomatic of the organic crisis of the '78 Regime (Podemos n.d.: 1) to marking the start of the Second Transition (Iglesias 2015d). If an organic crisis is understood as the point at which an order's key signifiers are available for resignification (Laclau 2005: 165 ff), then it becomes clear that 15M opened the way to a Second Transition because the core meaning of the historical

Transition was not challenged. Rather, it was reclaimed as the essential basis for a new phase of democracy in Spain. This was the vision behind the Transition discourse when talk of a Second Transition first began around the time of the death of former Prime Minister Suárez and the abdication of King Juan Carlos I.

The internal debate about tactics will no doubt continue, along the lines of the two existing stances, in the run-up to Podemos' second national congress (February 2017). Both stances, in spite of their differences, reveal traces of a recognition of the resilience of the Transition. The general secretariat, by challenging the elites but not their institutions, accepts the political game board set up by the Transition and places itself in the space on the left in order to emerge victorious, while the political secretariat rejects this set-up and plays for time to reconfigure it. Nevertheless, both the long-term strategy and the acceptance of the existing game board imply that the construction of a new hegemony is on no one's agenda, which points, in turn, to the absence of an organic crisis.

Notes

1. For more on Podemos' ideology and political platform, see Morón 2015: 213–282; Tamames 2015: 63–100 and 145–175; Tímermans 2014: 119–153; Trillo-Figueroa 2015; Torreblanca 2015: 171–202; Quirós 2014: 123–137; Villacañas 2015: 121–128; Errejón and Mouffe 2015: 97–138; and Rallo 2014: 139–161.
2. This is a departure from the formal relation between demands and order proposed by Laclau (2005: 110–122; 163–197). If the relation is mutually exclusive, and demands must disrupt the order if they are to be met, the logic of equivalence prevails. If, however, the relation is one of continuity, demands can be successful within the existing order and the logic of difference prevails.
3. Pablo Iglesias (2014a) states that the Transition consensus consisted of the elites meeting in private rooms in restaurants to agree policies and draw up the Constitution. He ended his first speech at Podemos' founding citizen's assembly by saying: "You don't take heaven by consensus; you storm it" (Author's translation. 2014c).
4. On January 31, 2015, Podemos organized its first mass event. The place chosen for the rally was the Puerta del Sol, which had been the epicenter of 15M in 2011. The "March for Change" was not a protest but a way of announcing that the year of change had begun (in May there would be

municipal and regional elections and, probably in November, general elections). The rally was a success, with more than 100,000 people filling the square and the surrounding streets. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=marcha+del+cambio+podemos. Accessed March 1, 2017.

5. Left-wing critics of Felipe González's governments (1982–1996) use this term to refer to his move to the Right and his abandonment of his social democratic principles.

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CHAPTER 4

Podemos' Performative Power: Space Struggles and/as Political Transformation

Susana Martínez Guillem

Occupation of spaces such as public squares, banks, or vacant apartments; slogans like "Yes we camp," "We're not leaving, we're moving to your conscience," or "Take the streets;" *escraches* in front of the houses of MPs and institutional buildings. These are all well-known symbols capturing the recent social unrest in Spain, catalyzed through different kinds of mass mobilizations and organizations (15M/Indignad@s, Marea Ciudadana, Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca (PAH)) as well as newly emerged political parties at the local and national levels, such as Guanyem Barcelona or Podemos. As a whole, these practices suggest that the politics of space have shaped Spain's convulsive (post-)crisis years in important ways. From the first seeds planted through Indignad@s, to current debates within Podemos about the party's preferred goals and strategies, many aspects of the different political maneuvers to counter social inequality in Spain can be located, understood, and critiqued through a spatial lens.

This chapter is an attempt to highlight the continuous relevance of space struggles as a defining factor both in the development of the conditions of possibility for the emergence of Podemos out of Indignad@s' "street activism," as well as the party's more recent tactics once it consolidated its

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presence within institutions. When deploying the notion of space struggles, I draw on work within Marxist cultural geography and sociology, as well as rhetorical and performance-oriented criticism, to highlight how space is a structured and (re)structuring force that regulates broader social relations and, at the same time, can be reinvented to serve strategic purposes (Bourdieu 1996; Carrillo Rowe 2004; Harvey 2006b; Lefebvre 1991; Massey 1994; Said 2000; Shome 2003, Soja 2009).

As David Harvey (2006b) points out, space has become an unavoidable contemporary "keyword"—a term coined by Raymond Williams'—in scholarly interventions that seek to understand human praxis in its different forms. This so-called "spatial turn" has brought with it new understandings of the connection between spaces and the social totality, and, consequently, new ways to study social relations and their empirical manifestations: from urban design, to capital accumulation, to social movements (Castells 1983; Lefebvre 1991; Harvey 2001). As any other keyword, the notion of space is "polysemous," "categorical," and "actively contested" (Durant 2008). In this sense, as Williams would put it, space is one of those "significant, binding words in certain activities and their interpretation," as well as "indicative [...] in certain forms of thought" (Williams 1983: 15).

We thus find different emphases and lines of work across the breadth of intellectual projects informed by and informing the concept of space. However, an important common contribution of the studies I draw on in this chapter is the commitment to deconstruct the naturalized ideologies that encourage us to think of spaces as neutral containers, and move instead toward a historical and political reading that acknowledges the ways that spaces are symbolically and materially fought over as they enhance and hinder the social advantages of certain groups. As Soja explains,

> [T]he structure of organized space is not a separate structure with its own autonomous laws of construction and transformation, nor is it simply an expression of the class struggle emerging from social (and thus aspatial?) relations of production. It represents, instead, a dialectically defined component of the general relations of production, relations which are simultaneously social and spatial. (1989: 78)

Through this dialectical and transdisciplinary lens, my analysis explores the contradictory nature of Podemos as, on the one hand, a product of the shrinking space of privilege in (post-)crisis Spain and the social mobilizations that followed, and, on the other, a potential producer of a more democratic

or "common" political culture via its different performative actions in institutional spaces. First, I introduce the concept of "precarious privilege" (Martínez Guillem 2017) as a way to capture the intrinsic relation between Indignad@s' particular spatial(ized) practices, the development of a common social position for this movement, and the resulting emergence of Podemos as a political project. Then, I focus on Podemos' attempts to overcome the fixing trap of place, or the attaching of certain meanings to only a particular (relatively marginal) location. I suggest that this move involved a further spatial "reterritorialization" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) beyond the plaza, and the "streets" more generally, that pushed Podemos toward a more central social position.

Specifically, and through the analysis of different performances of politics geared toward the reappropriation of institutional spaces such as Congress or Parliament, I argue that Podemos actively tried to challenge the dominant, unmarked—but equally performative—accepted practices that continually constitute traditional political spaces through exclusion. Overall, these powerful performances of politics can be seen as a manifestation of cultural (re)production and potential political transformation. However, as demonstrated by the growing internal tensions within Podemos, the effective but inherently ephemeral character of performativity needs to be translated more firmly into an overall hybrid political practice that can secure a common—and thus stronger—position for the party.

4.1 Shrinking Space, Indignation Growth: Producing Precarious Privilege

Recent occupation-based protests throughout the globe have received quite a bit of scholarly attention across the humanities and the social sciences. Often, these discussions are framed within the context of a "new social movements" approach, which proposes a breach between pre and post- Cold War forms of collective action, where the latter are seen as united by a cultural sense of identification rather than class-based "political" concerns, thus privileging personal autonomy, identity, informality, spontaneity, and a low degree of vertical differentiation (Briziarelli and Martínez Guillem 2015; Cohen 1985; Gitlin 2012; Klandermans and Oegema 1987; Larana 1993; Larana et al. 1994; Melucci 1989; Offe 1985). In these accounts, discourse often arises as a rather independent and powerful constitutive agent that facilitates the development of a sense of community with shared goals, often privileging symbolic concerns over material ones (e.g. Chesters and Welsh 2004; Garrido and Halavais 2003; Swords 2007).

Accordingly, creative communicative practices are analyzed as embodying radical and innovative ways of doing activism that prefigure the future social order, even though these initiatives do not always engage the existing structures that may help consolidate such "lived" changes (García Agustín et al., 2016; Martín Rojo 2014; Briziarelli and Martínez Guillem 2015).

An emphasis on these kinds of practices, I would argue, risks forcing a separation between the so-called "political" and "cultural" spheres of society, thus hindering a more holistic understanding of social movements as "relational" and "developmental" that emphasizes "organising rather than organisation, culture-making rather than culture-being" (Cox 2014: 5). As Cox, drawing on Gramsci, puts it, culture in this sense is "a way of 'doing' the everyday, including everyday organizing" (2014: 9). In my view, one possible way to systematically account for social movements in relation to both political culture and cultural politics is to incorporate an analysis of their spatial struggles as inherently related to broader social struggles (see Lefebvre 1991). With regard to occupation-based protests, such a view can helps us recognize the important role that pre-existing social conditions played in the formation, dissemination, and (lack of) success of many of these "new" initiatives, as well as their more specific communicative practices. In other words, the material circumstances that inform who we are, and thus how we organize (Cox 2014) are fundamentally spatialized, and thus politico-cultural mobilization cannot be properly understood without reference to space.

Building on these insights, I offer here an analysis of different residual space-based dynamics that acted as exigencies for the development of Podemos as a political alternative in Spain that, at the same time, strategically reinvented spatial relations to question dominant cultural logics of political praxis in this context. First of all, it is important to highlight the set of social relations produced and challenged through different spatial practices in recent years in Spain, as well as how they informed the development of a community that, via the social movement Indignad@*s* and related organizations such as Plataforma de afectados pot la hipoteca (PAH), converged in the political party Podemos. Throughout their groundbreaking demonstrations, starting in May 2011, Indignad@*s* relied on physical space as the main site of struggle where different ideological positions could materialize and a potential "counter-space" could emerge (Lefebvre 1991; Martín Rojo 2014). In this sense, reclaiming the public spaces of emblematic squares as common spaces was a way to intervene in and possibly readjust the social order that, in less than a decade, had repositioned these mostly young, middle-class, and college-educated protesters closer to the margins of their society.

Loss of purchasing power, an increasingly precarious job market, or the escalation of corruption cases among politicians were among the unacceptable conditions that, according to the manifesto developed by Indignad@s, called for an "ethical revolution" which could bring about a "true democracy," guaranteeing "basic rights" for all, such as "the right to housing, employment, culture, health, education, political participation, free personal development, and consumer rights for a healthy and happy life" (Briziarelli and Martínez Guillem 2016; Martínez Guillem 2017; Movimiento 15M n.d.).

Crucially, then, the demands in the squares were voiced by a generation of *preparados*—a term coined by the newspaper *El País* that playfully combined the Spanish words for "ready" and "unemployed." Indeed, many Indignad@s embodied this explosive mix of privilege and precariousness: 72% had a Bachelor's degree or higher educational attainment, and 41% were unemployed when they joined the movement. From this abruptly acquired social space of "precarious privilege," Indignad@s saw themselves as the main victims of a series of inadequate, elite-favoring measures adopted by the Spanish government in order to tackle a deep economic crisis without challenging its broader, systemic roots. This proximity in social space that could—and eventually would—define the potential for unity (Bourdieu 1996) was empirically reinforced by the specific spatial practices that literally brought Indignad@s together as a coherent multitude.

Thus, and inspired by the Arab Spring protests that had spread among some North African countries months earlier, as well as the 2009 "Icelandic revolution," the Indignad@s occupied a series of major Spanish squares such as Madrid's Puerta del Sol, Barcelona's Plaça Catalunya, and Valencia's Plaza del Ayuntamiento (which they renamed Plaza del 15 de Mayo). By claiming these spaces in public, they themselves became public (Harvey 2006a, b) and directly challenged the cultural logics of protest, turning "conventional" temporary demonstrations into a permanent series of *acampadas* (camps). In these camps, they quickly organized into different *comisiones* (committees) in charge of duties such as *cocina* (cooking), *donaciones* (donations), or *limpieza* (cleaning), but also around issues such as *economía* (economy), *inmigración* (immigration), *acción* (action), *educación* (education), and *sanidad* (healthcare).

From these public stands reappropriated as commons, protesters were able to engage in conversations with passersby about what they saw as important issues affecting Spanish society, as well as possible ways to address them. For example, in the *economía* stand, members would explain the concept of the "Tobin Tax," aimed at preventing speculation based on

money investment in foreign exchange on a very short-term basis. The participants in the *acampadas* also held daily *asambleas* (assemblies) at 8 p.m. where they organized, discussed, and voted on particular measures to be taken. In other words, they engaged in "place-making," transforming physical spaces through their everyday practices (de Certeau 1984).

Importantly, therefore, and in a telling example of the contradictory ways in which social movements inevitably "move," it was through their residual integrated social space that Indignad@s managed to engage in a series of innovative spatial practices that both constituted them as a movement, and allowed them to reappropriate the meanings and uses of the emblematic public places they interacted with. As Shome (2003: 47) explains, "being able to exist in public space is dependent also on having rights and access to the legalities that protect our bodies in that space." In the case of Indignad@s, the literal "being together" enabled by the presence of particular—relatively privileged—bodies in the physical spaces of different squares and streets, was key in creating a climate of openness, direct participation, and possibilities that "ensure[d] participants' access to the production of discourses, and put into circulation new forms of participation, authorship, agency and inclusiveness" (Martín Rojo 2014: 626). As such, their spatial and communicative practices cannot be considered in isolation from broader structural conditions, or even merely as their result, but should rather be seen as "integral to the production of the social" (Massey 1994: 4).

Indignad@s' "ability to exist in public space," apart from being a key component in the development of a common social position for the movement, also produced particular (re)actions from the state, thus demonstrating "the situated practices of space and place through which identities [and social relations] are continually reworked, contested, and reproduced" (Shome 2003: 43). After several weeks of occupation, the different camps established across Spanish cities were dismantled by the police, in some cases violently. As a result of these institutionally sponsored measures, the kinds of activities stimulated by Indignad@s eventually decreased in terms of number of participants, as well as size and location of spaces where the different meetings could take place. Thus, "members of the different assemblies […] ended up creating platforms, associations, co-operatives and political projects amongst other collectives born in the wake of the demonstration" (Martín Rojo 2014: 624), once again evidencing the intrinsic link between social and spatial dispositions.

In 2015, the Spanish government's "Ley de Seguridad Ciudadana" (Citizen's Security Law) was passed in a direct attempt to coercively ban the occupation of public spaces and collective actions such as *acampadas.*

This law, tellingly dubbed "Ley Mordaza" (Gag Law) by the political opposition (Garea 2015) de facto prevents citizens from exercising basic rights such as public manifestation of dissent, or documenting police practices through amateur videos. Due to its particularly repressive nature, it has been strongly criticized by organizations such as Amnesty International (Amnesty International 2015; Minder 2015). As a result of this legal measure, the Indignad@s were officially "rendered out of the legality of public space" (Shome 2003: 47) and thus potentially relegated to invisibility. These quick and harsh actions, and the clear institutional attempt to (re) position Indignad@s as illegitimate users of the spaces they previously occupied, reveal the important implications that (lack of) control over space has for the ways in which social movements may "move" through a symbolic dialogue with power (Cox 2014; Foucault 1980).

At a quick glance, therefore, it seems as though the space struggle enacted by Indignad@s—as a specific manifestation of a broader social struggle—resulted in a widening of the gap between state and civil society, rather than the longed-for equal distribution of resources, including spatial ones. As Goutsos and Polymeneas (2014) put in their reflections about the Syntagma Movement in Greece, certainly a too rigid link between a social movement and a particular place—such as a main plaza—could contribute to a weakening of the opportunities to affect broader social dynamics. Thus, if "the crucial question for socially defining who we are becomes where we are" (Goutsos and Polymeneas 2014: 32) being forcefully deprived of that essential "absolute space" (Harvey 2006a) can have dramatic consequences for a social movement. Such an observation also points to the need for a spatial perspective that "calls particular attention to relationality as a constitutive force," as opposed to an emphasis on place as the mere "backdrop to the interaction between different bodies marked by different identities" (Chávez 2010: 5).

Unlike the Syntagma Movement and other "occupy-based" initiatives, however, Indignad@s' particular circumstances led them to "move" to actively overcome the fixing trap of place, or the attaching of certain meanings and values to a particular (relatively marginal) location. Next, I show how this expansion was possible thanks to a further spatial "reterritorialization" beyond the plaza (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Martín Rojo 2014), and the "streets" more generally. As I illustrate below, with the formation of the political party Podemos and its associated performances of politics, the space struggles that informed and helped develop this political alternative in Spain expanded to include institutions such as Congress and Parliament, which, like the squares for Indignad@s, were symbolically

and materially reclaimed as "common" spaces. Thus, Indignad@s' space struggles, far from resulting in a defeat, literally and figuratively paved the way for Podemos' project. Through this move, street-based activism physically retreated backstage, while at the same time helping bring to the fore the idea that certain spaces—such as that of politics and its associated places—were not restricted to certain groups anymore, but could be thought of in terms of "the common" (García Agustín and Ydesen 2013).

4.2 Podemos' Performative Power: Transforming Political Culture Through Institutional Spaces

In March of 2014, Podemos was founded as a political party, thanks to the impulse of a group of organic intellectuals (Gramsci 1971) led by university professors Juan Carlos Monedero, Pablo Iglesias, and Carolina Bescansa. Podemos' main goal was to catalyze the mixed and productive street-based activity stirred up in the previous years and culminating in Indignad@s' demonstrations and encampments into a coherent and alternative political project that could also, eventually, "occupy" institutions (Briziarelli and Martínez Guillem 2016).

The chosen name for the party, "We can," signals a willingness to capitalize on the sense of empowerment emerging from virtual and physical plazas and take tactics of spatial occupation into the Spanish parliamentary system. The means utilized to initially intervene into the rigid two-party political system, such as Iglesias' participation in political talk shows in mainstream TV channels, as well as his leading role on the internet-based show, *La Tuerka*, signal the ways in which (new) media served as an important and needed mediator between the everyday and the institutional realms that both gave rise to and threatened to destabilize Podemos (see also Chap. 2, this volume). Only a few months after its constitution, the party gained considerable attention after its surprising success at the 2014 European elections, as it obtained 1.25 million votes and five seats in the European Parliament. This meteoric rise would be confirmed after the June 26, 2016, elections, when Podemos was able to gain support from over 20% of the Spanish voting population and obtained over 5 million votes and sixty-five parliamentary seats, thus officially becoming the second political force in Spain.

In this section, I examine the ways that, through a series of performative spatial practices functioning as a challenge to the dominant social order, Podemos was able to exert a series of pressures over sedimentary (structural) aspects of the political Spanish system, ultimately showing the

possibilities of a materially "determined" (in Williams' dialectical sense) "common culture," understood as "the creation of a condition in which the people as a whole participate in the articulation of meanings and values," with the consequent "removal of all the material obstacles to just this form of participation" (Williams 1989b: 36). To this end, I highlight the interaction between space and performance, showing the *creative and iterative* ways in which Podemos' deputies necessarily constructed these common politico-cultural spaces through their actions.

Drawing on work by Ervin Goffman (1959), my discussion is grounded in an understanding of "social structure and communication in terms of theatrical imagery" (Manning 2007: 178), and of social actors as "performers" who actively try to portray certain images of themselves. I also, however, incorporate Judith Butler's caveats with regard to this framework, thus acknowledging how individual actions are inextricably tied to the broader social residues that delimit them. As Butler explains, "the social norms that constitute our existence carry desires that do not originate with our individual personhood" (2004: 2). In this sense, performance "is subsumed within, and must always be connected to, performativity, to the citational practices which reproduce and subvert discourse, and which at the same time enable and discipline subjects and their performances" (Gregson and Rose 2000: 441).

This perspective helps illuminate how, confined by particular labels, we engage in and "reward" expected behaviors, while also avoiding and condemning those actions that seem to disrupt or question our learned assumptions about particular identities and their corresponding social situations. As I will show below, these general social dynamics are crucial to understanding specific performances in/of institutional spaces, as well as different reactions to them. It is thus Podemos' performative actions as products and producers of their newly gained parliamentary space that are of interest here. Much like Indignad@s did with the different squares, in terms of changing the cultural logics of demonstration through the permanent occupation of space, Podemos' recent performances in the Spanish Congress and Parliament have been geared toward challenging culturally commonsensical assumptions about how to "do politics."

Shortly after the December 2015 elections, the newly elected deputies of the different Spanish political parties participated in the ceremony known as *la jura del cargo* (oath of office). From the beginning, Podemos' representatives challenged, through different practices, the historically naturalized "formal" character of this kind of event, through which, as Bourdieu would put it, "structures are reconverted in systems of preferences" (1996: 15).

In this case, the physical and symbolic spaces of Parliament (inter)acted to form a structuring force, actively regulating communication practices, relationships, and social positions. Specifically, a commonsensical moral and instrumental call for "respectful demeanor" (Bourdieu 1996; Goffman 1959) was intrinsically attached to a series of expectations for *decorum* that delimited options of how to be seen or heard within institutions.

Rather than embracing this unquestioned *habitus*, Podemos' deputies engaged in different practices geared toward the material and symbolic reappropriation of this and other institutional spaces as a way to include "your voice in the Congress," in reference to the 5 million Spaniards who voted for them (Podemos.com). For example, many of Podemos' new deputes gave up their right, as members of Congress, to use an official government car, and chose instead to walk or ride their bikes to Congress (Podemos.com). Once there, they replaced the traditional acceptance speech, which only allowed for a small variation in the formula—I swear (or promise) to abide by the Constitution—with the statement "I promise to abide by the constitution *in order to change it; never again a country without its people*" (my emphasis).

In addition, many of these new delegates' (non-)verbal practices directly enacted the vocally expressed commitment to a kind of "change" that would place ordinary people closer to, if not within, the making of politics. Thus, they substituted suits, ties, leather bags, or traditional hairstyles with "common" artifacts such as jeans, backpacks, dreadlocks, or T-shirts with printed political messages (Domínguez 2016). They also engaged in public displays of affection such as hugging and kissing, used hand gestures such as the V sign or a raised fist, and showed a preference for informal terms or address—using the pronoun *tú*, as well as first names, to address their fellow congressmen and women.

A particularly symbolic moment embodying Podemos' attempt to radically rethink performances of politics was the kiss on the lips, in Congress, between Pablo Iglesias and Xavier Domènech, leader of En Comú Podem—the coalition grouping Podemos with other similar initiatives in Catalonia. After Domènech's speech in front of the members of Congress during the investiture debate, the two politicians hugged and then kissed, causing the consequent disorientation of many of those witnessing the act, both in Congress and via (social) media (García 2016). The "unconventional" display of affection between two men, regardless of their sexual orientation or the degree of premeditation, can be seen as a literal-specific, as well as broader-figurative queering of unreflective performances that avoid scrutiny because they "make sense" within dominant cultural logics

(Morris and Sloop 2006). Through their kiss, these two deputies thus drew attention to the ways in which institutional spaces are defined by and reinforce the interests of certain groups who, through their reiterated, ritualized, and reaffirmed practices (Butler 1993) try to fix the historical and cultural meanings of political practices.

As a whole, these actions capitalized on Podemos' newly gained access to certain physical spaces in order to reappropriate their symbolic dimensions, blurring the distinction between "frontstage" and "backstage" practices (Goffman 1959). Consequently, these previously restricted, "absolute" material locations were (re)constructed through performance as popular, which in turn functioned to reconfigure the party's—and its voters'—"relative" social position (Bourdieu 1996). As Gregson and Rose (2000: 434) explain, not only social actors, but also the spaces in which they act are "brought into being through performances and as a performative articulation of power." Thus, the different strategies outlined here show how Congress emerged as a site of struggle among different groups to impose their views on institutions and society as a whole. At the same time, the productive aspects of spatial practices emerge when we consider that it was only due to the institutionalized, exclusive links between a place such as Congress and a series of assumed (in)appropriate practices taking place in it that many of Podemos' gestures acquired particular meanings.

From a dominant reading of institutional spaces, exemplified by the party's critics, these actions were interpreted as a form of *postureo* or posing. As such, these commentators claimed, they were either not to be taken seriously, or condemned for their "degrading" effects (Alpañés 2016). The leader of the socialist party in Asturias, for example, claimed that "what they [Podemos] are doing is gesticulation, *postureo*, and to some degree degrading the institution" (Javier Fernández acusa a Podemos de "degradar" el Parlamento asturiano 2015). Similarly, critics of Carolina Bescansa's decision to bring and breastfeed her infant son at the inauguration of the legislature argued that such "gestures" and "political Adanism" were outdated, and contraposed this "saying" to the "doing" of "political measures" geared at work–life balance (Arantxa Tapia califica de "postureo" que Bescansa fuera al Congreso con su bebé 2016).

The recontextualization of *postureo* from the realm of social media, and Instagram more specifically, to describe Podemos' actions was thus an attempt to infuse them with negative connotations about lack of professionalism and superficiality, just as it tried to reaffirm the supposed location of performance outside of the realm of "real" politics. Importantly, such disputes and the ideological assumptions informing them were not

only revealed through isolated statements by politicians in different contexts; they also shaped the dynamics within the institutions at stake. Thus, recently, Congress' president scolded Podemos for wearing T-shirts with protest messages in Parliament, arguing that "this hemicycle is not a clothes line, it is the representation of all Spaniards. The institution and this hemicycle must be treated with respect" ("Pastor regaña a Podemos: 'esto no es un tendedero,'" 2017).

Such moves are indicative of a willingness to secure the traditional borders of political practice—a willingness that emerged from traditional parties' sense of ownership over the congressional space. From that privileged position, these attacks attempted to mark Podemos' performances as opportunistic, just as they obscured and normalized dominant practices. As a result, the "good citizenship" stance that, through Indignad@s, facilitated Podemos' emergence and development, was put into question within the specific spatial politics of institutions. These spatial politics interacted to create a distinction between "good" and "bad" deputies through "adequate" or "inadequate" practices. By trying to situate Podemos further away from the institutional "norm," these (re)signifying moves potentially hindered the party's potential to capitalize on its popular appeal.

Within Podemos' overall strategy of reappropriating the soil and symbols of institutions, however, these practices constituted a direct challenge to the dominant, unmarked—but equally performative—accepted practices that constituted certain spaces, such as Congress, through exclusion. As Carolina Bescansa put it, "It's time to make visible within institutions what's on the streets, and to make this chamber more similar to our country" (Manetto 2016). Likewise, Domènech referred to his controversial kiss with Iglesias as "having done something normal in the Congress, which is normal on the street" (Romo 2016). The struggle to provide this particular space with certain "meanings, concepts, values, and categories" was therefore crucial in enabling potential ways in which it could be "read and acted on and within," thus constructing a "basis for defining the conditions under which individuals and groups may (inter)act within that space" (Carrillo Rowe 2004). It also, and importantly, shows the co-constitution of the "cultural" and the "political" by which a political party may "draw on neighbourhood networks, workplace skills, popular music, local emotional repertoires and shared symbolic references" in order to be effective (Cox 2014).

As a whole, through their particular ways of (re)doing politics, the goal of Podemos' deputes was to deterritorialize the innovative practices that Indignad@s established in the plazas and reterritorialize them within institutions, embracing the tension between "the structures that provide

conditions and constraints on human action" and the ways in which "these largely unconsciously operative structures achieve a certain level of conscious awareness and articulation as individuals form themselves into collectivities and become genuine historical agents" (Surber 1998: 240). Podemos demonstrated the possibilities of this awareness through its powerful performances of politics as a manifestation of cultural (re)production and political transformation.

A last and particularly telling example of the ways broader social struggles take place through space struggles is the controversy that surrounded the process of assigning Congress seats to the different political forces after the general elections. As explained above, Podemos obtained sixty-five seats and aspired to form a strong and coherent block by situating its representatives in a visible area of the chamber, starting right behind the seats reserved for the government. However, and following a proposal by the Congress president, Podemos was eventually relegated to the last rows, and its members were separated onto different benches (Cruz et al. 2016). These practices of containment and control contributed to constitute Congress and its "others," marking Podemos' deputies as "out of place" (Shome 2003).

This decision, as well as the subsequent outrage and appeal by Podemos, shows the ways in which power relations are often negotiated through space and bodies (Shome 2003). Thus, Podemos' attempt to reterritorialize the Commons through particular performances of politics was countered, in this instance, with an effort to deprive its enactants of the needed visibility in institutional spaces that would allow them to reconfigure them. The reactionary measures taken by those whose dominant positions were perceived as threatened, as a parallel move to the repressive actions taken toward those demonstrating on the streets, sheds light on the intrinsic connection between the exercise of power and the (unequal) distribution of space (Foucault 1980). By attempting to relegate Podemos to the so-called *gallinero*, the Spanish political institutions countered the disruption of the commonsensical, acquired ways of doing politics with a measure geared at making sure that dissenting voices, by being attached to particular (less visible) locations, carried disparate symbolic weight.

As shown in this discussion, material spatial arrangements are producers of different kinds of communicative practices that (re)shape social relations. As such, they are a crucial terrain of struggle where those interested in challenging the broader social order, as well as those invested in continuity, inevitably collide. As Williams (1977) explains, it is through these frictions that change necessarily happens, because the reorganization of the social order has first and foremost to do with the kinds of relations that people are (not)

able to develop among themselves. To this, I would add that those relations necessarily happen *somewhere*. By enabling, regulating, sanctioning, and/or giving particular meanings to communicative practices, symbolic and material uses of space play a huge role in the extent to which emergent proposals of social organization are even conceived of and can be developed.

4.3 Conclusions: Hybrid Politics, Hybrid Spaces

In this chapter I argued for the need to pay more careful attention to spatial relations as a crucial component of the dialectic between social reproduction and transformation, and more specifically in relation to the emergence and consolidation of a progressive political alternative in Spain. To this end, I examined Indignad@s and Podemos' co-constitutive relationship with places such as the plazas or the Spanish Congress, as well the broader spatial struggles over civic and institutional spaces that they enabled. Following Harvey's call, I shifted my guiding question from "what is space?" to "how is it that different human practices create and make use of different conceptualizations of space?" (Harvey 2006a: 126). Accordingly, I emphasized how specific practices—such as performances of parliamentary politics—(re)create place and space, understood not as objective starting points, but as the subjective results of larger societal processes.

Through this framework I highlighted how, first of all, ideologically informed understandings of (im)proper uses of space, and the cultural practices that they help justify, have an important impact on the extent to which emergent forces may find their way into the public eye. Thus, on the one hand, my analysis revealed how particular collective initiatives, such as a social movement or a political party, may emerge from the friction between the perceived need to engage in alternative cultural practices, and the extent to which material spatial arrangements allow for those practices to take place. As Williams puts it, "the minds of men [sic] are shaped by their whole experience, and the most skillful transmission of material which this experience does not confirm will fail to communicate" (Williams 1963: 301). It was this "failing" moment in the Spanish socio-political moment, and the window of opportunity for cultural change that it provided, that this chapter tried to understand and explain.

On the other hand, and looking into the future, this dialectical understanding of spatial dynamics also sheds light on the possibilities as well as challenges that emerge from contradictory experiences. In the case of Indignad@s, as of 2017, the movement has just celebrated its fifth anniversary with demonstrations in plazas all over Spain, where protesters voiced

very similar demands to those first heard in 2011. However, interestingly, these meetings also exhibited a push to internationalize all the different and localized struggles that were initially grounded in a particular national context. Thus, the main motto of the demonstration called for a "struggle without borders" as "the only possible way." Together with this centrifugal move blurring national boundaries, Indignad@s have also been increasingly receptive to the centripetal impulses of more peripheral groups. A particularly important one is that of immigrants, whose concerns in 2011 were mostly absorbed into other *colectivos*. However, in 2016, many of them stepped into the front lines of demonstrations in several cities, coupling visibility with their own demands under the general slogan: "Immigrants against cuts. Papers for all" (Martínez Guillem 2017).

In a current historical context in the European Union marked by the so-called "refugee crisis" and the (re)turn, in many countries, toward extreme Right political options informed by racist and fascist ideologies, the increasing plurality of movements like Indignad@s could mark an important alternative move toward cultural logics that place common access to resources at the basis of their identitarian claims. Such an alternative, as Agustín and Jørgesen (2016) argue, implies connecting migrant struggles for rights to anti-austerity struggles to "ensure the conformation and redefinition political identities in defense of the common."

In the case of Podemos, we can observe how its inherently hybrid nature marked not only the conditions for its consolidation as a coherent group, but also constitutes the basis of its moments of internal crisis. The potential risks of these inevitably continued tensions were last apparent at the second national citizens' assembly for the party, Vistalegre II, held in February 2017. In this meeting, three different "projects" for Podemos' organizational structure and overall political strategy were presented and debated over. However, it was mostly the disagreements exemplified by Pablo Iglesias and Íñigo Errejón's proposals that evidenced the internal divisions in Podemos. Beyond the expected capitalization on this schism by mainstream Spanish media, it is important to note that the discourses around and by those involved in the dispute often drew on and (re)introduced a binary opposition between "state" and "civil society" that threatened to undermine Podemos' capacity to "construct a people"—to borrow from Ernesto Laclau—with a broad enough base to constitute a hegemonic political alternative (Gramsci 1971; see also Briziarelli and Martínez Guillem 2015).

From a spatial perspective, we can understand the different discursive strategies deployed by Iglesias and Errejón, as well as their (in)ability to create a "collective will" (Gramsci 1971), as shaped by particular assumptions

about the "proper" spaces of Podemos and the degree to which different symbolic and material locations for the party are (still) seen as essential. Thus, Iglesias' project privileged Podemos' original pull from street-based activism, whereas Errejón situated the strength of his "Podemos ganador" mostly within institutions. The effects of Iglesias' victory and his significant closing statement at Vistalegre II, "*Nos vemos en las calles*," are already palpable in activist-oriented initiatives such as the demonstration against corruption or *la trama* organized by Podemos for March 25, 2017, or the related *tramabús*—a bus that attempts to shame corrupted politicians as it visits different locations in Spain (Gil 2017; "Podemos saca a las calles su tramabús" 2017).

However, such splits risk neglecting the creative possibilities of in-between spaces and their accompanying "disorientation devices" that, as Sarah Ahmed explains, "make things lose their place, which means the loss of coherence of a certain world" (2006: 254). As the analysis of Podemos' performances of politics demonstrated, the greatest transformative power of this organization may lie in its capacity to rethink dominant logics away from traditional understandings of *both* (reformist) institutions and (revolutionary) activism. This disorienting possibility, however, needs to fully embrace these two elements as a way to show that institutions can be revolutionary and revolution can be institutionalized.

In the case of Podemos, the combination of creative and iterative performances of space, and their tense interaction with the residual elements of the Spanish political system and its institutions, derived into creative blendings or hybrid spaces that actively tried to relocate politics in the realm of everyday life. For example, the recent initiative labeled "el Congreso en tu plaza" (Congress in your square), took members of Podemos back to the streets to share their experiences in Parliament, as well as answer questions from the audience in an effort to "render themselves accountable" (El Congreso en tu plaza 2016). Similarly, Podemos built or restructured spaces in different Spanish cities that are dedicated to "political and cultural" events such as talks, debates, exhibitions, film screenings, or activities for children (La morada llega a Valencia 2016).

The constitution of these blended spaces can be seen as one more step toward what Williams (1989a) referred to as a "common culture," understood as an "educated and participating democracy" (37) "not given ready-made as in, say, the great books tradition or in the remaking of the refined mores of elite pasts, but instead constituted in the inventory of exchanges between opposing classes and groups in human societies" (Pina 2008: 6). In this sense, the "common" does not have to be artificially created, or imposed from above, but it can be grounded in the needs and

activities of people as they manage their own resources, because "the culture of a people can only be what all its members are engaged in creating in the act of living" (Williams 1989b: 36). It is through these everyday "ordinary" social relations, such as struggles over space, that broader structures may be (re)constituted. This is what Homi Bhabha (1988: 9) calls "the 'hybrid' moment of political change," where "the transformational value of change lies in the re-articulation, or translation, of elements that are *neither the One* […] *nor the Other* […] *but something else* besides which contests the terms and territories of both." This is, in sum, and as Lefebvre would put it, the unguaranteed possibility of creating new social spaces that can account for new social relations, and vice versa.

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PART III

Concepts

CHAPTER 5

Podemos' Twofold Assault on Hegemony: The Possibilities of the Post-Modern Prince and the Perils of Passive Revolution

Marco Briziarelli

The Gramscian recipe for revolution is certainly not of an explosive kind. In the propaedeutic stage of the so-called "war of position" (Gramsci 1975: 802) especially, it requires a constant rearrangement of relations of forces—striving with delicate equilibria and regressive tendencies—and a patient permeation of the social fabric and social consciousness.

For this reason, Podemos' almost irresistible initial rise may have appeared to many as the dream of the frustrated Gramscian militant coming true: finally a (war of) movement on the left! Podemos gave life to a social and political initiative that emerged when all the stars of radical struggle seemed to have propitiously aligned: an economic crisis turning into an organic crisis of hegemony and political legitimation; a state that, losing its capability to reproduce consent, increasingly resorted to using coercive and repressive apparatus; the cathartic capability of the people affected by the crisis to sublimate the loss of material life chances into a political mobilization; and, finally, the emergence of what appeared to be a national popular front.

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To my enthusiastic eyes, it looked like the "beautiful February revolution of 1848" (Marx 1871: 305):

> the revolution of universal sympathy, because the contradictions which erupted in it against the monarchy were still *undeveloped* and peacefully dormant, because the social struggle which formed their background had only achieved an ephemeral existence, an existence in phrases, in words,

which started with the spectacular manifestation of dissent of May 15, 2011, and continued through Podemos' first electoral victory at the European Elections.

However, as frequently happens, inner contradictions started to surface, with unpredictable outcomes. Mindful of that, in this chapter, I claim that some of those internal tensions were created by the unstable accommodations of two perspectives: respectively the Gramscian and the Laclau-Mouffian take on hegemony and their repercussions for practical politics. I will argue that those frictions currently make Podemos walk a fine line between the progressive possibilities of a post-modern prince and the regressive perils of a passive revolution.

On the one hand, the political organization seems to have internalized several Gramscian practical principles: the assault of the "integral state" as the combination of civil and political society; the consequent expansion of the struggle on multiple fronts such as political, economic, cultural, and social; and, finally, the amalgamation of politicized masses and organic intellectuals into a national popular movement. On the other hand, Podemos has also incorporated elements of Laclau and Mouffe's analysis: the need to go beyond class and politico-economic essentialism; the embracing of a contingent, unstable, and rhetorically/discursive hegemony; and, finally, the replacement of a well-defined ideology with transversalism and aggregating empty signifiers. As I will show later, the result was a combination of Marxist and post-structuralist elements and two dialectally united ontological visions of the world: one emphasizing social unity and one emphasizing social difference.

While the initial success of the organization appeared to have positively tested such a compound reading of hegemony and political praxis, its more recent development and series of political *impasses* may have actually shown its problematic synthesis. It took those contradictions almost three years to fully develop though. In fact, in November 2014, in one of the most interesting episodes of the TV program *Fort Apache*, Podemos' leaders stated

the continuity of thought between Gramsci's social bloc and Laclau's populism, and proposed as a positive historical referent Togliatti's reading of Gramsci and the Italian Communist Party (PCI) as the role model of an articulating agent of the subaltern (Rosso and Dal Maso 2014).

However, in early 2017, in occasion of Vista Alegre II citizens' assembly, in the midst of the 'less beautiful'stage of the 'revolution,' part of the current internal debate between the two factions clustered around leaders Pablo Iglesias and Íñigo Errejón could be explained in terms of the unravelling tensions already intrinsic in the initial accommodation between Gramsci and Laclau/Mouffe, two main competing models of twenty-first century Left radicalism (Fomenti 2017).

In order to advance my reflection, I will first evaluate salient traits of Gramscian and Laclau-Mouffe's competing understandings of hegemony. Then, I will try to make sense of their combination in terms of two different emphases on 'unity' and 'difference' via the notions of a post-modern prince and passive revolution.

5.1 Podemos and Gramscian Hegemony

The fascination that Podemos' intelligentsia has had for Gramsci's perspective on hegemony can be explained by three main reasons. First of all, as both Iglesias and Errejón have frequently claimed (e.g. Errejón 2014b, 2015; Iglesias 2009, 2015), Gramsci provides the basis for a historicist analysis that takes into account the specific elements of Western capitalist societies, thus approaching more closely the Spanish context. Second, the force of such a Gramscian perspective derives from its synthesis of practical considerations and theoretical reflections, hence offering to alternative political projects such as Podemos fairly concrete insights into 'what is to be done.' Lastly, in relation with the unsettling stances Podemos leaders held against traditional Marxist theory, Gramsci's critical and anticonformist views delivered a powerful corrective to the most hypostatic and reductive facets of traditional Marxism, replacing it with highly fluid concepts that seem to more effectively understand the complexities of social reality.

In sum, Gramsci delivered Podemos' founders with tools that could be effectively utilized to understand and act upon Spain. I will briefly illustrate how Podemos has drawn from Gramsci's notion hegemony, both in order to produce diagnostics of the Spanish social and political context as well as pragmatic tools to implement its political project.

5.1.1 The Organic Crisis of the Spanish Regime

As the inaugurating 'manifesto'of the organization "Mover ficha" shows (2014: 1), Podemos framed the Spanish political context by a narrative of an organic crisis in the Gramscian sense, which started as economic recession that successively turned into a crisis of hegemony: a "profound crisis of legitimacy" that has "left citizens abandon to their own fate." The most critical aspect of such a crisis was the weakening of the cementing function of dominant ideology, the link between state and civil society, and the incorporating capability of the ruling class of subaltern classes' interests and views.

In fact, for Podemos, the tendency of the Spanish state to repress protests, the adoption of "austerity" measures, the further implementation of the 2012 Reforma Laboral, and the approbation of a package of new laws named *Seguridad Ciudadana* and *Ley Mordaza*, were clear signs of the increasing difficulties of the state in reproducing consent by maintaining those dynamic balances between force and consent that defuse larger conflicts in civil society.

Such a reading of the crisis has been consistently present in Podemos' political discourse. However, looking at the most recent documents produced for the occasion of Vista Alegre II, while it still continues to play a major role in Iglesias' rhetoric, it mostly faded away in Errejón's proposal. Iglesias' *Plan 2020* expands the frame of crisis to neoliberal globalization and the European project, and depicts Podemos as the subject that can effectively respond to it. Conversely, Errejón suggests that the state of emergency created by crisis should be replaced by a concrete and pragmatic plan for Podemos to seize power.

5.1.2 Podemos' Integral Struggle

According to Gramsci, in times of crisis, when the Marxian 'base' seems to lose its grip on the superstructures, new ideas, perspectives, and practices emerge. That is the case with Podemos' innovative project, which advances a proposal for a new configuration of the democratic process, rejects the model of neoliberal globalization, and aspires to "renationalize" key realms of social life via a revived welfare state.

The analyses of both Podemos' theorists Iglesias (2015) and Errejón (2014a) coincide in the conclusions that the crisis alone would not have automatically brought change but required a carefully pondered action,

because Western capitalist social formations showed numerous times to be "resistant to catastrophic 'eruptions' of the immediate economic element" (Gramsci 1971: 235). The inference was that in order to radically transform Spanish society Podemos could not simply get involved in counter-hegemonic practices but needed to seize power by building an alternative hegemony, which implied that the "conquest for the skies" (Iglesias 2015: 93) had to be carried out at an all-pervading levels (Gramsci 1971: 244).

Accordingly, Podemos moved beyond 15M's 'private' associationism and the pure institutional politics inside La Moncloa. In this sense, one of the great achievements of Podemos in a Gramscian sense was to elevate the confrontation initiated by 15M with the Regime of '78 at the level of civil society to the combined level of civil and political society, that is, the integral state, which is reflected by the hybrid initial constitution of the organization: acting as a political party as well as a grassroots movement.

Such a multilayered perspective mirrors an understanding of power that directly refers to Gramscian hegemony, which is understood as

> the "spontaneous" consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is "historically" caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production (Gramsci 1971: 12)

The insight that Podemos took from Gramsci's definition consisted in treating power as deriving from a combination of conditions that allow a given class/social group to both dominate through forcing the system, and lead through consent in the historic-specific circumstance of a given social formation.

While formally rejecting the idea of embracing clear ideological stands de facto, Podemos' discursive elements of *sentido comun*, *ciudadania*, *soberania*, and *justicia* constituted an ideological terrain upon which to build the political consciousness of its constituencies. It represented the way Podemos' partially sacrificed its "corporate" interests in the name of a construction of interclass alliances, that is, a historical bloc:

> an historical congruence between material forces, institutions and ideologies, or broadly, an alliance of different class forces politically organized around a set of hegemonic ideas that gave strategic direction and coherence

> to its constituent elements. Moreover, for a new historical bloc to emerge, its leaders must engage in conscious planned struggle. Any new historical bloc must have not only power within the civil society and economy, it also needs persuasive ideas, arguments and initiatives that build on, catalyse and develop its political networks and organization—not political parties such. (Gill 2001: 58)

Thus, the notion of a historic bloc connects with the attainment of an organic ideology, that is, the terrain on which both practices and consciousness provide a condition of possibility for a ruling project.

For Gramsci, one of these conditions consists of the systematic production and reproduction of consent:

> consent organised, and not generic and vague as it is expressed in the instant of elections. The State does have and request consent, but it also "educates" this consent, by means of the political and syndicalist associations, these, however, are private organisms, left to the private initiative of the ruling class. (1971: 259)

In other words, the organicity of such an ideology is not only relational to the hegemonic class but also to the articulation of ideological elements shared by different classes and the constituting of cultural agencies within civil society, such as, in the case of Podemos, Circulos Culturales, the production of mediatic content, street parades, and festivals.

Following such reasoning, Podemos did not limit itself to antagonizing *la casta* but, more constructively, intended to carry out an intellectual and moral reform based on the forging of a 'common sense,' a 'political sense,' and a new sense of sociability based on fraternity and solidarity (Briziarelli 2016). Thus, for Podemos, the first task diagnostically wise, was to detect how the current ruling class could reproduce its consent. *La casta* then appears as a ruling social bloc, an alliance among different powers such as political, financial, and industrial ones, in order for them to benefit from one another.

Such an analysis naturally evolved over time. Interestingly enough, while Podemos intensively used the term *La Casta* in its first year of operations, by late 2015 was already almost abandoned in Podemos' political discourse as the "floating signifier" could not grasp the complexity of a scenario in which Podemos joined institutional politics. It is not by accident that, in recent months Podemos has switched from *la casta* to *la*

trama, which was understood as a social plot, therefore allowing a more complex reading of the structure of power and its capability to create consent. *La trama*, in fact, describes a social arrangement rather than an isolated class, thus larger than "*mafia del canapé*" (Lopez de Miguel 2017), that is, an entire regime defined by power and corruption.

5.1.3 Podemos' National Popular Element

Since its beginnings Podemos established itself as a national popular project, which, in Gramsci's terms, refers to a dialectical unity formed by the intellectually organic element (the "national" elements) and the "popular" element. Hence, the "national popular" represents the combination of the revolutionary potential of "spontaneous philosophy" (Gramsci 1971: 422), that is, a daily empirical engagement with social reality, and the theoretical consciousness of intellectuals that contributed to the refinement and systematization of the "chaotic aggregate of disparate conceptions […] of common sense" (422) into a "good sense"; that is, a new conception of the world (323).

One particular function of Podemos' intellectuals was to create a theoretical-practical environment, approaching a new kind of common sense, that could act as a historic bloc (1971: 443) and which "succeeds in creating a system of alliances which allows it to mobilise the majority of the population against capitalism and the bourgeois state." As commented elsewhere (Briziarelli 2016), Podemos' national popular approach was particularly evident in its discourse, which attempted to combine a political language that tried to be vernacular and accessible with theoretical concepts.

In the context of the national popular front, the founders of Podemos acted as quasi-organic intellectuals, understood in Gramscian sense as (1971: 9): "in general the whole social stratum that exercises organizational functions in the broad sense, both in the field of production, and in the cultural one, and in the politico-administrative one."

Linked to the educational function of organic intellectuals are their tasks as "constructors, organizers, permanent persuaders" (1971: 5), and the intense use of media to popularize Podemos' political discourse, which was understood as

> the most dynamic part of the ideological structure, but not the only one. Everything that directly or indirectly influences or could influence public

> opinion belongs to it: libraries, schools, associations and clubs of various kinds, even architecture, the layout of streets and their names. (Gramsci 1996: 53)

For Gramsci, both interpersonal and mediated communication represent a mode of expression of a given class/social group, and the plurality of different linguistic codes reflects the social struggle among different groups (Ives 2004). Thus, the use of means of communication signals an operationalization of the Gramscian assumption that language constitutes a supreme terrain for political praxis, “an integral conception of the world” (Gramsci 1975: Q5 123).

For instance, Podemos capitalized on its media-savvy founder Iglesias and his usage of TV to broadcast political information and discussion. Iglesias in 2010 created *La Tuerka* and *Fort Apache* as political programs that allowed the experimentation and refinement of Podemos’ political communication strategies. Both the use of media and the rhetorical activity of intellectuals are indeed aspects of the national popular project of uniting the theoretical consciousness of the intelligentsia with intuitive, commonsensical, and spontaneous feeling.

As we shall see in the next section, while Laclau and Mouffe share with Gramsci the idea of implementing an alternative hegemonic project via discursive practices and ideological struggle, that reading is also influenced by very different epistemological and ontological assumptions.

5.2 Podemos and Laclau and Mouffe’s Hegemony

In its initial stage, when the emergence of the party also required an explicit confrontation with its theoretical foundations, Podemos suggested a powerful cross-fertilization between Gramsci, Laclau, and Mouffe. I only share in part such a position, as I interpret the “school of Essex” perspective as constituting both an important historicization of Gramsci but also a significant departure from the basic presuppositions of the notion of hegemony.

On the one hand, there is a noteworthy continuum between the three thinkers that cannot be dismissed: their common profound historicist sensibility; their rejection of hypostatic theorizations of the social field, which is founded on the conceptual tension between the centripetal forces that generate social “unity” and the centrifugal forces that generate social “difference”; the complication of social determination that acknowledges the

combination of structural constrains over historical agency; the renewed importance of the ideological battleground; and, finally, the need to politicize and mobilize the "great masses."

Furthermore, the examination of what has been considered the most disputed point between those thinkers (Howarth 2015), namely the category of class, reveals an interesting degree of affinity. On the one hand, compared to Gramsci's preoccupation for the proletariat as the revolutionary subject of the subaltern, Laclau and Mouffe abandon class analysis as the pivotal instrument to understand social reality and assert "the rejection of privileged points of rupture" and "the acceptance of the plurality and indeterminacy of the social" (Gramsci 1985: 152). However, on the other hand, Gramsci anticipated Laclau and Mouffe's preoccupation, by implicitly problematizing traditional class reductionism via concepts such as the historical bloc, as, for the Italian thinker, social antagonism materializes in terms of two competing hegemonic projects socially based on dynamic class alliances rather than singular class formations.

Therefore, confronting Gramsci with Laclau and Mouffe, my intention is not to remain in the realm of the tedious debate on the ideological purity of the Essex scholars, as I align with Howarth (2016) by interpreting Laclau and Mouffe's intension in terms of reviving and extrapolating pre-existing concepts as tools to implement radical politics in late capitalist societies. Instead, I interrogate whether Podemos' combination of two different sets of ontological assumptions can be really compatible both at the logical and historical-political level.

While Gramsci fought orthodoxy even to the point of emphasizing the "historical" rather than the "materialist" element in his take on historical materialism:

> one should put the accent on the first term—"historical"—and not on the second, which is of metaphysical origin. The philosophy of praxis is absolute historicism, the absolute secularization and this-sidedness of thought, an absolute humanism of history (1975 Q11§27, 1971: 465),

thus echoing the radical contingency conveyed by Laclau and Mouffe's approach to hegemony, that a move was made in order to avoid the paradoxical idealization of matter (i.e. vulgar materialism) not to reject historical materialism.

Conversely, Laclau and Mouffe' post-structuralist view (1985) discards the vision of society as intelligible and determined object in its

totality, and defines it instead as an open field, transitorily constituted by articulated discursive practices. Therefore, Laclau and Mouffe's ontology is characterized by the absence of basic tenants of historical materialism: no central principles of social life such as historically determined relations of production of social life, no grand narratives informed by dialectical dynamics, no synthetic intelligibility of society such as the one provided by the notion of totality, no moral or epistemic authority such as the one provided by class struggle, no sense of determination between definable social structures such as "base" and "superstructure" or as classes.

Their radical democratic project assumes that the heterogeneous, precarious, and volatile subaltern, which is formed by people who feel they have fallen outside society's social contract, has replaced the proletariat as revolutionary subject. Drawing on Schmitt's postulation (2007) that a given society cannot produce or be produced by common goals, common culture, and a common social project, the two thinkers regard the social and political fields as the result of multiple poles of interests or social demands. Consequently, even the traditional idea of the general social contract or the collective will that directs Gramsci does not apply here.

As per the previous section on Gramsci, in order to elucidate how Podemos operationalizes Laclau and Mouffe's hegemonic vision, I will examine their take both at the level of diagnostics and pragmatics.

5.2.1 The Opening of the Field and the Emptying of the Signifiers

As per Gramsci, Laclau and Mouffe's narrative of social change starts with a hegemonic crisis that leaves important aggregative elements of society unsettled. Those elements are discursive in nature and are defined as system of communicative-oriented practices of representation and signification that can engender social identities, thus potentially recomposing an otherwise open and disjointed social field. Discourses are, for the two authors, articulatory terrains, linking linguistic and extralinguistic elements (Howarth 2015). Discourses create identities by providing the subjects with occasion for affinity with desired elements such as a *Justicia*, a charismatic leader such as Iglesias, or antagonized objects/subjects, such as a common enemy like *La casta*. A key aspect of their understanding of discursive practices is that their articulatory capability is always incomplete

and temporary, "never exist[ing] in the form of simply *given* and *delimited* positivity" (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 110).

While for Gramsci, following Hegelian dialectics, social antagonism arises from progressively more developed class identities that manifest proportionally to the emergence of social contradictions, for Laclau and Mouffe those identities are consistently fluid and their antagonism follows the same fluidity (Knopps 2007).

In the anti-essentialist theoretical environment of Laclau and Mouffe(1985), discourse approaches metaphysical essence because no element of social reality seems to escape its discursive realm. Even when apparently non-discursive elements of social reality are examined, they emerge as "more or less complex forms of differential positions among the object, which do not arise from a necessity external to the system structuring them, and which can only be conceived as discursive articulations" (1985: 107).

In a fashion approaching circular logic, discourses become politically meaningful in their articulatory function, by establishing relations among elements such as identity, when that is modified as a result of the articulatory practice. Thus, especially for Laclau, discursive articulations are possible due to the fact that the social and political field and the psyche develop through homological structures (Howarth 2015); however, it is not clear what generates those homological structures, without recurring to the metaphysics of presence of discourse.

Returning to the epochal occasion of a hegemonic crisis that historically concerns Podemos, signifiers that previously united the field lose significance and, as a consequence of that, social dispute and protest arise. Such a general impeachment of the establishment opens up the possibility of articulating a wide and inclusive popular front, overcoming any preexistent allegiances.

As Errejón claims (2015), in his summer workshop "*Seminario Sobre Hegemonia y Discurso*," an alternative hegemonic articulation is not simply linking elements or summing them up, but combining then in such a way that they form something entirely new, so that their value is not "added but rather multiplied." Alternative hegemony requires an important degree of novelty then, because the crisis of existing hegemony demands that even older counter-hegemonic initiatives had to be overcome as well. In the case of Podemos, the political discourses of the past, marked by traditional ideologies (e.g. Communism, fascism, and liberalism), that is, the axis of Left–Right, had to be replaced by transversal discourses. In his "Le Monde Diplomatique" essay, Errejón (2014c) explains the ways in

which Podemos has challenged the "taboos of the classical Left" and redefined "the sides (the identities), the terms, and the battleground itself." These new dichotomies, he writes, "aspire … to isolate the elites and generate a new identification against them" (2014c).

As noted, Laclau and Mouffe think that hegemonic crises are, first of all, an *impasse* of signification, as the meanings at the base of the chain of equivalence of the historic bloc start losing sense. Then, the protests that follow the decomposition of the previous chain of equivalence, as well as the emergence of new demands, reflect a struggle to resignify those meanings in order to establish a new discursive societal arrangement. In this sense, almost everything Podemos did, especially at the beginning, was meant to reappropriate and resignify elements of public political discourse. Thus, the appropriation of public spaces such as squares and theaters rather private venues such as hotels or conference halls, the specific style of clothing of its leaders that was meant to recharacterize their political ethos with vernacularity, and, finally, the way Podemos *diputados* inhabited and actively performed in the space of Spanish Congress were all (re)significant.

5.2.2 Hegemony and a Populist Rearticulation of the Field

As already suggested, Laclau and Mouffe consider hegemony to be accomplished when "a particular social force assumes the representation of a totality that is radically incommensurable with it" (1985: x) because it reconfigures the social field into something new rather than simply summing the allied forces around the hegemonic group, thus a "political construction rather than a common underlying essence" (1985: 65), which is externally articulated by a common antagonism, and perceived as conflict and moral and psychological involvement (Stavrakakis 2007).

In the case of Podemos, such an understanding of hegemony has meant to "re-take the centre of the table" (Gonzalez 2016), which refers to controlling the cardinal point for a new chain of equivalence that transversally cuts across the political scenario (Iglesias 2015). In this context, hegemony represents both the process through and the accomplishment of universalizing the party's agenda across the social field, thus creating an incomplete contested and contingent new arrangement, a construction of a new meaning (Errejón 2016).

However, the retaking the center of the table also describes a complex process in which the previous hegemonic order can try to recuperate the

situation by providing renewed meaning to the strategic signifiers. In the Spanish case, there at least two important instances. First of all, Rajoy's government, after an initial repressive attitude toward the social protests, tried to engage in the signification struggle over, for instance, the terms *populismo*, *separatismo*, and *terrorismo*. That seems to prove that even a successful articulation such as Podemos' stands as only a transitory construction consistently facing new social circumstances creating new demands, new tensions, and new needs to resignify. In this sense, a telling example of such an open struggle over meaning during the last few years has been provided by the newspaper *El País*—and its transformation from a bourgeois agent, with a critical voice *à la* Habermas' bourgeois public sphere, to a mere ideological state apparatus—constantly and effectively trying to reframe and resignify Podemos. The other example, that I will develop more in detail later on, is Ciudadanos, which appropriated and capitalized on elements of Podemos' initiative.

However, when the enterprise of retaking the center of the table positively develops, it succeeds when accomplishing a temporarily stable system of articulation of social demands and different identities. However, at this point, Laclau and Mouffe's hegemony competes with notion of "people." The nature of the relationship between hegemony and the populist element is not in fact clear: Do they coexist in the same framework? Both signal the accomplishment of a chain of equivalence but they do not necessarily coincide. As Anderson suggests, they may describe the same process in the different stages of Laclau and Mouffe's reflection, according to which "hegemony" is prevalently used in the theoretical apparatus provided by *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985), which then turns into "people" in Laclau's *Populist Reason* (2005).

While the two notions are understood as accomplishment of both politicizing and then mobilizing the subaltern by means of strategic alliances and aggregative discourses against a common enemy (Thomassen 2016), in relation to the particular perspective of this chapter, the interpretation of "people" gradually replacing "hegemony" may confirm a further departure from the original ontological environment in which Gramscian hegemony was conceived. It thus confirms the significant distance between the two definitions of the term, which, as I will argue later on, marks the distance between two different emphases: "*unity in difference*" and "*difference in unity*."

In the case of Podemos, populism meant, first of all, the repoliticization of the masses that, in the last few decades, felt alienated by the political

process. The political party successfully resignified what it meant to be involved into politics by linking politics to enthusiasm (Iglesias 2014a), as well as by dichotomizing the field between the ruling class *La casta* and the ruled "multitude" *Elpueblo*, with its socially transformative potential encapsulated in its *Elsentido común* (Iglesias 2014b).

Such a process required an intensive use of means of communication in order to materialize those signifiers against other signifiers through images, in people, in performance, because "from our point of view, politics is not only about listening; we must also speak and create" (Errejón 2014a, b, c). Those dichotomies were purposely conceived to be broad and transversal in order to facilitate the chain of equivalence among different social realities in Spain in an allegedly post-ideological context.

The presence of competing signifiers signals the presence of a vastly fragmented social field. For instance, in an article titled "Trench Warfare and Political Strategy" (2015), Iglesias reproposes the Gramscian concept of war of position reinterpreted in Laclau's terms: a social field in which multiple groups bring forth their social demands in which several fronts and confrontation intersect each other. In this sense, Podemos' take on populism represents a way to overcome the heterogeneity and contingency of such trench warfare by transversally constructing a chain of equivalence through powerful mediators, the so-called empty signifiers.

In such a discourse Pablo Iglesias' persona embodies a central signifier, explaining that Podemos intended "to aggregate the new demands generated by the crisis around a mediatic leadership, capable of dichotomizing the political space" (Iglesias 2015). The role of the charismatic leader also catalyzes the psychological investment of Podemos supporters; in fact, based on Lacan's theory of *jouissance*, politics becomes the drive toward desired objects and subjects (Thomassen 2016).

5.3 The Fine Line Between Post-Modern Prince and Passive Revolution

As already mentioned, both Gramsci and Laclau–Mouffe's approaches consider hegemony to be built on the dialectical combination of "unity" of the social, economic, ideological fields and contingent "difference" that constantly cuts across, undermines, but also enables the former. However, the two hegemonies vary in terms of the relative weight of unifying and differentiating components, and therefore tensions may arise when we

consider them fused in Podemos' project. I consider the *unity in difference* for Laclau and Mouffe and *difference in unity* for Gramsci. The former emphasizes the capability to mobilize and functionally articulate difference, the latter emphasizes the capability of hegemony to make a single cultural climate. Accordingly, in this section, I will argue that the alternative prevalence of different mixtures of those hegemonies can alternatively create the conditions for a post-modern prince or a passive revolution.

Unity in difference (Laclau and Mouffe) and *difference in unity* (Gramsci) imply ontological presuppositions, and the political trajectory of Gramsci and Laclau and Mouffe produce two essentially different visions of the world, which currently, as Fomenti recently suggested (2017), may inform part of the friction between the two internal factions inside Podemos in the context of Vista Alegre II. Those variances are particularly evident in the part played by discourse in the two hegemonies.

On the one hand, while Gramsci does not mention it, the closest system of signification, representation, and mediation of reality to 'discourse' may possibly be his interpretation of language, which synthetizes most practical and ideological aspects of discourse. He regards communicative practices toward hegemony as "the question of collectively attaining a single cultural 'climate'" (1975 Q10§44), thus emphasizing unity over difference.

From the point of Gramscian language, hegemony appears as a configuration of unity of the idiosyncratic ways in which everyone speaks based on his/her social and historical circumstances. It is consolidated into a "normative grammar [that] indicates the unification of a given territory and culture under a 'governing class'" (1985: 181). Accordingly, if Gramsci's core research consists of the theoretical and historical investigation of the conditions necessary to create a collective will out of a socially and culturally disjointed social field, then language consists of "an indispensable constitutive factor" (Lo Piparo 1979: 24) in order to forge "a multiplicity of fragmented wills, a cultural-social unity" (27).

The social homologies needed to create such a unity come both from "objective" and "subjective" factors. Objectively, based on historical materialist assumptions, Gramsci considers social reality to be marked by a condition of general translatability across different social realms, idioms, practices, and ideologies, which derives from a common experience of material production of social life taking in place in structurally parallel

social relations, such as the condition of working, exploitation, subalternity. Subjectively, unity derives from the successful agency of a specific political project that builds a historic bloc by showing, rather than constituting as in the Laclau and Mouffe vision, the existence of those foundational links among the subaltern.

On the other hand, Laclau and Mouffe's hegemony presupposes "unity in difference," a social field articulated by distinct social demands from different groups that can be articulated by chains of equivalence. As already noted, the distance between "unity in difference" and "difference in unity" is relative and a matter of degree; however, they do indeed ontologically differ because, according to the former, unity is constructed immanently and stands as a positive unification of difference of substantially similar life conditions. Conversely, in the second case, unity is more properly understood as articulation, which is constructed transcendentally, in the sense that Laclau and Mouffe's "account of articulation of elements was purely negative, based on the essentialist theoreticist notion that each moment would relate to every other solely as an 'other'" (Sanbonmatsu 2004: 183).

There are two important united but distinct levels of "difference" in Laclau and Mouffe's envisioning. On the one hand, the social field is characterized by its heterogeneity and radical tendency toward change, so difference stems both from the multiplicity of social experience and different positionality, as well as from the fact that those realities and positionalities rapidly mutate in time. On the other, they also understand difference as *différance*, as a Derridean deferral of meaning, which ultimately implies the structural undecidability of the social field and the fact that such a field lacks any central social determinant.

So, consequently, the question for Podemos consists of whether or not it can really escape the unsettling politics of meaning that potentially get signified by any of a regime of statements, thus remaining trapped in what Frederic Jameson refers to as the "prison-house of language" (Boucher 2009). In doing so, Laclau and Mouffe's take radicalizes in idealist terms the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis, because "activists trying to change a given category are not negotiating over meanings, as if changing the semantic content of a word automatically meant a real change in the opportunities and risks faced by a given social group, but over access to resources (income, education, health, services) and relief from constraints" (Delanda 2006: 62).

However, the combination of those two logics, that is, "unity within difference" and "difference within unity" is not inherently negative, but

rather generative, potentially producing progressive and regressive potentialities, namely the conditions for a passive revolution and/or for a postmodern prince.

5.3.1 Passive Revolution

Gramsci understands passive revolution emerging as an expression of middle-class society's "organic crisis." It is an antithesis or a failure of the active revolution of the popular classes that, by acknowledging progressive social demands from below and implementing them from above, avoids the mobilization of people and democratization of power (Thomas 2013). The term was initially utilized to describe how the social struggle of bourgeois society against the old regime exhausted its revolutionary potential and continued its project with conservative methods. He then successively extends the concept to other periods and contexts, such as 1920 fascist Italy, Germany, and Fordist United States.

More broadly, passive revolution comes to exemplify the way capitalism produces and reproduces its own hegemony: by creating consent via mechanisms such as 'modernization,' 'rehabilitation,' 'renovations,' 'structural adjustments,' or through the 'welfare state', thus implying a level of progress and even democratization that nevertheless preserves the fundamental relations of production. Passive revolution exemplifies *par excellence* the dialectical nature of Gramscian thinking, as it combines 'revolution and restoration,' regressive methods, and progressive objectives (Morton 2007). Such a fluidity between different tendencies makes this notion particularly useful for providing a possible explanation of how Podemos' internal tensions, linked to two competing understandings of hegemony, may play out regressively.

In the case of Podemos, one way of employing the notion of passive revolution is to think about how elements of a socially transformative project become domesticated, which may involve "socio-political processes in which revolution-inducing strains are at once displaced and at least partially fulfilled" (Callinicos 2010: 498). Part of the problem derives from Iglesias and Errejón's model: the Italian Communist Party (PCI) molded by Togliatti and then Berlinguer's historic compromise. In fact, in the political discourse of 1970s PCI, passive revolution became the new way to understand the hegemonic project, a perspective that traded the conflictualism and social change proper of traditional Marxism with Hobbesian order and stability. Hence, passive revolution was understood

as providing "the resolution of the dichotomy between 'crisis' and 'stabilisation'" (Frosini 2008: 668). In the case of the PCI, that translated into a pacification process with liberal capitalism, which was exemplified by the "historic compromise" of the alliance of Communism and the center-Right Christian Democrat Party.

Along the same line, in an article titled "Una Cuarta Socialdemocracia?" Iglesias urged the Left in Spain to engage in an ideological debate around the notion of social democracy and its historic accomplishments in the aftermath of the Second World War. In the same publication Iglesias mentioned Berlinguer's historic compromise as a model for what I consider a passive revolution because it defuses the social unrest post-2008 with the classic instrument of social democracy, that is, the welfare state, a kinder capitalism in which the contradiction between labor and capital are mediated by the state and other institutions, and, as Javier Franze puts it in Chap. 3, offers a continuum rather than a rupture with the transitions started after Franco's death.

In this broad context, I see more specifically two possible united-but-distinct paths to passive revolution: one has to do with a political transversality and discursive articulation, the other is linked to the risk of alienating the popular base of the party for lack of internal democracy and communication.

As previously discussed, the articulation that links different floating signifiers is carried by a transversal discourse that tries to interpellate the broadest possible social base. As Anderson notices, Podemos embraces a

> a discursive idealism severing significations form any stable connection with referents. Here the results have been to detach ideas and demands so completely from socio-economic mooring that they can be appropriated by any agency for any political construct. (2016: 96)

The consequence then is that Ciudadanos could articulate, by similar signifiers, a completely opposite political project. The success of emerging Right-wing party Ciudadanos seems to indicate how such a discursive articulation, based on renovation, "purification," and democratization of politics—because not tied to any particular sets of social relations—could be appropriated.

In fact, Ciudadanos represents how the counter-hegemonic discourse of Podemos gave the ruling hegemonic discourse the chance to partially reconstitute itself, not by initial counter-revolutionary and repressive mea-

sures but by a more successful mediating agent that mediates between revolution and counter-revolution. In the Conclusion chapter, García Agustín and I will return to this point by describing the different phenomena tied to the so-called effort to 'radicalize the center.'

Another potentially concerning path to consider has to do with Podemos as a political party and its contradictory Leninist democratic centralism, which reproduces a model of communication and discursive construction that, despite the interactivity brought by social media, returns to a one-way model of traditional mass communication, thus tendentially reducing communication from active signification to consumption of the message.

Podemos, on more than one occasion, displayed a kind of top-down logic that reached the local circle after decisions had been made. In this sense, Muro (2015) notices how the structure of Podemos allows the leadership to take fundamental decisions without consulting the base (Lopez 2015). When the base is consulted, the plebiscitary vote of every registered member may be a dangerously uncritical endorsement of the "charismatic leader" and tends to obscure the less publicly/mediatically visible criticism of the minorities.

The concern that emerges here consists in the tension between communication as measure of political action and communication as a democratic internal organizational means. While public communication and mediated performance seem to constitute the path to discursively construct hegemony, it cannot replace dialogic communication in local circles.

5.3.2 The Post-Modern Prince

As already mentioned, the perils of a passive revolution are indissolubly linked to capitalism rather than being specific features of Podemos. As a matter of fact, despite the regressive potentialities associated with it, Podemos did not exhaust its radical potential and can still assert of a new kind of political party, as "the embryo of a new kind of society" (Gramsci 1971: 52), which may solve the *impasse* provoked by the potential for passive revolution. In fact, while, according to current post-modern political conditions (Harvey 1989), "unity" and "common" appear almost symptoms of totalitarian projects, I think Podemos could push for the mobilization of differences in a single movement in order to apprehend the unity of disjointed elements.

In many ways, Podemos represents the positive materialization of Gill (2016) and Sanbonmatsu's (2004) call for the constitution of a post-Modern prince, in other words a political subject that could form a collective will out of diversity and difference, in a social, cultural, and political context defined by a post-modern subjectivities (Gorz 1980) and a post-Fordist mode of production (Hardt and Negri 2000), thus combining Gramscian and Laclau and Mouffian elements.

However, as Thomas (2013) suggests, this cannot be constituted as the articulation of difference by means of a chain of equivalence but rather as the production of coherence of diverse elements, which are reciprocally translatable because produced by the same socially organized, productive structure in order to reach the

> the attainment of a "cultural-social" unity through which a multiplicity of dispersed wills, with heterogeneous aims, are welded together with a single aim, on the basis of an equal and common conception of the world, both general and particular, operating in transitory bursts (in emotional ways) or permanently where the intellectual base is so well rooted, assimilated and experienced that it becomes passion. (Gramsci 1971: 349)

According to Hill (2008), the current struggle of the (post-)Modern Prince to dialectically combine "unity" and "difference" should follow the logic of an orchestra in relation to a single instrument, "while the individual elements within an orchestra had the capability to create their own distinctive sound, an awareness of one location in relation to the whole, and of an understanding of the function and the importance of the whole in relation to one's potential, was critical to its success" (181).

In my view, Podemos as the post-Modern Prince should reassert a *national popular* over a *populist* project, which would imply embracing class struggle. In fact, while recognizing its undeniable power of mobilization, transversal populism, in the name of a utopic pluralist agonism (Mouffe 2013), dangerously leads to the incorporation of bourgeois elements within a movement which essentially still represents the lower strata of Spanish society.

In Laclau and Mouffe's view, "people" represents the contingent achievement of a particular historical moment, and such a political involvement is logically implied in the construction of people (Laclau 2005). So, while in Gramsci popular elements pre-exist in a specific political project, in a "objective" structural position as a subaltern, in Laclau and Mouffe's case the

objective is to discursively construct popular subjects by external articulatory practices and by antagonism, thus as a transcendental operation, because "elements do not pre-exist the relational complex but are constituted through it" (Laclau 2005: 68) and "we only have populism if there is a series of politico-discursive practices constructing a popular subject" (43).

Second, particularly with regard to the role of organic intellectuals inside the (post-)Modern Prince organization, populist sentiments can potentially risk romanticizing "the state of nature" of people's common sense instead of incorporating it in a collective journey of intellectual growth. In fact, a successful national popular project requires, at the same time, alliances among the subaltern groups forged by the party, as well as an integral reform of the moral and cultural reform propelled by organic intellectuals.

The question then is linked to the function of 'good common sense' created by the new articulatory practice (Snir 2016). For Gramsci, the question of systematizing and rationalizing common sense is essentially the epistemological concern of creating a consciousness that can effectively illuminate an understanding of societal complexity and class struggle. Thus, people discover themselves through the attainment of a contingent and historical truth of society, which is based on "objective" social relations that pre-exist 'the people' as a political subject. Conversely, for Laclau and Mouffe, people constitute themselves *ex novo*, and in doing so already they rearrange the social field. However, they do that without necessarily experiencing the dialectical and pedagogical journey envisioned by Gramsci, which consists of sublating the incongruities of common sense to good sense into a more systematized vision of the world, an integral *Weltanschauung*.

5.4 Podemos and the Return of the Repressed (Class Struggle)

Mouffe (2014) is probably right when she claims that, in the context of degenerative post-political politics such as Spain, in which center-Left and center-Right parties have exhausted their function, the assertion of a new kind of politics becomes a necessity. However, as in any politics of the subaltern, by definition of its structural position of disadvantage in relation to the established ruling, Podemos' project appears to be without guarantees (Hall 1988). And the struggle for such an initiative to succeed

is not only against a rancid, immobilist, and ultra-Right ruling government, or against the constant aggressive mediatic attack that the party continues to experience, but also against its own inner dialectics.

In respect to that, this chapter has tried to show the role played by the indissoluble unity of political theory and political action in determining the evolution of a given enterprise such as Podemos. Therefore, by combining logical and historical arguments (Marx 1967), I tried to show how defining and embracing different notions of hegemony and their deriving distinct combinations of 'unity and difference' principles—two organizing forces of the social-political field—produces implications in the most material and practical senses (Hall 1987). That is because while ideas operate as historic force only when incorporated in the real and material social process, people make meaningful history only when such social process intersect with human envisioning.

On the one hand I consider Laclau and Mouffe's reflections as fundamental to both understanding and acting within the current social context, which implies, as the two Essex professors advocate, purifying hegemony from the necessity logic dictated by the social-economic field. On the other, I take their understanding of hegemony as emptying the notion of its basic presuppositions, because they drain it of any sense of social determination and a *telos* (not understood as historical necessity but as a sense moral, cultural, and political projection to the future) as a full-blown anthropological project. This runs the risk of transforming the potential of what I defined as a post-modern prince into a latent passive revolution. In fact, I suggested that when "difference" overdevelops "unity," the condition for political regression is potentially created, by letting Podemos' discourse be appropriated by "counter-revolutionary forces" or alienating Podemos' constituency and militancy through using a model of organization and communication that privileges top-down dynamics.

The (post-)Modern Prince should embrace back both class analysis and class struggle. While I recognize the historicizing value of Laclau and Mouffe *vis-à-vis* Marxism, and Gramsci specifically, I also resist the argument that, for instance, Sim (2000: 1) advances when he claims that the "logical outcome of an immanent and uncompromising critique [today] [...] would seem to be post-Marxism." As Geras (1987) puts it, the post-Marxist narrative implies that class position is no longer determinate, that struggle against capitalism does not equal a true path toward democracy, and finally that there are no unifying principles for such struggle.

Thinking of Podemos and its constituency, the structural relations that define the exploitative conditions of workers and repressive apparatus of

citizens are still present (Fuchs 2014). If indeed we apply Wright's defining criteria of class exploitation (2005), Podemos would better serve its own dream of radical transformation by leading the still consistent part of Spanish civil society that experiences the following conditions that: the wealth of a given social group depends on the deprivation of another; there is limited access to productive resources; and, finally, the value produced by the exploited social group is appropriated by whoever controls the productive resources (Wright 2005). All those tendencies seems to be confirmed by the alarming indexes of *desigualdad* (inequality) in Spain (Sanchez 2016).

The reassertion of class analysis and struggle should be considered as a political move in its own right against the perils of passive revolutions. In fact, agonism (Mouffe 2013) consistently provides a representation of politics propelled by the fiction that different social groups may fairly compete at the same level, as respectful adversaries, just like in Smith's utopian market. In doing so, it obscures the fact that the repression, pauperization, and precarization the Spanish working class has experienced during the last decade was carried out as a neoliberal class project by the ruling *trama*. Such confrontation between social classes creates existential incompatibility deriving from the material production and reproduction of social life.

Thus, the political struggle among different groups dramatically exceeds political fair play over meaning. In fact, the conciliatory position of Laclau and Mouffe, but especially the latter's notion of pluralistic agonism (1993), advocating both the agreement and the respecting of the rule of the game, sheds light on the fundamental paradox that has constantly characterized utopian liberalism: that equal rights applied on unequal conditions aggravate disparities enormously, therefore accruing antagonism over agonism. As a result, acknowledging the moral and political legitimacy of opponents of class struggle means following the moral and intellectual leadership of the ruling class. However, this ruling class is currently involved in the process of bloody primitive (re)accumulation, as in the example of the Spanish financial system, backed by the state apparatus, that since the 2008 crisis has evicted more than 400,000 families in Spain (Sarries 2016) from their homes, dramatically increased (by 20 %) suicides linked to eviction and unemployment (Sanmartin 2016), and reduced wages by the staggering average of 30 %, thus cheapening labor and increasing exploitation. Historically, primitive accumulation is at the base of class formation and class struggle, and in that Podemos can find its chance to make history.

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CHAPTER 6

Populism, Hegemony, and the Phantasmatic Sovereign: The Ties Between Nationalism and Left-Wing Populism

Emmy Eklundh

6.1 Introduction: Indignados and Podemos: A Natural Continuation?

In 2014, Spain saw the founding of a new political party, named Podemos. Allegedly emerging from the Indignados Movement, the party claimed that it signified the "true" representation of "the people" and that politics in Spain as we know it now had come to a crossroads. Naturally, their argument struck a chord. Spain has, since the transition, been caught in a quasi-bipartisan system, where the two main parties, PSOE and PP, have enjoyed a nigh-on monopoly of government (Balfor 2005). This situation, paired with the financial crisis and austerity politics, has, for many, become constitutive of the contemporary Spanish political landscape. There is a rift and lack of confidence between "the people" and the state (Muñoz Lopera 2012; Sampedro and Lobera 2014).

This has made way for new political constellations. The Indignados Movement, rich in numbers but constantly accused of lacking political

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influence (Wert 2011), is one of the current outlets. There are numerous newspaper articles and voices which claim that if the Indignados could only agree on a common program, if they could only have a clear agenda, if they could only focus more directly on policy, then the chances of them gaining more power and influence would be so much higher (García-Jiménez et al. 2014). In addition, a view has emerged that political impact is too scarce, and that steps should be taken to formalize popular dissatisfaction into tangible political policy. There has been frustration from within the movement regarding the inefficiency of protest, and the "failing to prioritise basic demands around which to mobilise the movement and wider layers beyond it" (Stobart 2014).

Nevertheless, the Indignados' levels of activism have waned or transformed since 2011. Going from protests which gathered together hundreds of thousands, the day-to-day presence on the streets or online is somewhat different today (2017). Recent developments have seen some parts of the movement move from the streets into political offices.

Podemos has gained electoral support, but it also seems as though the sense of popular power has changed shape. Podemos has a party structure with a clear leadership, but this has caused some concern that the central management is too strong, and that the party is at risk of committing the same mistake as its adversaries, creating a top-down organization (Sampedro 2014). When the Indignados Movement gained the most support and had their strongest presence they were least regarded as political subjects, and the formation of a political party was deemed a necessary development. This situation has now changed drastically with the arrival of Podemos. In the current political landscape, the leaders of Podemos are given much attention, are invited to debates, and the party is doing rather well in the polls (Metroscopia 2015; European Parliament 2014).

Podemos is a party which carries certain characteristics. They have utilized a rather radical media campaign, building visibility from below, and thus embodying a grassroots movement (Iglesias 2015). The goal of Podemos, which they by no means are trying to hide, is an articulation of a political project, in order to create political subjectivity, and thus channel the discontent present within the Indignados Movement. To do so, Podemos has, to an increasing extent, begun to use the concept of sovereignty, in order to describe the problematique of contemporary Spanish politics. In their view, the lack of sovereignty is the root of the problem, which expresses itself both in relation to the European Union, as well as to the Spanish political elite.

This creates a tension which is well known in political theory, namely between horizontality and verticality (Michels 1999 [1911]). The paradox of leadership and representation has indeed troubled political parties and organizations for a long time: How can one ensure representation of the members whilst still gaining political influence?

The political strategy of political articulation is strongly reminiscent of the intellectual work of Ernesto Laclau. Podemos has, more so than any other European party, taken his theory as a strategy for achieving political ends. However, what are the political implications of appropriating Laclau's framework of political articulation? Does his theory readily translate into practice, or could we envision problems with employing Laclau's theory of hegemony as an instructional for political party formations? Does the concept of sovereignty readily align with Laclau's idea of subjectivity, or is sovereignty invoking a theoretical heritage at odds with the progressive politics advocated by Podemos?

This chapter will commence with an overview of Laclau's idea of political subjectivity, and sketch the main outlines that have been most influential for Podemos, and which are most pertinent when discussing the concept of sovereignty, as well as the tensions between horizontality and verticality. This section concludes that, based on critiques posited against Laclau from, primarily, Hardt and Negri, political subjectivity must be understood as in constant motion between the two poles of horizontality and verticality.

In the second part, however, the chapter will discuss the concept of sovereignty as subjectivity, where I point to the commonalities and shared ontological and historical heritage between a post-Marxist idea of subjectivity and a critical take on sovereignty. This becomes crucial when wanting to understand Podemos and its application of Laclau. By subsequently looking at two different uses of sovereignty in Podemos' discourse, both popular and national, the chapter sketches how the tension between the base of the multitude and the articulation of the people becomes skewed to the latter in Podemos' discourse. By placing a large emphasis on the creation of the sovereign, Podemos could run the risk of losing sight of the horizontal nature of their political project.

In the last section, I further argue that by indicating that a national or popular sovereign is possible (or desirable), Podemos could also be invoking connotations of sovereignty less compatible with progressive politics. Using concepts such as the national sovereign, or the fatherland, could be interpreted as a more conservative and reactionary political agenda,

contrary to Podemos' progressive character. Regardless of the ambition to rebrand these concepts, one could also interpret the usage as a political strategy aiming to align with political frontiers already in place, such as the nationalist discourse. In doing so, Podemos could gain electoral success, but at the expense of their progressive project.

6.2 Laclau's Theory of Political Subjectivity

Laclau's works could be said to emanate from two main strands of thinking: Lacanian psychoanalysis as well as Derridean deconstruction. However, for the purpose of this chapter, Laclau's take on political subjectivity becomes the main focus. Laclau has, over the course of many years, developed a radical democratic idea of subjectivity. For Laclau, the moment of the decision is where we can see the subject at play, and he pairs the Derridean idea of the decision with the Lacanian concept of the subject. In doing so, Laclau argues that the very desire for the decision emanates from a constitutive lack: "lack is precisely the locus of the subject, whose relation with the structure takes place through various processes of identification" (Laclau 1990: 210).

Inspired by Lacan, Laclau, in his later works (1990, 1996, 2005, 2006), highlights the connection between language and identity, and draws heavily on the concept of the constitutive lack. Much like Lacan (1993 [1955–6], 1964), who argues that the constant failure of identification is producing a constant lack for the individual, Laclau brings up the (im) possibility of signification. In one of his seminal essays, "Why Do Empty Signifiers Matter to Politics" (published in *Emancipations* 1996), Laclau also rejects the Saussurean (1983 [1916]) idea of the isomorphism between the signifier and the signified. He here follows Lacan in arguing that for there to be any sense in identification through the symbolic order, one must sacrifice the essence of the signified. In other words, when seeking identification in the symbolic, we are succumbing to the structure of the signifier. The process of identification results in a lack rather than in fullness.

Identification, as such, is a radical investment in a signifier. Radical investment becomes key for understanding his idea of the subject, and is, in other words, "making an object the embodiment of a mythical fullness" (Laclau 2005: 115). Investment represents the affect stemming from the lack, while radical is the contingent chimerical satiation of the lack. One might become confused as to what the stance on agency actually is, since

Laclau rejects both the ego cogito and the subject position as part of a relational totality. Rather, Laclau says that "what counts as a valid decision will have the limits of a structure which, in its actuality, is only partially de-structured. The madness of the decision is, if you want, as all madness, a regulated one" (Laclau 1996: 56). One must also recognize that this is the construction of order, of the investment in a particular signifier, which is ultimately a decision in the undecidable terrain. Hence, "a discourse incapable of generating any fixity of meaning is the discourse of the psychotic" (Laclau and Mouffe 2001: 112). Therefore, the Laclaudian subject becomes the very locus of the political, because without its creation there would be no disagreement, and vice versa. In addition, there is structure in the undecidable terrain. Furthermore, the constitutive lack is crucial in the creation of identity politics. It means that no matter how much you might want to grasp the fullness of yourself and your belonging to a group, this will inevitably fail. This does not mean that there will not be any attempts at doing so. The constitutive lack is also inextricably linked to a craving and desire for order and fullness, something which constitutes social relations. In fact, the lack and absence of parts of our identity are what create identity in the first place. The argument becomes even more exacerbated when applied on an aggregated level, with regards to collectivity, which also becomes highly relevant for a discussion on Podemos.

According to Laclau, a social movement or a group is never a pure reflection of its particular demands. If an individual, or a smaller group, has a claim, this is a democratic claim. However, when this is aggregated, when those with claims about societal malfunctions join with other groups who also identify societal malfunctions, something happens. One of these claims will rise with an ambition to represent all in the movement, becoming a populist demand. According to Laclau, this is impossible, since one cannot represent or embody emptiness (Laclau 2005: 107), but there is still a desire to do so:

> Embodying something can only mean giving a name to what is being embodied; but, since what is embodied is an impossible fullness, something which has no independent consistency of its own, the embodying entity becomes the full object of the cathectic investment. (Laclau 2005: 119)

Laclau makes clear references to Lacan when saying that this driving force, the desire for the universalizing process to take place, is central for

all collective action. However, Laclau refers to this as radical investment rather than desire. When bringing in the dimension of affect, Laclau points out that this is not very different from his other discussions. His whole approach to linguistics and naming includes a moment of affect, since the desire for identification is strongly instituted in language. Without affect, there would be no reason to choose certain signifiers over others, nor to want to keep the ones we have (Laclau 2005: 111). Here we return to the concept of lack mentioned above. Laclau argues, referring to psychoanalysis, that this absent fullness is what drives political structures. The desire to fill the lack is what spurs hegemonic representations which are always false universalities (Laclau 2005: 115). Another important note is that there is no predetermination on which particular representation will assume the role as the false universal. Radical investment, in other words, is "making an object the embodiment of a mythical fullness" (ibid.). Again, investment represents the affect stemming from the lack, and radical is the contingent chimerical satiation of the lack. The constitutive unevenness that Laclau recognizes in every individual and thus in the social (that we always have a constitutive lack), is the driving force of social relations. Populism, in other words, is the "affective [radical] investment in a partial object" (Laclau 2005: 116). In a hegemonic situation, it is vital to remember that the signifier is not a totality in itself, but a part which is a whole (ibid., 226). As such, it is indeed a particular concept, which assumes the function of universality.

6.2.1 Tracing the Tensions

The interpretation of Laclau's works as a call for unity, centrality, and leadership has generated quite critical responses. The most influential and pervasive critique has come from Hardt and Negri (2000, 2004, 2012), who, by defying the very thought of representation and by promoting a larger focus on horizontality rather than verticality, have managed to capture many of the features and characteristics within social movements today. Where does that leave the debate? Does it mean the death of hegemony, or reveal the "hegemony of hegemony," and does that necessitate a departure from verticality into a full embrace of horizontality and autonomy? These theories promote a dichotomization or a polarization of social action, which could omit important nuances in analysis. Instead of emphasizing the abyss between autonomy/hegemony, immanence/transcendence, I argue that we should focus on the crossovers and how these can

help us further understand contemporary forms of protest and social action.

A nodal point of this critique is what I would like to call the phantasmatic sovereign, an analytical tool to reveal implications which we might encounter when trying to impose this static idea of sovereignty on contemporary social movements, something which is to some extent done by both Laclau and Hardt and Negri, and which becomes most relevant to the case in point: Podemos.

Within Laclau's works, as well as Hardt and Negri's, we can identify two problems of idealization of sovereignty. As several of his critics argue (Kioupkiolis 2010; Day 2005; Lash 2007), Laclau's theory seems to put a limit on the level of flexibility and autonomy in a hegemonic relation. For Laclau, since the focus on negativity and lack is so prominent, the *populous* will have to succumb to the hegemonic, false, universal, at the expense of their own demands. In other words, we have a situation where one demand is aiming at representing a plurality of demands, something which will never be fully reflected. The problem also lies in the static nature of the hegemon. If we look at Laclau's prime examples, tsarism in Russia as well as Peronism in Argentina, they tell the same story of a strong, oppressive force which is strongly connected to the state and against which the "people" can—and have to—unite. Is this an accurate picture to be painted today? Many would say no. As pointed out by Hardt and Negri, the struggle can now take on many guises, it cannot be modelled after a two-sided frontier, but must be thought of as a network, as a rhizome, where the people are not suppressed by the transcendent hegemon, and where connections among the popular demands are plentiful (Kioupkiolis 2010). The development in information and communication technologies is but one fact which significantly changes the game plan. The idea of the strong, suppressive state can also be called into question. In the case of recent protest movements, the Other, the force which is presenting full realization of the Self, is not one, homogenous entity. Rather, it consists of many Others, which can be capitalism, political elites, monarchy, non-democratic governments, or democratic governments where the people still feel unrepresented. As such, we are encountering a world of many Others. However, Laclau has responded to this critique as well. He would argue that, indeed, the Other can be seen as one political entity, but, in fact, the same hegemonic construction is at play on the side of the antagonist as of that of the hegemon. As such, even though we can think of many Others, we are still facing one antagonist.

Regardless of their well-founded observations against Laclau, Hardt and Negri do not manage to construct a picture which fully captures the nuances and complexities of contemporary social action. By flipping the coin and turning almost exclusively to horizontality instead of (the perceived) Laclaudian verticality, much of the power and thrust of a theory of social action goes amiss. What Hardt and Negri fail to identify, or perhaps choose not to, is the puzzle we are currently faced with: How do we understand movements like the Indignados or Occupy? For Hardt and Negri, it seems as though affect is merely something corporeal and something present, but is disjointed from signification and meaning (Hardt and Negri 2012: 37). As such, Hardt and Negri fall in the same trap as recent affect theorists: affect is part of the equation, but which part it plays is left unsaid.

If we are to take Hardt and Negri at face value, the Indignados Movement would not be a political entity. It would be to deny them any kind of political voice or subjectivity, since they cannot form any channels of representation. Not only is this unfair, it is also inaccurate. Many are the reports which argue that, despite the talk of defying representation, representation finds its own new ways. Indeed, we are not seeing any official spokespersons for Indignados, or for Occupy for that matter, but does that mean a complete lack of representation and centrality? In addition, there are other issues with the return to horizontality. For instance, Hardt and Negri are arguing for a world which largely resembles that of a deliberative democratic model. The network and the rhizome is a space for deliberation, it is a space for discussion and dispute. Even though the focus might not necessarily be to create a political consensus, Hardt and Negri seem to regard a special idea of political communication as superior. In that very moment, the developments of democratic theory which have been forwarded by radical democracy are taking at least two steps back. Laclau has also pointed to this fact, which is obvious in the quotation below:

> How can the multitude organise and concentrate its energies against the repression and incessant territorial segmentations of Empire? The only response that we can give to these questions is that the action of the multitude becomes political primarily when it begins to confront directly and with an adequate consciousness the central repressive operations of Empire. (Hardt and Negri 2000: 399)

As such, even though they are rejecting any form of organization and representation, they are still succumbing to classical ideas of demands and

rights. At the end of *Empire*, Hardt and Negri formulate a political program for the global multitude, which in my opinion bears a strong resemblance to representation and centrality, since it settles on a specific agenda, after all. Hardt and Negri do admit that there could be a certain degree of centrality, but it is left unsaid exactly how this differs from representation or deliberation (Hardt and Negri 2012: 51).

Laclau has also recognized this and asks how the common "being-against" can be political. If there are only punctual and momentaneous forms of verticality, articulation of the common is "left to God (or to Nature)" (Laclau 2005: 242) and thus it produces a "complete eclipse of politics" (ibid.). Then, if Laclau's theory focuses too much on the sovereign as an oppressive power, and Hardt and Negri are idealizing the autonomy of the people too much, is there another way to conceive of the political identities? Many would say yes to this question. Stavrakakis (2007, 2014), Prentoulis and Thomassen (2013, 2014), as well as Tønder (2005), all find that the future of radical democracy lies in the embracing of dichotomies, rather than perceiving them as purely conflictual; there is always an inherent tension between horizontality and verticality since they are intrinsically linked. I argue that this tension becomes very accentuated for Podemos in practice, but is also at risk of being diminished, largely due to the emphasis on sovereignty.

Laclau argues that a situation of immanence, when the proletariat can emancipate itself in and of itself, becomes obsolete and precludes the possibility of politics. He accuses Hardt and Negri of romanticizing the multitude, as if the multitude was something which we could not problematize or question. How, says Laclau, will this multitude come about? Who will they oppose, and why? These are questions which are left to imagination in Hardt and Negri, and intentionally so. Laclau further argues that the consummation of immanence, of reaching the multitude, would preclude any form of transcendence, that is, there would be no vertical unity in the group (Laclau 2001: 5). However, what can these discussions tell us about Podemos and its discourse on sovereignty?

Recent debates point to the fact that neither immanence nor transcendence is the answer to the question. In other words, we cannot rely on a transcendent political identity, but nor can we think of identities as contained in themselves. For instance, Prentoulis and Thomassen (2014) argue that we must think beyond immanence and transcendence, and autonomy and hegemony, where autonomy connects to the strong anarchist traditions which have been greatly inspired by immanence (Newman

2007). Hardt and Negri refer to the multitude as "emerging out of Empire in an immanent form, and the multitude is a constituent power opposed to the transcendence of any constituted power" (Hardt and Negri 2012: 71).

What Thomassen and Prentoulis argue is that even though Laclau is being accused of promoting an idea of transcendence, that is, a quest for sovereignty, this is a misunderstanding, which is evident in the discourse of Podemos. What Laclau argues is not that hegemony is always successful, nor that it is always beneficial or harmful, but that we are encountering a failed transcendence. Hegemony exists, but it never completely succeeds in representing particular demands. With regard to the emerging protests movements we are encountering, Thomassen and Prentoulis argue that both theories of autonomy and of hegemony have valid explanatory power.

First of all, we can observe that the newest social movements (Day 2005) are very much focusing on horizontality, which goes hand in hand with an autonomist perspective. Indeed, many would argue that autonomy and the multitude, as explained by Hardt and Negri, have the most relevant bearing on our current situation of protest, both the Indignados and other movements.[1] On the other hand, we have Podemos, with their focus on sovereignty and an explication of political demands, which positions itself at the other end of the spectrum. This could be seen as an illustration of the notion of failed transcendence, central for Laclau's works. However, failed transcendence also undermines the concept of a complete or total idea of sovereignty, since this should rather be seen as a failed enterprise, and not as an attainable political agenda. As such, centrality is still present, albeit in a different form. This centrality does not have to be confined to traditional political leadership, to a party structure, or even to a common agenda. It can exist merely by reference to the empty signifier, and this empty signifier holds a high level of radical investment, that is, affect.

As shown above, there is an inherent tension between horizontality and verticality in any political group, movement, or party. However, what happens to this tension when theory is applied to practice? Which are the political implications of taking Laclau's theory as a roadmap, and could it have unintended consequences? Below, I will look into Podemos' use of the word sovereignty, and argue that even though this could function as the unifying empty signifier for "the people" of Spain, it could also rearticulate nationalist practices, even though this might not be initially intended. I will thus inquire into the choice of the word sovereignty, and

question the possibility of departing from its rather conservative historical connotations.

6.3 Subjectivity as Sovereignty

It is important to distinguish between the concepts of sovereignty and subjectivity, due to Podemos' use of both concepts. For post-structural political philosophy, where Laclau could be said to be situated, the concept of subjectivity is key (Newman 2007; Marchart 2007). As demonstrated above, working on the basis of Derridean deconstruction and Lacan's psychoanalytical interpretation of the subject, Laclau successfully constructs his own idea of subjectivity as a failed project, yet constantly desired.

The idea of the popular sovereign is fundamental for democratic theory; however, it can be read in a slightly different manner than normally done in scholarship close to Laclau's since the concept of sovereignty in democratic theory has largely been equated with enlightenment theorists, such as Hobbes (1968 [1651]) and Bodin (1992 [1576]), who saw the concept of sovereignty as indivisible and based on a possibility of representation. Laclau is also deeply critical of their understanding of sovereignty, and distinguishes between his own account of political subjectivity and sovereignty as follows:

> To some extent we are in a situation comparable to that of Hobbes sovereign: in principle there is no reason why a corporate body could not fulfil the functions of the Leviathan; but its very plurality shows that it is at odds with the indivisible nature of sovereignty. So the only "natural" sovereign could be, for Hobbes, an individual. (Laclau 2005: 100)

Laclau is, however, not as critical of sovereignty as Hardt and Negri, and he is accusing them of oversimplifying the negative aspects of the same. In this sense, Laclau argues that Hardt and Negri see sovereignty as something completely transcendent, and that a theory of hegemony, by placing emphasis on the possibility of political subjectivity through articulation, endorses this transcendence. This, says Laclau, is to be mistaken:

> So, sovereignty was an essentially repressive device to prevent the democratic upsurge of an unspecified multitude. What a beautiful fabula! For as anyone acquainted with the modern theory of sovereignty knows, its practical implementation entailed a far more complicated process than the story proposed by Hardt and Negri. (Laclau 2001: 6)

Laclau argues, in other words, that his idea of sovereignty does not align itself either with the immanent version of the multitude, nor with a transcendent sovereign, conceived in its totality. There is thus a problematization and an interrogation of what subjectivity and sovereignty signify, and also an aim to demonstrate the fallacy of these concepts as failed universals, historically constructed for a particular purpose, and always only representing one particular interest. This leads me to ask, in this chapter, where this leaves Podemos in its invocation of sovereignty? How does it use this concept, and how does the concept function in relation to its overarching political agenda? And, perhaps most importantly, is there a possibility of filling the concept of sovereignty with new progressive content?

The main intellectual figureheads behind the Podemos agenda could be said to be Pablo Iglesias and Íñigo Errejón. Their works are, in general, largely sympathetic to and also heavily influenced by Laclau's theories. For instance, Errejón has published a co-authored volume with Chantal Mouffe, in which they seem to be in almost complete agreement regarding the fluidity of the society and the articulation of social classes, as well as the ever-changing totality of the people (Errejón and Mouffe 2015).

Further, Errejón has, in single-authored works, been heavily influenced by Laclau's legacy. For instance, he readily recognizes the incomplete nature of subjectivity, which enables the creation of chains of equivalence—the beginning of an articulation of a political subject (such as the Indignados Movement, or Podemos)—and agrees with Gramsci that "discourses construct political identities and are above all performative practices of the political order and its actors" (Errejón 2015: 127, my translation).

Nonetheless, Errejón is also taking a quite clear stance against Laclau's critics, such as Hardt and Negri and others. He argues that there are indeed cases where hegemony and politics should not be equated, but these are not suitable when wanting to contest the power of the government (Errejón 2015: 130). In addition, he refers to these situations as "post-sovereign," indicating that any political project looking to achieve political power must succumb to a sovereign order. Iglesias, on the other hand, while also clearly influenced by Laclau, argues that new popular subjects are needed in order to change the political landscape:

> In Spain, the spectre of an organic crisis was generating the conditions for the articulation of a dichotomizing discourse, capable of building the

> 15-M's new ideological constructs into a popular subject, in opposition to the elites. (Iglesias 2015: 14)

Nonetheless, there are instances when these thinkers, as well as official Podemos materials, are ambiguous on the topic. Interestingly, Podemos have begun to use (or returned to) to the concept of sovereignty in conjunction with subjectivity. Since sovereignty functions both in a popular and national version, it becomes vital to look at both possibilities when examining Podemos' discourse.

6.3.1 The Restoration of Popular Sovereignty Against the Spanish State: The Construction of a People

As mentioned in the introduction, Spain has suffered an increase in dissatisfaction with democratic institutions. This was one of the main claims of the Indignados Movement, and has been studied and analyzed in numerous studies, which all conclude that there is a legitimacy deficit for democratic institutions in Spain (Castells 2012; Castañeda 2012; Romanos 2013). Organizations such as Democracia real ya! have constantly argued that democracy in Spain is a faux practice (Lopera and Mario 2012: 250; Democracia real ya! 2011). This has also been one of the main claims of Podemos' discourse. Podemos supporters have argued that a vote for the group is not a vote for the political elite, and that democracy must be restored with a return to the people:

> Podemos is a method for the leadership of the populace and citizenry. We wish that our programme will be realised through citizen participation and the *Circulos Podemos*. Nobody knows our needs better than the citizens who take this country forward day by day. (Podemos 2014)

However, this return to the people comes with a clear focus not only on increased participation of the citizens in political matters, but an increased focus on the popular sovereign. For instance:

> To put it simply: the reclamation of "democracy"—the central motto of the protests was "they call it democracy, but it isn't"—is the demand which articulates and re-signifies others in a new constellation. The crisis of representation, the "they don't represent us" so often chanted in the squares, thus acquires ideological sentiment to be linked to the power elite from the

> most wealthy minority of the population. It has the pernicious effects that they law of private accumulation of capital trumps the importance of social services and the national and popular sovereignty. (Errejón 2015: 140, my translation)

Here, Errejón makes it clear that one of the political problems lies in a prioritization of banks over people, of the elites over the masses. However, he is not only referring to the words "people" or "democracy," but to also "sovereignty," as a clear component of what democracy should mean. Further, even though he clearly recognizes the intellectual heritage of Gramsci, in that political identities, a "people," are constructed, he nonetheless returns again to the concept of popular sovereignty, as the ultimate form of political identity formation:

> "The united people will never be defeated again" means practically nothing in the abstract, but in a specific situation it is the strongest possible reclamation of sovereignty against those who want to defeat it. The appearance of "the people" as the idea of "us" in the mottos of the Indignados signifies, without a doubt, reclamation of popular sovereignty, but also, and perhaps more importantly, a construction of what Gramsci called "the collective will of the national popular." (Errejón 2015: 142, my translation)

Similarly, Iglesias has adopted the same discourse on sovereignty as popular identity and the achievement of democracy:

> On the symbolic terrain of left and right, those of us who advocate a post-neoliberal transformation through the state—defending human rights, sovereignty and the link between democracy and redistributive policies—have not the slightest chance of electoral victory. (Iglesias 2015: 15)

Granted, Errejón and Iglesias do not fully represent Podemos. However, their use of the word sovereignty has also been transferred into the official Podemos program, where sovereignty is seen as a goal equal to democracy, and where the latter is perhaps reliant on the former:

> But now we can do it from within the institutions: we are going to win this game to restore democracy, sovereignty and the ultimate meaning of democracy, which is nothing else than to obey the people and to attend to its needs. (Podemos 2015: 13, my translation)

In the quote below, it becomes particularly obvious that sovereignty is not a necessary present, it is the desired future:

> Within Podemos, we believe that change begins with changing the institutions, with equipping ourselves with transparent public frameworks, which will be at the level of the people, and will be professional and efficient, and where popular sovereignty shall manifest itself every day. (Podemos 2015: 63, my translation)

6.3.2 The Restoration of Sovereignty Against the European Union: The People as Nation

In addition to the focus on popular sovereignty against the Spanish state, Podemos have also gained much political ground based on their resistance to the practices of the European Union. Indeed, there has been a shift in power from the elected officials of the Spanish government to (often unelected) officials in the European Commission, the European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund.

After the Lehman Brothers crash in the United States in 2008, financial markets throughout the world were increasingly affected by uncertainty, the worst enemy for any financial stability (Kolb 2011: 219). Fear and doubt had crept into the system, resulting in falling stocks all over the world. Naturally, Spain was no exception (Charnock et al. 2014). Since the implementation of the euro in 2000, Spain has been bound to the monetary policy of the Eurozone. Sovereign monetary policy has therefore been transferred elsewhere, and has created a system in which free financial flows and fixed exchange rates have been favored. Spain was caught in a position where the sovereign debt crisis could not be adjusted in any way but through cuts in public spending. As such, a private debt crisis became a sovereign debt crisis.

The Spanish social democratic government, led by José Luis Zapatero, was then under much pressure from the so-called Troika (European Central Bank, European Commission, and the International Monetary Fund) to implements budget cuts in order to receive bailouts for some of its largest banks (European Financial Stability Facility 2013). The government thus adopted a similar attitude as the United States: some banks were "too big to fail." However, bailouts were conditioned upon structural reforms, and, consequently, in 2012, the conservatives (PP), who had taken office the year before, announced a 10,000 million euro cut for healthcare and education (*El País* 2012).

This had several severe economic consequences, one of the most acute being a massive rise in unemployment. In 2010, youth unemployment reached 41%, and 47% in 2011 (Eurostat 2011). The government, however, was tied to conditions set by the European Central Bank. Among these one can note the raising of the retirement age from sixty-five to sixty-seven, and budget cuts in health, education, and social services (Castells 2012: 110; *El País* 2012). Reducing the public debt became the overarching goal to preserve the Spanish membership of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU).

These circumstances have led to several conclusions among members of the Indignados Movement, as well as Podemos. First of all, they identify the transferal of powers from Madrid to Brussels as a loss of legitimacy for decisions made. This ties in with a general discussion of EU democratic deficit which has been prevailing since the mid-1990s (Habermas 1996), and the rise of critiques of technocracy. In this instance, however, there is not only a critique of the perceived lack of legitimacy for EU institutions, but also an invocation of sovereignty and a clear demand to reinstate more power for the Spanish people (and state). This differs from previous discourses in important aspects. First and foremost, it is a transformation of the Left as a supporter of a European identity. Traditionally, national sovereignty has not been the main rhetorical figure within the Spanish Left, since nationalism has often spurred connotations with the Francoist heritage (Nuñez 2001; Ruiz Jiménez et al. 2015). Now, however, there is a decrease in support for Europe, as it is seen as an instance of neoliberal authoritarianism:

> Many of the struggles of the past decades in Europe can be seen as defensive stands against the on-going attrition of national sovereignty. In this context of defeat for the existing lefts, critical thought was largely separated from political praxis—in stark contrast to the organic links between theoretical production and revolutionary strategy that characterized the early twentieth century. (Iglesias 2015: 8)

As such, the Spanish Left is reinvoking the national sovereign as the political endpoint. Even though nationalism has been a contested topic in Spain, there is now a trend to equate an amelioration of circumstances with a defense of the nation-state as a political unit, which cuts against both progressive voices wary of nationalism and its dangers, as well as international relations (IR) scholarship which has branded the national

sovereign as exclusionary and potentially violent; the use is still very much present:

> A process of certain pulling back of mobilisation and also a demonstration that only mobilisation in incapable of defeating the plans of impoverishment, of the sell-out and looting of sovereignty. (Errejón et al. 2015: 7, my translation)

Lately, the concept of fatherland, *patria*, has also found its way into Podemos' discourse. This word, so often associated with a very nationalist and reactionary agenda, has been a problematic term in Spain since Franco's frequent usage of the same. Podemos, on the other hand, is looking to use "fatherland" as something which should increase solidarity amongst Spaniards, and should indicate paying your taxes and being loyal to the social services:

> We have a democratic, not a nationalist, idea of the fatherland, which identifies the fatherland as the people. We are trying to illustrate how those who are using the word national are also, at the same time, selling our national sovereignty for cheap. We are therefore trying to restore our economic and political sovereignty, a necessary action to restore the country and the interests of the majority. (Errejón in Marco 2015)

It here becomes clear that Podemos do not equate referring to the fatherland or to the sovereign with promoting a nationalist agenda. On the contrary, they are looking to fill these words with new meaning. The question remains, is it possible to disregard the nationalist discourse whose terms and concepts Podemos are now using as its own?

6.4 The Phantasmatic Sovereign

Above, it has been argued that Podemos are invoking two different ideas of political subjectivity in their public messages and in academic works. Below, I will discuss how this illustrates the inherent tensions within Laclau's concept of failed transcendence and the constant oscillation between the logics of equivalence and difference.

Iglesias and Errejón have seemingly interpreted Laclau so as to signify not only the possibility of a hegemonic construction (the articulation of a "people"), but also infer the necessity of this construction for any political

identity, and for any political project. As seen above, sovereignty, the unified representation of the people or the nation, is a central goal. Whilst Laclau would agree that political articulations of this sort are indeed the very locus of politics, does this mean that the strife and desire for a hegemonic frontier is the sole goal for a social movement or a party? In addition, to what extent should a movement or a party promote this frontier, and what happens when they use all means available to do so?

Based on the material above, one can draw two conclusions. First, that Podemos is using sovereignty as an empty signifier to unite disparate claims. This, in itself, need not be highly problematic. In fact, it merely illustrates how it is using Laclau's theory in order to gather political support on the Left, to articulate a counter-hegemonic project. However, one can question the emphasis placed on unity, and if the promotion of sovereignty sufficiently recognizes the tensions between horizontality and verticality.

As such, there is a risk that by invoking "the people" as the popular sovereign, as well as the national sovereign Spain, Podemos is not fully recognizing the political implications of Laclau's work. As described above, since political subjects are constantly moving between horizontality and verticality, a sedimentation of either end of the spectrum will nullify the democratic notion of the movement. This becomes problematic for Podemos, whose main political appeal has emanated from a careful consideration of the grassroots' movement.

Instead, Podemos has now constructed an image of political subjectivity which might not recognize the needs and claims of the people it is claiming to represent. This becomes especially evident in its repeated call for returns to sovereignty, which connotes an idea of political subjectivity which does not recognize the split nature of identity so crucial for Laclau's theories. Laclau would not agree with a concept of sovereignty which carries with it an intellectual heritage tainted by the repressive nature of modernity and "the rational Man." Nonetheless, Hobbes' idea of the sovereign as an individual also seems to have rung true within Podemos:

> The main goal of the campaign was to explain that "the guy with the pony-tail" on TV was taking part in the elections. That's why we opted for something that had never been done before in Spain: using the candidate's face on the ballot. The "People of the Television"—*el pueblo de la televisión*, or the TV nation, so to speak—didn't know about a new political party called Podemos, but they knew about the guy with the pony-tail. (Iglesias 2015: 17)

This notion of the charismatic leader as the ultimate signifier for the people could be seen as the height of Laclau's theory in practice. However, one must also keep in mind the incapability of the charismatic leader to ever represent the people, and the empty nature of his/her persona. As such, this raises concerns regarding Podemos' practical implementation of Laclaudian thought, and whether the charismatic leader as embodied by Iglesias fully recognizes the constant oscillation between horizontality and verticality.

In addition, this leads this chapter to a second question. By using the word sovereignty, and even fatherland, does Podemos risk associating itself with a less radical agenda? One could argue that Podemos is not, in fact, using sovereignty in the same way it has been used before. How, one might ask, could a progressive party such as Podemos, who have time and again stated that it is merely trying to channel political discontent on the Left, be accused of voicing reactionary or nationalist agendas? This chapter is by no means questioning the intentions of Podemos, merely its methods.

Nonetheless, the imminent danger could be that the Podemos electoral base are not endowing the concepts of sovereignty and fatherland with equally progressive content as its leaders. In fact, one has to question the possibility of rearticulating these terms and disregard their historical value. I argue that one could read Podemos' use of the words sovereignty and fatherland in two different ways. First, it could be seen as a lack of recognition of the historical value of these terms. No words can be seen as disjointed from their historical meaning. We cannot turn a new page and consider previous usages as belonging to the past; the past is always present in the terms themselves. The second interpretation would be that sovereignty and fatherland dip into political agonistic frontiers already in place. Podemos has, since its inception, argued that creating these frontiers is a core part of its political project. However, creating these frontiers is by no means an easy task, and it might seem tempting to utilize terms which are already part of a clear antagonistic relationship. It is this second reading which could harbor counterproductive consequences for Podemos. By associating itself with a discourse previously connected with a much less radical agenda, it runs the risk of attracting or promoting a politics positioned far from its own. The rebranding of traditionally nationalist words might be a taller order than currently envisioned.

6.5 Conclusion

I have in this chapter argued that the increased use of the concept of sovereignty in Podemos' discourse carries two political implications. I have demonstrated how Laclau, in his works, constructs an idea of political subjectivity which positions itself as contrary to modern conceptions of sovereignty, conceived as an indivisible representation. In addition, I have discussed how critical IR scholars have made similar observations with regards to sovereignty, which also recognize the potentially exclusionary and violent implications of this concept.

However, Podemos still uses this term both in its discourse against the Spanish state, as well as against the European Union. In both cases, a restoration of sovereignty is deemed the political goal. This could result in two unintended consequences. First, it could place an overemphasis on centrality and leadership which does not sufficiently take the horizontal base of the party into consideration. Second, the conservative connotations present in concepts such as sovereignty and fatherland might carry unintended consequences. In addition, the possibility that Podemos is consciously and intentionally using this type of discourse because of the political frontiers already in place raises concerns about the viability of progressive politics born out of a reactionary discursive field. In both cases, a phantasmatic idea of sovereignty is haunting the conception of political subjectivity, be that presented as the multitude, the people, or the nation. This phantasmatic sovereign threatens to eclipse vital insights of failed transcendence, which indicates how Laclau envisioned political subjectivity as caught between the two extremes: the horizontal multitude and the vertical people. Ultimately, by employing the concept of sovereignty and fatherland, Podemos runs the risk of sedimenting and perpetuating agendas less radical than initially intended.

Notes

1. For studies on the horizontal qualities of Indignados, see Perugorría and Tejerina (2013), Stobart (2014), Espinoza Pino (2013), Sampedro and Haro Barba (2011), Fominaya (2014), and Peña Lopez et al. (2014). For studies on the Occupy and the Global Justice Movements which agree with Hardt and Negri, see Maeckelbergh (2012), Juris (2011, 2008), Sitrin (2012), and Williams (2012).

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CHAPTER 7

We the People or We the Republic? The Need for Republican Populism

Óscar García Agustín

About ten years passed between two different yet interrelated electoral events: the first one saw José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, on March 14, 2004, winning the general election in Spain; the second one starred Pablo Iglesias on May 25, 2014, when Podemos erupted onto the political scene and entered the European Parliament with five seats.

On the evening before the general election, a multitude of protesters in front of the headquarters of the PP were demanding the truth about the terrorist attacks in Madrid on March 11. Indeed, they demanded to know the truth before voting. PP did not comply with the demands and was penalized when ballots were cast the next day. The results are well known: Zapatero, leader of the PSOE, won against all odds. When people celebrated his victory, they asked him explicitly, through chants in the streets, "Zapatero, don't let us down" ("No nos falles"). Zapatero responded with a promise: "Power is not going to change me."

May 15, 2011, also known as 15M, was a second moment in which the political system, as well as the role of mass media, was openly questioned, but, in this case, there was no direct political translation. Despite the general calling out of politicians by yelling: "You don't represent us," the

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PP won the municipal elections and a few months later achieved an absolute majority in the Spanish Parliament. The echoes of that outrage were present in 2014 when Pablo Iglesias celebrated the European Parliament electoral night. The sympathizers, in this case, shouted: "You do represent us." Iglesias tried to reduce the degree of optimism by reminding people that despite the electoral success of Podemos, the financial and market powers would continue to make decisions against the people.

There are some similarities but also some differences between these two scenes. The voters who elected Zapatero demanded clear information and the truth before voting (in order to become well informed despite manipulation by two powerful forces: the government and mass media), and they believed that things could be changed within the existing institutional structures; that is, relying on the party system. People who did not want to be let down expressed a renewed belief in institutions and in their capacity to respond to the interests of the people (and to tell them the truth). Zapatero, on his side, offered from the beginning a negative conception of power as something that must be controlled and, thus, could not change him and transform him into "yet another politician." The supporters of Podemos reclaimed something different in 2014. They did not believe in the party system, ruled by the PSOE and the PP, and they were critical of the concept of representativeness which derived from that system. A new politics, rooted in a new representativeness, was needed, and it had to be produced outside of the existing two-party system. Iglesias differentiated between two logics of power: the one which is developed within institutions (with its own rules and as a part of the "political game") and the other which applied to the people who suffer from the unjust measures taken by political and economic forces and whose demands are not being listened to by politicians (nor resolved by institutions).

Although both the PSOE, led by Zapatero, and Podemos shared the need for change, their visions could not have been more different: respectively, the need for institutional change in order to reinforce the institutions (Zapatero made a ferocious defense of representativeness after the 15M protests) and the need to change the conditions of people in order to make a real difference. It is no coincidence that the theoretical reflections which inspired their political practices, were, in principle, also very different. Zapatero embraced neorepublicanism, particularly in the version elaborated by Philip Pettit, whilst Podemos was inspired by neopopulism, as defined by Ernesto Laclau. However, it would be too simplistic to oppose these two approaches without exploring their connections. Zapatero expe-

rienced the limitations of the narrow institutional approach when he decided to deploy the austerity measures imposed by Brussels, and the emergence of the 15M Movement and populist demands for democracy and distribution overran the institutional limits for politics. On the other hand, Podemos had to face the "institutional challenge" since they became quite quickly part of local and regional parliaments, responsible for governing major cities, and gained a substantial representation in Parliament.

The objective of this chapter is to explore the possibilities of a republican populism. After presenting some of the limitations of social democratic republicanism, I revisit some of the intellectual work developed to accompany Podemos' praxis by introducing the need for a republican turn, as José Luis Villacañas and Carlos Fernández Liria have done. Finally, I present four principles to contribute to the elaboration of a republican populism without implying the rejection of a progressive populist perspective. Theoretical reflections are thus combined with analysis of political practices in the Spanish context in recent years.

7.1 Social Democratic Republicanism

The ideological crisis of social democracy was hardly solved by Anthony Giddens' Third Way (assumed politically by Tony Blair), which Vicente Navarro (1999) defined as a hybrid between Christian democracy and neoliberalism. Even the politicians inspired by Blair, like Zapatero when he was leading a renewal wave within the PSOE, were very cautious about adopting the approach, especially when Blair strengthened the international alignment by following the warmongering position of the George Bush administration and abandoning the European project. It would not be fair to say that Zapatero was merely "Blair's Doppelganger" (Mathieson 2004) but it is true that there is continuity with the major topics of the Third Way: theorizing the political practice, embracing globalization, and defending economic competitiveness (Agustín 2006). However, there was also a consciousness of the limitations of the Third Way. Despite being thankful to New Labour for breaking with traditional Leftist prejudices, Zapatero pointed out the necessity of redefining social democracy in the light of a new philosophical ground: neorepublicanism.

When Philip Pettit reclaims republicanism, he does it in opposition to two other traditions: populism and liberalism. His main argument is freedom as non-domination, as a way of overcoming the dichotomy between negative and positive freedom: "This possibility would have one conceptual

element in common with the negative conception—the focus on absence, not presence—and one element in common with the positive: the focus on mastery, not interference" (Pettit 1997: 22). Thus, in line with liberalism, Pettit assumes freedom as his essence for elaborating a theory of government. Freedom as non-interference is likewise assumed, not only in a formal but in a material sense: the conditions of non-domination must be enhanced in order to have individuals who are capable of living without uncertainties (due to arbitrary interferences) and without subordinating relations.

According to Pettit, the critique of the liberal negative conception of freedom is not incompatible with liberalism, however, since they share the same goal of organizing a viable state and a viable civil society. It is even less incompatible with Left-of-center liberalism, which shares the concern about guaranteeing non-interference as well as the importance of equality and the elimination of poverty. However, Pettit argues forcefully against populism and emphasizes its differences, and in this case, indeed, incompatibility, with the republican project. He does not simplify populism, as does, for instance, Maurizio Viroli (quoted in Pavon 2015), who reduces it to demagogy which threatens the republican institutions. Instead, Pettit points out the populist understanding and practice of democracy. His main rejection of populism consists in the relation between citizens, on the one hand, and the institutions and the democratic means, on the other.

Populism "represents the people in their collective presence as master and the state as servant," whilst republicanism sees "the people as trustor, both individually and collectively, and sees the state as trustee" (Pettit 1997: 8). The implications would be that for populism people only rely on state representatives when it is necessary, while for republicanism, on the other hand, people trust the state because it guarantees non-arbitrary rule. Besides his opposition to the conflictual relation between the people and its representatives, Pettit is totally opposed to the populist preference for democratic means, not just representative democracy but, in particular, direct democracy (assemblies or plebiscites). Democratic participation can be important, but this does not imply that there must be something like the right of democratic participation. In other words, it can be useful to promote freedom as non-domination but it is not an attractive value in itself.

The line which defines democratic control (such as participation) as essential to achieving liberty or as a means of furthering liberty is extremely important to Pettit, since freedom could evolve to a populist position by considering liberty as democratic self-rule. In this sense, republicanism is an alternative to the conception of democratic self-rule, consisting of

existing laws and government assuring non-domination and removing arbitrary power. There is, in all, a perceived risk by Pettit of republicanism becoming populism and transforming participation into a goal and not the means for liberty. There is no doubt that Pettit, as well as republican theory in general, is in favor of a major role of the state and of the involvement of civil society. The state cannot in any case monopolize decision-making in its function of guaranteeing non-domination. Citizens' participation, through deliberation, can contribute to fighting against arbitrariness and increase inclusiveness. In this sense, Pettit moves beyond the idea of democracy as consent and as the mere election of the government. Democracy is contestatory, not consensual (but not conflictual either), and it requires that the conditions and institutional basis for contestation are established. Furthermore, Pettit claims, in opposition to populism, republicanism is a process of contestation: "not one that necessarily involves majority decision-making. There is no suggestion that the people in some collective incarnation, or via some collective representation, are voluntaristically supreme" (1997: 201).

When Zapatero assumed Pettit's republican framework, adapted to the Spanish context, the idea of inclusiveness and listening to civil society became recurrent. Zapatero assumed the idea of freedom as non-domination and related it to the values of the Left, although this implied that another core Left value, equality, was understood as "non-dominated diversity" (quoted in Gallego-Díaz 2001), in line with Pettit's conception of an inclusive republic. It remains clear that Zapatero's government fostered the idea of freedom as non-domination, and improved the conditions of social groups by attempting to reduce vulnerability against arbitrary power and by introducing active measures to ensure the conditions for material liberty. Law against gender violence (2004), reform for gay marriage (2005), dependency law (2006), equality law (2007), and abortion law (2010) reflect the ambition of the applied reform program (despite its later implementation) to improve the conditions for non-domination and, consequently, for acting freely. Some of these legislations were, besides, preceded by processes of deliberation, whereby public matters, like gay marriage, were contested by different interest groups and social movements. Deliberation did not lead to a consensual decision but the possibility of exposing arguments and making them acceptable as part of the public (and not only the particular) will was there.

Another relevant republican aspect is the defense of constitutional patriotism. Zapatero embraced this idea as a way of reconciling the notion of

fatherland with civism and democracy. He had already voiced his satisfaction with constitutional patriotism in 2001, since it enabled him to feel Galician, Basque, Catalan, Andalusian, or from any other region in Spain (quoted in García Abad 2001). In a multinational context like Spain, with strong regional diversity, the possibilities which constitutional patriotism opens up by enhancing a constitutional sense of unity are worth exploring. However, the main problem is the existing Constitution and legal framework and those who do not try to include the nationalist demands and do not comprehend (or efficiently manage) such a diversity. Indeed, constitutional patriotism ends up being a new form of legitimation of the Spanish Constitution and tries to neutralize the nationalist demands which would be the only ones represented as responding to cultural, and not civic, identities.

Zapatero's political project, inspired by republicanism, succeeded in offering an alternative to liberalism in such areas and in renewing the political agenda: giving rights to dominated or vulnerable groups, enhancing deliberative democracy, increasing the role of the state, addressing diversity, and proposing constitutional patriotism as a new framework. However, there was no rupture as such with liberalism (or neoliberalism). Although the Minister for Public Administration from 2004 to 2008, Jordi Sevilla (2002), criticized the "rebellion of the riches" and the imposition of a sole ideology (the so-called *pensamiento único*), he was far from presenting a conflict against the economic elite (the master). Instead he advocated for embedding the ideas of open markets and flexible economy within socialist discourse. Therefore, the renewed social democratic project is more about "offering institutional improvement today consistent with the socialist principles" (Sevilla 2002: 41), rather than expanding the democratic horizon. The rejection of the excesses of capitalism does not hide a pending issue for the republican tradition: to discuss in depth the capitalist market (Ovejero et al. 2004). This should be crucial for a stronger differentiation between the republican and the liberal model. In this regard, Pettit notices that republicans do not have to oppose the free markets, since the principle of arbitrary interference does not apply to them. Contestatory practices, in his understanding, must be revisionary but "not so revisionary as to be hostile to every form of market arrangement" (1997: 205).

In his conversation with Pettit, Zapatero (2008) refers to the republican limitations in developing an alternative economic model when he comments that the republican social project is better drafted than the economic one. Social democracy is aware of the margins of action left by the economic and social model, and the difference with the Right wing would be

the management of the "social state" through social and political reforms. This became obvious to Zapatero after the imposition of the austerity measures by the EU and the emergence of the 15M Movement claiming a new way of doing politics and opening up those narrow "margins" of doing politics. After assessing very positively the republican achievements made by Zapatero, Pettit (2011) had to revise his opinions (and consequently his own applied theory) after the 15M. He actually paid more attention to the economy than in his theoretical work on non-domination and recognized two serious mistakes: too much optimism about the reliability of the international financial system to enable the Spanish government to provide economic welfare; and membership of the Eurozone.

The self-critical tone is somehow mitigated when he identifies two radical responses to the crisis: neoliberalism and populism, or, in other words, the plutocratic and the populist way. Both are jeopardizing the republican project due to their simplistic approaches and by relying on the liberation of the power of the market (neoliberalism) and the reassertion of the collective will as people (populism). The solution should entail a regulative system in which the financial system can continue providing people with resources of credit without giving financial insiders the opportunity to endanger the common good. The 15M should thus evolve into more specialized associations for the interrogation of government policy, and get into issues of institutional design if the movement wants to have an impact. Pettit was already very suspicious about the populist turn taken by the 15M and by its mistrust of existing political parties and its claim of giving voice to popular demands.

However, the crisis of the PSOE provoked by the final years of Zapatero's government and its economic policy represents likewise the end of social democratic republicanism. Despite some attractive components, from the concept of non-domination to recovering the state, neo-republicanism (as in its application by Zapatero) reflected the ambiguity of republican positions toward liberalism, not only in relation to negative freedom but also to the free market. The functioning of institutions, particularly the traditional party system, was questioned, and the economic system became quite visibly part of the domination system (where minor regulations could barely lead to more autonomous institutions and government). The ideological continuity of the PSOE in line with European social liberalism has recently become more distant from the republican tradition (especially since the theoretical references are not so present anymore in party debates). The other party which has approached

republicanism from a social democratic perspective, namely Ciutadans (Ciudadanos when it was only a Catalan party), had become quite silent in its claim for republicanism. As shown in the work by Cordero Fuertes (2008), a great part of Ciutadans' interest in republicanism consisted in opposing nationalism and so-called cultural identities.

The crisis of social democratic republicanism does not imply that republicanism has not been discussed and that other forms of republicanism have not been postulated. Indeed, and despite the efforts made by the majority of the republican tradition to reject the populist tradition, the foundation of Podemos and the deployment of a populist framework enable new conditions for thinking about republicanism beyond the version attached to social democracy.

7.2 Rethinking Republicanism after Populism

The institutional crisis evidenced by the 15M Movement was interpreted from a populist perspective by Íñigo Errejón (2015) as an organic crisis (crisis of legitimacy of the elites). Errejón identified "democracy" as an empty signifier and frontier to distinguish between two dichotomized political spaces: the one of the people against that of the regime. It entails an emergent discursive moment in the struggle for hegemony, in which a political subject names itself and aspires to govern the entire political community. But "people" is the name for a wide and transversal aggregation which acquires sense against the existing order and its elites. It is interesting that Errejón compares the 15M with the "We the people" from the American Constitution, since he understood the 15M as a foundational moment which necessarily should lead to a new institutional framework. The populist reading of the 15M as "We the people," which later would become one of the ideas deployed by Podemos, offers a connection between the institutional and the non-institutional, although such a connection should be explored: If the institutions are the same as the "regime," should a completely new institutional realm then be created? Or could those who do not feel represented by the existing order be capable of creating or reforming institutions representing their own interests and those of the others?

It became more urgent to answer this open question when Podemos rapidly became part of the institutional framework. If the republican tradition has been skeptical toward populism, the latter has shown more convincing potential in accounting for the mobilization phase, but has faced more difficulties in developing an institutional project. The legitimacy

gained by the 15M and the wide popular support for Podemos (together with the need to reform a system which generated such a high degree of disaffection) are not easy to settle just by saying that they are populist manifestations which entail a threat to democracy. It is significant in this sense that, after a focus on populism (mostly in a negative sense), the debates on republicanism and populism started to emerge. Based on the experience of Podemos, two interesting works were published: *Populism* by José Luis Villacañas and *In Defense of Populism* by Carlos Fernández Liria. Curiously, both volumes advocate for recovering the republican tradition, and both, in particular the work of Villacañas, are critical toward populism. Liria has followed the evolution of Podemos quite closely from the beginning, although with increasing disagreement with Pablo Iglesias' official line, whereas Villacañas primarily placed himself close to the attempt by Errejón and his circle to find an institutional coupling for populism. In the following I present the main ideas of these authors and their contributions to reintroducing the republican project after Podemos' populist appearance.

7.2.1 Populism as Minimal Republicanism

José Luis Villacañas presents an interesting case. His book *Populism* is a brief but well-grounded critique of Laclau's theory on populism and a defense of republicanism. Curiously, the book was received with interest in Podemos, particularly in the circle around Íñigo Errejón, and Villacañas became engaged with Podemos as a political project aimed to promote change in Spain. Despite this political approach, two aspects must be remarked upon: intellectually, he maintains the republican approach although appreciating the dialogue with the populist tradition; politically, he mainly supports Errejón's line within the party and strongly criticizes Iglesias' leadership. According to Villacañas, republicanism would be "the way of channeling the populist movement, the populist politization, towards the strengthening of structures, institutions, which are in conditions to make us strong against the neoliberal agenda" (quoted in Molpeceres 2016). His contribution can thus be summarized as how to republicanize (meaning: minimize) the populist impact and to revitalize institutions to face neoliberalism. He even claims that "populism is democracy (maybe even liberal) without republicanism" (Villacañas 2015: 109–110) and republicanism would be the antidote against the populist threat. The goal of republicanizing populism, briefly, is to neutralize populism as a risk for democracy and its potential alliance with neoliberalism.

Villacañas tries to identify the conditions for the appearance of populism by referring to Bruce Ackerman's "dualist democracy" and his understanding of democratic politics as a two-step process (Sagos 2014). There are both periods of stability ("normal politics") and others of uncertainty or crisis ("abnormal politics"). During the periods of normal politics, citizens delegate administration and governing to their representatives and they focus on their personal projects; they vote and maybe participate in processes of deliberation if they consider issues to be relevant. It is during the periods of "abnormal politics" that citizens are mobilized and become actively engaged in popular deliberation and decision-making. Villacañas (2014) points out that "abnormal politics" requires a change that can vary from reforming the Constitution (and revising the social consensus upon which it is founded) to a new constituting process leading to a new Constitution. The main concern for Villacañas is the development toward a constituting process, but he salutes the necessary constitutional reforms and holds that as far as a new form of representative politics is demanded, it will happen in harmony with the republican or civic spirit.

Populism, in this regard, is the political manifestation of a period of "abnormal politics." This is interesting because, in a later debate, Villacañas denominates this moment as the "populist moment" (Morada 2016a) when domination is denounced since institutions are dominating (as they usually are) without channeling people's demands (which becomes evident in times of "abnormal politics"). By comparing the "constitutional moment" (Ackerman) with the "populist moment," Villacañas actually opens up the possibility for a "republican populism" and acknowledges the populist contribution to the institutional realm (through the readjustment of people's demands and institutions). On Podemos, Villacañas (2014) predicted (and wished) that the party would be moderate in its principles and radical in its applications. Thus Podemos would not refuse representative democracy but could radicalize it around what a representative is (not a privileged person but a public servant; someone who listens to her constituencies; accountable and willing to be revoked; etc.). These aspects could contribute to developing a republican populism and modifying the relationship between representatives and the people they represent. However, Villacañas refuses to explore this line and opts for rejecting populism altogether in favor of the republican tradition.

In *Populism* there is an assumption about the sufficiency of well-organized and differentiated institutions to prevent the emergence of the populist hegemony. When multiple unsatisfied demands are articulated

and consequently unified, the conformation of the "people" and the fixation of an inseparable distance between people's demands and institutional order begin. Following Laclau, Villacañas claims that a strong institutional structure, derived from a solid national reality, is capable of satisfying people's demands. An institutional crisis thus becomes necessary. As a consequence of the populist logics, a new political space must be articulated in which all the demands are solved at the same time by a new hegemonic formation. Here there is a relevant critique of the institutional scope of populism. Since institutions are rejected for not representing the represented adequately, the unified demand represents the other demands metaphorically (without being the key to resolving them). Therefore, what is behind the institutions is the establishment, and not the nation, whilst people are excluded. "People" becomes a totality since it can exclude the establishment, and a new frontier which separates establishment and people (where the latter becomes unified) is drawn. In this sense, as part of the hegemonic formation, a part assumes the representation of the totality.

The hegemonic formation, well depicted by Villacañas, entails the use of the charismatic leader as an empty signifier, capable of unifying all the demands (through the logic of equivalence). The leader would, in this sense, represent the totality of the demands, but this does not mean that a solution would be reached since the satisfaction of demands would blur the frontier between people and establishment. There are two models of representation: the division of powers (republicanism) and personalization (populism). Villacañas concludes that populism is anti-institutional and cannot accept political normalization, given that populism relies on unsatisfied demands, the existing establishment, and the need to keep the "people" active. There are, indeed, two risks which Villacañas points out: the difficult translation of the centralized structure around the leader (the progressive Cesarism) into something that does not imply centralized power (here the division of powers would be relevant), and the use of the institutional realm to perpetuate leadership in power (where mechanisms of controlling power again should be required).

I consider the concentration of power, as the prolongation of the need for a charismatic leader in the phase of mobilization, to be the main obstacle for a republican populism in the phase of institutionalization. However, I do not agree with the claim that populism is anti-institutionalist. Villacañas bases his arguments on the constitutive friend/enemy distinction by Carl Schmitt, but he omits Chantal Mouffe's theory on "agonistic pluralism" in which the goal is not to destroy the enemy. The category

"enemy" is replaced by that of the legitimate "adversary," "i.e. somebody whose ideas we combat but whose right to defend those ideas we do not put into question" (Mouffe 2000: 15). Although antagonism is not eradicated and there is no rational resolution of the conflict, "we have some common ground because we have a shared adhesion to the ethico-political principles of liberal democracy: liberty and equality" (2000: 15). Mouffe offers a reconciliation of the principles of liberty and equality and of plurality and common ground. This establishes the basis for pluralistic institutions to ensure liberty and equality (which must be complemented by the principle of division of powers).

Furthermore, although the creation of "people" generates exclusion (due to totality, as Villacañas says), populism emerges within an existing institutional framework, and in most cases it is difficult to imagine that the division of power can easily be suspended. Podemos' claim of "recovering institutions for their people" takes place in the context of representative democracy and without a parliamentary majority. This means that agreements with other parties, coalitions, and negotiations (together with processes of participation, which are open to citizens) are necessary. It is difficult to consider this kind of doing politics as anti-institutionalist but rather as reforming institutions. Also, in cases where the institutions are apparently well functioning and established, there are still demands which are not satisfied and become more evident in populist or constitutional moments.

The trust expressed by Villacañas in republicanism is due to his consideration that populism can coexist with and not challenge neoliberalism (which is perfectly true in the case of Right-wing populism and even in some cases of progressive populism). However, there are not so many reasons for thinking that republicanism is the most efficient way of contesting neoliberalism. The existing liberal turn in republicanism, including the social democratic republicanism, clearly proves that. This does not mean that the underlying problem is not the economic structure, as Villacañas rightly sustains: "the real core of domination relies on the economic structure" (Morada 2016a). This acknowledgment should lead to a new kind of republicanism, which expands the concept of domination to the economic realm. In this regard, it should be possible not to reduce populism to minimal republicanism but instead consider populism as a way of maximizing republicanism to counteract the economic powers.

7.2.2 *Republican Objectivity*

The case of Carlos Fernández Liria is different. He has been linked to some of the main Podemos founders and was already an influential philosopher for some of them before establishing the party. Being quite close to one of the Podemos founders, Luis Alegre, he grew disappointed by the development of Pablo Iglesias' leadership and criticized him openly. His book, *In Defense of Populism*, enters, in any case, into dialogue with the experience of Podemos, and it is indeed thought of as a way of pushing the party forward and providing it with an intellectual framework. Despite the title, the content is rather a defense of republicanism. There is actually no critique of populism. The debate between populism and republicanism usually tends to reduce the theoretical spectrum and exclude other (mainly Marxist and post-Marxist) approaches, which likewise have addressed the collective subject and the principles of equality and liberty. Marxist tradition's major mistake is its frontal rejection of the achievements of the Enlightenment from the modern state to the rule of law. In this way, the Left has handed these achievements to the "enemy" and abandoned the possibility of deepening what already exists for creating something utterly novel. Liria salutes the populist turn, arriving in Spain by the hand of Podemos, as a way of vindicating republicanism, since both populism and republicanism (which he clearly feels closest to) challenge the positions that historically have characterized the radical Left tradition. In this sense, *In Defense of Populism* offers a framework for applying institutional politics and putting the position of Podemos in a different space than the one owned by the radical Left.

The political trap, revealed by Liria, is to think that the enemy is the state or the law instead of it being capitalism (the real enemy). The institutional realm would never offer the conditions for an optimal functioning because it is always appropriated by capitalism as a wild power. This means that the state and legislation always preserve a democratic potential which cannot be fulfilled due to the way in which capitalism uses it. An emancipatory project which does not understand such potential would only consist of rejecting the value of everything existing and result in the construction of something completely new: "If the modern state is only the coverage of capitalism, we are also fighting against the modern state, meaning that we detest the division of powers, parliamentarism, rule of law, etc. and, besides, we head to the imprudent task of making up something better than all that" (2016: 93).

Since the institutions are deprived of their democratic potential by capitalism, Liria attributes to populism the function of recovering such a potential. In comparison with Villacañas, populism here is not anti-institutional but rather the opposite: it aims to recover institutions. Left-wing populism (Liria is quite explicit about the fact that he talks about Left-wing populism and not about populism in general) has to take advantage of the current "window of opportunity" in which a new distinction between us vs. them has been shaped. Liria, first, is not opposed to the us/them dichotomy as structuring for republicanism (including the conflictual dimension of politics), and second, such distinction is shaped around institutions (and their function) rather than around the people. According to Liria, "they" are the group whose aim is to destroy institutions; a sort of rebellion of the riches against the poor which is threatening what is known as "civilization." "We," on the other hand, become the conservatives; those who want to maintain the things that deserve to be maintained such as public schools, a public healthcare system, the right to retirement, to housing, to jobs, and so on. Being anti-systemic, in other words, consists in saving the system: the most basic commonsense republican system. It entails a sort of political paradox: being revolutionary would mean being conservative and reformist (of the emancipatory and democratic potential of institutions).

Left-wing populism, or the populist moment, is therefore a necessity, so the existing conflict between us–them can be channeled into reclaiming the democratic function of the modern state and law. It established the ground for a republican populism, which, as Liria stresses, should rely on the principle of "republican objectivity." It implies the possibility of producing objectivity in the political world through a system of balances between powers and the articulation of institutions. This would create a space for reasoning. Populism should not reject the defense of the republican objectivity; doing that would be a huge mistake. Indeed, populism becomes Left-wing populism by assuming such a defense. Through this operation, the defense of populism becomes, rather, a defense of republicanism. Institutions ensure the conditions for the collective will to speak and annul the "shouting" of the polis. Objectivity means that laws rule and not the people. In the rule of law any change must be made in accordance with the law (and not with arbitrary decisions). This "introduces a *distancing* of the people from itself; a distancing that makes people think it over twice, so to say, or, in the end, to reason" (2016: 111). Distancing converts people into a republic: law is above people, and any change made by the people should be carried out through reasoning.

A clear example, according to Liria, of how the dichotomy us/them can be used from a republican perspective can be found in the option chosen by Podemos to continue with the demands of the 15M Movement and move a step forward to representative institutions. In the presentation of Liria's book, Pablo Iglesias similarly interprets Podemos' success when he explains that Podemos understood the political meaning of the 15M: the use of the language of liberal democracy to demonstrate that democracy is not possible under the financial power. Podemos would assume, in this regard, the claim for democratic institutions in order to defend the demands of the social majority against the establishment: division of powers (an independent judicial branch), public services, and representativeness (instead of politicians who have nothing to do with ordinary people's interests).

After this process of "translation" from populist demands into institutions, Liria does not see much use in populism. He identifies capitalism as the enemy to be defeated, and, as Villacañas argued against neoliberalism, the only option is republicanism. There is no need to deepen the mechanisms of participatory democracy. It is enough to create the political conditions whereby the economic powers become subject to legislative supremacy and the rule of law. Liria summarizes his formula to republicanize populism very synthetically: "More Kant and less Laclau." Therefore, the contribution of populism to republicanism becomes blurred, and the sense remains that everything that Liria says could be applied more generally to the Left and is not specifically about the populist Left. However, the introduction of objectivity within the populist tradition is a major contribution that must be taken into account. Comparing with other distinctions between Left and Right-wing populism, Liria's perspective is clear and goes beyond inclusive politics: Left-wing populism differs from fascist populism by embracing republican principles. It provides a strong argument for thinking about republican populism.

7.3 Principles for a Republican Populism

The emergence of Podemos has contributed to enriching the debate on populism and republicanism. First, it has made it possible to approach the debate from a perspective in which populism is not only attributed negative connotations, but can also be addressed from the constitution of a Left-wing populism; second, populism and republicanism tend to appear as necessary to shape alternatives in the moments of mobilization (populism) and institutionalization (republicanism). The theoretical reflections

of Villacañas and Liria, rooted in Podemos' practices, introduce interesting lines for exploring the development of a republican populism. In this section, I present some of the topics which can contribute to thinking about the formation of republican populism, drawing upon the experiences of Podemos. The idea is not to resort to republicanism as a retaining wall to populism but rather to develop republicanism based on the need of populism. The four principles for a republican populism developed below are applicable to the government and opposition functions as well as to external and internal (i.e. organizational) relations.

7.3.1 Non-domination as Conflictual Principle

If there is one principle that must be essential for a republican populism it is that of non-domination. As seen, Pettit's proposal focused primarily on political liberties and only later did he develop a certain awareness of the need for regulating the market. However, non-domination should be a principle applied to both the political and the economic sphere. At the political level, by eliminating the threats to freedom (exposition to arbitrary interference), it would guarantee the acquisition of new social and cultural rights for minorities. It should likewise enhance plurality (through republican institutions) in society and avoid moments of unity deriving from moments of homogeneity. On the other hand, at the economic level, non-domination introduces the importance of equality to achieve the material conditions for liberty. Villacañas emphasized that the real core of domination relies on the economic structure. Therefore, non-domination cannot succeed without regulating the control of the markets and increasing social protection. The populist distinction between establishment and people is very useful here to introduce the economic and social injustices into the public debate, and it requires institutional changes in order to do that. Non-domination must thus go beyond preventing arbitrary interference and acknowledge the conflictual dimension: although freedoms would be guaranteed, inequalities would still be produced and be the basis for domination.

As Nancy Fraser (2013) argues, there is a third pillar to be added to Polanyi's double movement (marketization or financialization and social protection): emancipation. Republican populism must thus deal with all the forms of domination at the political and economic levels and offer measures to promote social protection and emancipation. Populism can contribute to fostering social protection by denouncing elites whilst

republicanism should enhance emancipation. But again: no form of non-domination can be implemented without tackling economic domination. This implies that domination goes beyond national borders: claims for national sovereignty restrain some global dynamics but strengthening transnational cooperation is mandatory.

7.3.2 Controlling Power: Institutional and Street Arenas

Without questioning the republican objectivity (laws rule and not the people) suggested by Liria, spaces of subjectivity, so to say, are necessary to democratize institutions. Institutions cannot always be changed from within, that is, without any kind of social protests or questioning of the institutions (i.e. electoral law) or, at least, their application. Podemos has included the division of powers and the independence of the judicial power in its relation to the executive power. This is very positive insomuch as it prevents the centralization or personalization of power (arising from the dependence on the leader as unifier for social demands). Sara Carreño (2017), MP for Podemos, points to that objectivity and how law also aims to control power, when she states that: "Rule of law needs not only laws elaborated by the Parliament, which is democratically elected, but also that those norms are applied to all the citizens and, specifically, to the political power." According to Carreño, cuts in social policies put the constitutional system at risk since social rights and well-being are being threatened. The defense of the Constitution, in this sense, requires the democratization of institutions. This means both institutional and social claims since the first alone would be insufficient. Assuming the fight against corruption as one of the main political axes is also the best republican request for well-functioning institutions.

Podemos' proposal of a vote of no confidence in May 2017 due to the many cases of corruption by the government and the persisting austerity policies is doomed to failure due to the lack of a parliamentary majority. However, the appeal to people to mobilize, resulting in a public event in the Puerta del Sol square in Madrid, reflects the need of alternative channels to control power, namely the streets. Besides the idea of enhancing an active citizenship or promoting contestation within institutional channels, civil society must likewise promote alternative spaces for popular deliberation and protest. The opposition between protest and government party tends to diminish the importance of protests and the fact that the streets are, in reality, a necessary arena to promote change. The movement through

institutions and streets (not forgetting their respective functions) is fundamental to a republican populism which does not renounce any one of them.

7.3.3 *Common-Wealth Patriotism*

The republican patriotism or constitutional patriotism is an alternative to nationalism without rejecting the love for the fatherland. In the republican tradition, patriotism is a passion which needs to be stimulated through legislation, that is, good government and the participation of citizens in public life (Viroli 2001). In this aspect, Podemos has offered an alternative to nationalism and to a populist reduction (or division) of the political community. Indeed, Podemos advances to a republican populism in which fatherland (*patria*) is related to both the institutions and the people. I call this kind of patriotism "common-wealth" because it is patriotism of the people (in its unity and its diversity), and it is grounded on the defense of the public services as common-wealth.

The populist dimension is reflected in the idea of the "fatherland is the people." Íñigo Errejón claims that defending the fatherland is to defend the ordinary people. The populist division between establishment and elite remains strong. The economic and political elites are accused of hypocrisy: declaring their love for the fatherland and at the same time following the policies of the Troika against national interests, or enjoying tax havens. "The patriots," says Pablo Iglesias (2016),

> work and do not need to be covered by a flag. They wake up early to go to work or to look for a job. The real patriots care about their people (…) To us the fatherland is the people. To us defending the fatherland is to defend that there are public hospitals, public schools, having the best services. The fatherland should be more like its people and less like its elites.

Although the fatherland is the people, it is likewise the institutions that guarantee equality and defend the interests of the vulnerable against the powerful. Therefore, this perspective combines the people's interests with the protection of the public services: people become attached to those institutions that make the defense of their interests possible.

Furthermore, common-wealth patriotism embraces diversity and, in the Spanish case, is a reaction against conservative patriotism (and its conception of the homogeneous nation) by moving "forward the recognition of cultural diversity and the right to decide" (Errejón, quoted by Redacción

2016). In other words, it promotes cultural and national diversity. This is relevant as constitutional patriotism has, at the theoretical level, faced difficulties in dealing with multiculturalism and, at the level of political practice, has often been used (e.g. by Ciudadanos) as a rejection of national diversity. A new meaning is given to the fatherland by this notion of "common-wealth patriotism."

7.3.4 Trimodal Party Organization

The internal organization of Podemos is probably one of the most interesting terrains to develop a republican populist approach by the combination of criteria of participation and representation (something that should be applied as well to the relation between institutions and civil society). The structure of the party has also been a terrain for disagreement and accumulating power. The party evolved quite fast, from a party close to a movement toward a hierarchic organization, not so different from other traditional parties. The potential here for republican populism relies on how to experiment with the horizontal and vertical tensions and try to find procedures for easing both.

Loreto Arenillas, who was a member of the Secretariat of Organization of Podemos, talks about the bimodal structure of Podemos since it has two pillars or ways of being: the circles (*círculos*) and the so-called citizens' councils (*consejos ciudadanos*) or political management. When Podemos obtained political representation, the structure became indeed trimodal: institutions, circles, and citizens' councils (responsible for the political direction). Arenillas (quoted in La Morada 2016b) underlines that there is a tension between the three pillars. There are actually different types of tensions: vertical–horizontal (circles and councils) and institutional–organizational. These tensions are not always satisfactorily resolved. The circles were in the beginning spontaneous and horizontal ways of organizing, which echoed the assemblies of the 15M Movement. The centralized leadership assumed by the party emptied the content and functions of the circles. The circles entail, however, a huge potential for renewing the organizational structure of parties by introducing elements of participatory democracy and defining its functions in a clearer manner: increasing deliberation and creating a permeable space to connect institutions with the demands of civil society. Despite the fact that circles are often reclaimed by Podemos leaders as being fundamental sources of mobilization, they have lost strength since the beginning.

The acknowledgment of a third pillar (the institutional), as pointed out by Arenillas, is necessary in order to rethink the relationship between the political management (as extraparliamentary and internal body) and the circles (the activist and most innovative part) and find points of connection and ways to delimitate their functions. The uses of mechanisms of direct democracy (referendums) for relevant organizational or political decisions are valuable and play a democratic role. However, it would be insufficient to promote only a plebiscitary approach (mostly to endorse the leadership's positions). Participation must be enhanced and can increase the motivation of the sympathisers. But, besides plebiscites, spaces of deliberation (including internal disagreements to be solved) are likewise important, as is a clear definition of how the representatives (those in the institutions) may be held accountable. The integration of plebiscitary, deliberative, and representative functions would offer an interesting republican populist approach, which would overcome the lack of means of internal participation and the risky concentration of power around the leader. Although concentrated power could guarantee unity of action, the promotion of diversity and deliberation would contribute to a more inclusive structure.

7.4 Conclusion

Whilst Zapatero's "don't let us down" implied a change in the relationship between people and their representatives, Podemos' "you do represent us" confirmed the need of still redefining such a relation in more radical terms. Zapatero's deployment of republicanism attempted to offer an alternative to social democracy. It succeeded in implementing new social rights and contributed to progress in many areas but it failed since there was no alternative economic model. Republicanism was not an option for populism. The arrival of Podemos to the institutional framework enabled the recovery of the republican tradition. But, due to the limitations of social democratic republicanism, a new kind of republicanism must be elaborated: republican populism.

The dialogue between republicanism and populism, when existing, has always been tense. The populist "will of the people" is often presented as incompatible with the institutional order, and direct democracy is usually conceived as a replacement of representative democracy. From a republican perspective, those who take populism seriously try to adapt institutions to assume the populist challenge, since, in the end, there is an

underlying conception of populism as a threat to democracy. However, republicanism has faced serious problems in its opposition to neoliberalism and has, indeed, come close to social liberalism, especially at the level of political crisis. The arguments against populism are mainly political, but against neoliberalism the position is not so clear as republicanism does not offer a well-defined economic alternative.

The republican belief that improving institutions could eliminate the conditions for any populist contestation to emerge does indeed diminish the importance of movements and protests outside of the institutional channels (which enhance more limited possibilities for participation and contestation). Improving institutions does not imply that the appearance of populist moments will not still occur. On the other hand, republicanism expresses this fear of populism as a way to eradicate institutions and replace them with a centralized and plebiscitary system. This option is unrealistic, at least in the European context, where institutions are consolidated and populist parties do not have a majority and need to be in dialogue and form coalitions with other existing parties.

Therefore, the conditions for rethinking republicanism from a populist perspective exist. The goal is not to blur populism within the institutional approach but to find an alternative project as a result of their combination and mutual dialogue (without ignoring existing tensions). I want to be clear that "populism" is used here to refer to Left-wing populism and, specifically, to the experience of Podemos. Indeed, republicanism, in its social democratic version, is limited in terms of changing society and institutions since it is embedded within the neoliberal economic system; the possibility of a republican populism, however, offers a way of combining rupture and continuity.

I have identified four principles to develop a republican populism: non-domination as conflictual principle, controlling power both at the institutional and street levels, common-wealth patriotism, and trimodal party organization. All these principles attempt to reconcile the dimensions of populism (conflictual division between elite and people, popular participation) and republicanism (rule of law, distribution of power, institutions). The irruption of Podemos offers a good opportunity to enhance such a dialogue and to explore the ways in which it can become productive. Issues such as liberty/equality, unity/diversity, globalization/national sovereignty, institutional/contentious politics, people/patriotism, coherent and decentralized organization are essential to change the political direction. Republican populism suggests that these tensions must not be resolved in

one direction only but rather as a dialogic solution. The claim is double: We the People, We the Republic. There is no contradiction, but a mutual and constitutive need. As Lawrence Lessig (2011) claims, we, *as a people*, still maintains its potential, even in times when we, *as a republic*, has lost it. Recovering the we, as a republic, through the we, as a people, in order to have a well-functioning republic is the main task for republican populism.

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PART IV

Comparative Perspectives

CHAPTER 8

Podemos and Latin America

Salvador Schavelzon and Jeffery R. Webber

8.1 Situating Podemos Politically

Podemos emerged in 2014 as an alternative political party in the Spanish state. Some specific characteristics allowed the party to occupy a political space that had not existed previously, or at least that no organized political force had been able to occupy. These were key for allowing for the initial hypothesis of the party to advance toward the construction of a national political organization of unexpected and unusual strength.

The road map put forward by a group of professors and researchers at the Universidad Complutense in Madrid touched on deep threads in the fabric of Spanish politics and became a political option for millions of individuals, who transformed Podemos into a force almost capable of forming a "progressive" government. Podemos also contributed to the formation of municipal governments under novel frameworks, and will continue to stand in electoral contests to come. In its short life, Podemos has intervened in national discussion in such a way that has forced a modulation of

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other political forces, as well as influencing the political paths of, at least, Europe and the United States.

In order to define their new position, the founders of Podemos appealed to wider European debates (such as their discussions on political realities and the world of work with authors such as Owen Jones, and intellectuals from the Italian workerist tradition). But the founders also saw in the Latin American version of the national-popular organization a possible model through which to speak to the Spanish population.[1]

The key, for Podemos, was to be able to situate itself "between" distinct positions and traditions, which had until then been thought of as obligatory and fixed spaces. 15M, and also Latin America, had provided clues to finding this place.

Podemos sought a new political identity, a "party of the people," a popular rather than ideological identity, for the majority and the nation, rather than for a particular class, or for specific social movements. It was understood that there should also be flexibility in relation to the internal voices within Spain that questioned its sovereign territorial space. With the political concept of "pluri-nationality," adapted from its Bolivian and Ecuadorian uses, and with respect to the "right to decide" that provided a response the growth of Catalan nationalism, Podemos found a way to grow in the center and peripheries of Spain, where support for traditional parties was in retreat.

This interstitial space was, at the same time, the product of three powerful ruptures. A first opposition was toward the two big parties of neoliberal governability (and their regional allies). A second demarcation was in relation to IU, with which various prominent future members of Podemos had had connections. Pablo Iglesias established in that sense a clear distance from IU—"cook yourself in your sauce of stars and red flags," he said in one forceful interview[2]—which was a critique that had emerged more widely in the context of 15M, as a cycle of mobilizations that emerged outside of parties and unions, and from which Podemos drew an arsenal of political resources. Finally, on a third level, irrelevant for the message that the organization emitted to the mass media, but important in its debate with militants from the rest of the Left, Podemos rescued 15M while simultaneously imposing a break on its trajectory. 15M was a different path, which in order to advance had to be left behind; 15M obeyed a political logic that was not acceptable in the short term from the point of view of institutional politics, into which the party hoped to be incorporated.

Podemos' aim was not merely to find a new place in the political spectrum, but rather to catalyze a shift in the totality of Spanish politics. It was bringing to the sphere of electoral politics what 15M was able to "say" from the streets; it was assuming a position on the Left against bipartisanship, but also distancing itself strategically from 15M and the habitual forms assumed by the Left. Podemos would simultaneously represent a confrontation with neoliberal politics and the parties that represented it in the latest democratic period and a Left front, searching for a projection of the national popular organization and the experiment in different political forms that had been born in the plazas and political collectives of 15M.

This new place is not consolidated, since it is not at all clear as of yet that a new party system has replaced the one that emerged from the transition, and because we also do not know how long Podemos will be able to sustain itself at its current level, with the same flow of votes. Although out of power, it is nonetheless clear that Podemos' position shares important similarities with that of South American governments. It was through monitoring these processes that the founders of Podemos visualized for the first time the possibility of filling the same space in the Spanish state. This was a space of distance from extant "partyocracies," where traditional forms of Left organization were set aside, and where popular movements, uprisings, and cycles of protest preceded the formation of such governments. Instead of a lived political experience in person, for the political scientists of Madrid, the progressive Latin American governments were a phenomenon to reflect upon, a phenomenon of evident and undiminished interest to them over time.[3]

Even before the "cities of change"—municipal governments backed by Podemos—were formed, Latin America became central in the defining coordinates of the new grouping, especially in terms of conceiving progressive administration of the state. It is from this point of reference that concrete ideas were presented for "progressive government," such as the treatment of the debt in Argentina and Ecuador, the idea of building the social from below in Venezuela, the novel territorial configurations of politics in Bolivia, and the progressive policies implemented in Uruguay. It was also from Latin America that the proposal for a party with strong leadership emerged along with the wager that a majority of votes could be won; the proposal for a party sought to combine political traditions of the Left with sensibilities of a "national and popular" variety. There were allusions to European references from the past, but the Latin American exam-

ple is what first rose to the surface, and also what remained available after the failure of Syriza in Greece.

This link with progressive Latin American governments was demonstrated in the first trips of the political organization, in which Podemos figures met with Evo Morales, Rafael Correa, and José Mujica. For a party without institutional weight, the reception and openness of the Latin American governments should be recognized as worthy of note.[4]

Latin America occupied an important place in the construction of a political profile for the individual trajectories of the founders of Podemos. Venezuela, Ecuador, and Bolivia were sites of research, political training, and professional development for the five founders of Podemos. The Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) foundation, that some of them had participated in, specialized in providing policy advice for several Latin American countries, and functioned as a think tank that monitored and studied Latin American political processes. Íñigo Errejón had also worked in a public survey institute related to the Hugo Chávez government (Grupo Nacional de Investigaciones Sociales del Siglo XXI; GIS XXI), Carolina Bescansa also served there as a pollster, and Juan Carlos Monedero, founder of Podemos alongside the others cited here, was already recognized as a social scientist for his work on the region, and had served for years as a direct advisor to Chávez. The fifth founder of the organization, Luis Alegre, was the most distant from the Latin American processes, but he did win an important award in Venezuela for his intellectual work.

8.2 South American Progressivism in Crisis

The late 1990s and early 2000s witnessed a remarkable economic crisis of neoliberalism in South America (1998–2002) morph into a political crisis of Right-wing regimes, as explosive extraparliamentary social movements emerged—strikes, land occupations, unemployed workers' roadblocks and factory takeovers, and indigenous uprisings. By the mid-2000s, this effervescence translated in a muted style into the parliamentary halls and presidential palaces of many South American countries as center-Left and Left parties were elected to office. In electoral terms, the progressive cycle began with the election of Hugo Chávez at the end of 1998, and was followed sequentially by the election of Luiz Inácio "Lula" da Silva and Néstor Kirchner in 2002 and 2003, Evo Morales in 2005, and Correa in 2006. Fernando Lugo, Tabaré Vázquez, and Michelle Bachelet also

formed part of the same wave of progressive administrations in South America.

The gatherings of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) symbolized this unity, especially as an articulation of presidential affinities, and a geopolitical realignment that positioned the region differently in the world. There were also expressions of progressivism in Nicaragua, Honduras, Panama, and other Caribbean countries, which integrated themselves into the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA), the regional organization pushed forward by Venezuela and which also included Cuba. Only Colombia, Peru, and Mexico, among the countries with large populations, maintained a distance from this cycle, although their political life did not go untouched, as connections were made with their neighbors.

From a nadir for the political Left in the early 1990s, the neoliberal economic crisis between 1998 and 2002 evolved into a political crisis that helped to produce an unexpected renewal of an extraparliamentary Left. The radicalism of this movement Left—particularly in Argentina, Bolivia, and Ecuador—was subsequently moderated in various ways through increasing participation of movement actors in elections and state apparatuses, the rise to office of center-Left and Left governments, and a worldwide commodity boom driven by China's dynamic accumulation. A "compensatory state" was consolidated by progressive governments, through which distribution to the poor was made possible without changing the underlying class structure of society—a model contingent on commodity prices holding firm.[5] The compensatory state was financed by modest (in most of the cases) increases in royalties and taxes in the accelerating extractive sectors of the economy—agro-industry, mining, and natural gas and oil extraction.[6]

The turn to the Left in Latin America has been heralded by some intellectuals sympathetic to the new governments as a fundamental rupture with the preceding neoliberal era.[7] Such a perspective tends to conceive of the state as the key agent of transformation, and occupation of the state apparatus by Left-wing governments as therefore the most decisive step in any "process of change." Political momentum here comes principally from above, with social movement mobilization seen in the instrumental terms of either advancing or undermining the consolidation of the progressive government once in office. On this view, given the geopolitical constraints of the world order and the disciplining mechanisms of the international market, progressive governments in South America have achieved what

was feasible, if not everything that was desired by the popular movements that made their election possible. Other observers have stressed the dynamics of popular movements from below, the shifting balance of power between these movements and domestic ruling classes, and the effects of changing power relations on state forms during the period of Left and center-Left hegemony.[8]

The material basis for a passive revolution in the mid-2000s—where passive revolution is understood as an epoch characterized by a dialectic of transformation/preservation, which introduces a distinct set of changes to the political order, but which ultimately guarantees the stability of the same fundamental underlying relations of domination[9]—was precisely the extraordinary commodities boom of 2003–2011, providing relatively easy access to higher rents for redistribution without serious confrontation with the interests of domestic or foreign capital. This material basis would disappear as China's growth began to slow, the Eurozone remained stagnant, and the United States continued to sputter. By 2012, it was patently clear that Latin America, whatever the hopes and illusions of some analysts, would not be shielded from the effects of the global crisis. While in 2011 aggregate growth in Latin America and the Caribbean reached 4.7 %, this was followed by a downturn to 2.9 % growth in 2012 and 2013 alike, with further drops to follow.[10]

The key political phenomenon emerging in the wake of the commodities downturn is a rejuvenating new Right in settings of center-Left and Left hegemonic erosion. We see this happening, at different speeds and with specific national characteristics, in various countries of South America where the economic crisis has become a political one.[11] It crystallized in late 2016 in the formal field of politics in Argentina and Venezuela, with the presidential victory of Daniel Scioli in the former, and the legislative victory of the Right-wing opposition in the latter.

While the initial impact of the 2007–2008 global economic crisis on the region was relatively weak, particularly in South America, by 2012 the tide had shifted and crisis rolled through the region. With a downturn in commodity prices, easy rent for redistribution disappeared, and center-Left governments were transformed into managers of austerity, alienating at one and the same time sections of capital that had reconciled themselves to center-Left rule, as well as the traditional social bases of these regimes in the popular classes. This dual retraction of support has provoked a decline in center-Left hegemony and the uneven appearance of new social and political movements of the Right.

There were myriad social gains achieved during the period of center-Left hegemony. There were some advances toward alternative regional integration projects to counter US dominance in the region.[12] Laws granting impunity to leading figures of the Argentine dictatorship were overturned as unconstitutional, and constituent assemblies in Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador saw some transformative elements in the new constitutions established as a result.[13] Politically, the contrast with repressive conservative regimes in countries such as Colombia, Peru, Paraguay, Honduras, and Mexico is acute. In the sphere of ideology, there was a regional revival of anti-imperialism and, in Venezuela, proliferation of strategic debates in society over socialism and paths of transition to a post-capitalist mode of production.[14]

The bonanza of export rent was used by progressive governments to fund targeted social policies for pauperized strata, increase and sustain employment rates (albeit typically in insecure and low-paid jobs), and spike domestic consumption. There were measurable improvements in living conditions for popular sectors of society.[15] There was a reduction in poverty, and income inequality was slightly reduced (although this was also true of some countries in the region led by Right-wing governments, as a cursory comparison of International Monetary Fund figures for Colombia and Brazil reveals, and the region remains the most unequal in the world). The pace of privatizations slowed and was even reversed in some economic sectors in a few countries. There was an uptick in spending on basic social services and infrastructure in poor urban neighborhoods and marginalized rural areas. Access to basic free education was expanded, and in some cases access to university was democratized. In the words of Ecuadorian sociologist Pablo Ospina Peralta, Latin American progressivism offered "something," however minimal, in the face of the "nothing" that had dominated the decades of neoliberal reaction that preceded it.[16]

The decline of center-Left hegemony is opening up a new period, likely to be marked by more intense forms of new Right rule, often lacking societal consent, and more reliant, therefore, on militarized and repressive methods. But the Right will be unable to solve the structural problems underlying the region's economics. The new period is likely to be one of economic, social, and political instability, of renewed interference by the United States, particularly in Venezuela, and of deteriorating living conditions for the majority of Latin American populations.[17]

Progressive governments in the region are increasingly wedged between growing popular demand for the sustenance of recent social gains, on one

side, and the intensifying discontent of foreign and domestic capitals that had learned to live with center-Left hegemony when there seemed to be no other option. In the present scenario, none of the progressive governments are ideologically, organizationally, or politically prepared to take the audacious steps against capital—nationalization of banks, monopolization of trade, agrarian reform, mass employment schemes, environmental regulations, boosts to popular consumption, and control of money laundering—that might realign them with popular bases of support. These "governments fear popular mobilization of their own bases of support," Guillermo Almeyra notes, "more than being toppled by the Right, which is on the offensive."[18]

The cycle of progressivism in Latin America has demonstrated that mass mobilizations against neoliberalism in the early part of this century, and the subsequent occupation of state apparatuses by progressive governments of different shades, are insufficient on their own to structurally transform society, the state, and the economy in the current context of global capitalism. Indeed, the occupation of the state can often domesticate social movements and tame their desires through partial incorporation of their demands within an underlying framework of continuity. This observation, though, is hardly vindication of the radical autonomist view of changing the world without taking power, of ignoring state power and buckling down in defensive islands.[19] The new situation demands a sober assessment of the period, interrogation of established revolutionary truths, and ongoing, open-ended discussion of the strategic lessons to be drawn. "When major historical processes come to an end, and in turn major political defeats transpire," Raúl Zibechi explains, "confusion and despondency set in, desire intermingles with reality, and the most coherent analytical frameworks blur."[20]

8.3 At the End of the Cycle: What Progressivism?

The Latin American progressivism that the founders of Podemos knew so intimately prior to launching their initiative in the Spanish state is a progressivism at its apogee—with high commodity prices, repeated electoral triumphs, the Bolivarian influence producing a new political framework in Venezuela, and the rise of pluri-nationality as a political model responding to indigenous peoples proposals for a new form of state in Bolivia and Ecuador, which was incorporated into the official frameworks of these states, even if it did not ultimately change their form. The Latin American

progressivism which emerged after Podemos consolidated itself as an organization, however, is the progressivism of the end of a cycle—with the electoral defeat of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner in 2015; the extraconstitutional ousting of Dilma Rousseff in 2016, following a disastrous performance by the Workers' Party (PT) in municipal elections that same year; the congressional defeat of Bolivarian forces in Venezuelan elections; and the triumph of the "no" side in the referendum on Morales' ability to run again in presidential elections in Bolivia. In Ecuador, Lenin Moreno—Alianza País' continuity candidate after Correa—won the presidency in the second round, but by a slim margin. It was also the first time since 2006 that the project associated with Correa failed to take the first round decisively.

In the modulations that marked their political discourse, progressive governments oscillated between gestures "of the Left," and a nationalist drift that responded to difficult moments through the strengthening of the image of state authority and a wager on promoting national development through the most powerful private actors in the economy. In an earlier moment of the cycle, progressivism in some countries had confronted these sectors, at least discursively, and with some important redistributive effects.

In Bolivia, the re-election of Morales occurred in a framework of cutting of ties to pluri-nationality and indigenous-peasant proposals. But 2013 appears to have marked a more general change at the regional level. There were attacks against workers' rights in Uruguay and Brazil, the economy collapsed in Venezuela and Argentina, and the costs of the fall in commodity prices were already pinching. In terms of political discourse, 2013 coincided with the death of Chávez and the arrival of Pope Francisco, giving rise in Brazil, Bolivia, Venezuela, Ecuador, and Argentina to a modulation of their previous relationship with the Catholic Church, which had been critical of progressivism's positions on gender equality and reproductive health. The arrival of the new Pope was seen by progressive governments as a populist opportunity to associate with his message directed toward the poorest, without a rupture with capitalism and without a focus on social antagonism. The street protests in Brazil in 2013, the indigenous-peasant and worker marches in Ecuador and Bolivia, can also be situated in this new framework.

With origins in social struggles for sovereignty over natural resources, human rights, and opposition to corruption, progressivism in its declining phase found that it was the opposition that had in a number of places mobilized behind the banner of anti-corruption, and the political position

of progressivism and the Left, which still inspired Podemos, that had blurred. But it would be their political positioning, and not their actual experience governing, to which Podemos would relate. It is true that such an orientation to processes elsewhere opens and closes specific paths. But the place of the Latin American processes was in no sense evaluated by Podemos as a simple example or model for Spain. Podemos took from these experiences something less measurable, but which is nonetheless important—a sort of generic code that emerged in 2013 and 2014 in Spain and allowed for the irruption of something new.

With nuances, each Latin American government involved a combination of ideological elements, political symbols, and composition of groups and figures associated with the Left, at the same time as they included the formation of wider popular movements, which were less ideological and distant from the Leninist tradition of organization. The PT was born from the Left, but for the Movement for Socialism–Political Instrument for the Sovereignty of the Peoples (MAS) in Bolivia and the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), socialism was only one of multiple components. In spite of its name, in the construction of its discourse in the lead-up to its electoral success, and after, in its administration and its Constituent Assembly, the MAS (a name originally inherited from a formally registered but practically defunct party for the purposes of participating in municipal elections) was inflected more with Indianism as a political element, than socialism.

Chávez declared himself a "Peronist" on a visit to Argentina, after expressing his admiration for Perón. Considering the Spanish political reality, the crisis of the Left, and the political space that had opened up for the proposal of a new party, the creative appropriation of this sensibility is understandable. As was the case in the South America, among those seeking to take forward and defend a project of statist progressivism (particularly in Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador), the possibility of a Leftist populism allowed for the coexistence of elements that Podemos, once it was established, also came to represent.

In its search for coordinates, Podemos presented itself as sharing affinities with some of the more moderate South American governments—rather than the space of ALBA, which included Ecuador and Bolivia, expanded throughout the Caribbean, with the influence of Venezuela, its driver, and symbolically embraced Cuba as a historic site of political struggles in the continent in the twentieth century. ALBA presented itself as a site of socialism and projects of the statist Left. In

order to understand Podemos' positioning *vis-à-vis* ALBA, it is important to consider the central element of the continuing campaign against Venezuela in the Spanish media. Despite links with Chavismo, Podemos was forced to put some distance between itself and Venezuela. In its place, Uruguay, Ecuador, and Argentina could be presented as more acceptable references of progressivism. Indeed, these became the reference points in the interviews, political visits, and social media presentation of figures from Podemos.

In the Southern Cone of South America, specifically, we find the political worlds closest to what Podemos sought to represent. Podemos found here societies with bigger middle classes, states with a stronger republican institutionality, and a certain cultural affinity, due both to a shared type of industrialized and urban society, and strong linkages between the Southern Cone and Spain. These included strong migratory currents with Argentina (including of exiled Argentinian activists who influenced the Spanish scenario), and the international projection of Brazil which had given Lula da Silva a presence beyond Brazilian borders.

While the party was finding its feet, it was Íñigo Errejón—political secretary of major campaigns until 2015, and parliamentary spokesperson and number two in the party until the Vistalegre II congress in February 2017—who would firmly invest in developing the dialogue with South America. For Errejón, this played a role in the construction of the political instrument of Podemos, not only in terms of positioning itself in the Spanish political conjuncture, but also in the construction of a militant mystique and symbolism within the party, helping to create a political identity.

In this sense, Argentine Kirchnerism deserves to be highlighted. It is within this milieu that Errejón discovered semiotic elements that he would adopt in defining internal and external positions for Podemos. Despite the fact that his ties as a researcher had been in Bolivia under the MAS (the subject of his doctoral thesis), and his role as political adviser in the area of communication in Venezuela under Chávez, it was in Argentina where Errejón found a political framework for thinking through the role of Podemos in Spain. Phrases in communication and Tweets from Errejón drew on this connection explicitly, and reached a new level during Macri's visit to the Spanish congress in February 2017. Errejón delivered a speech that ended with the "V" gesture and the phrase "Vamos a Volver/We Will Return," a Kirchnerist slogan that emerged in the wake of the electoral defeat of Fernández de Kirchner to Macri.

This element, associated with what came to be called *errejonismo*, and which ended constituting a rival tendency in the aforementioned congress to *pablismo*, took as its primary foundation Errejón's political and theoretical relationship with Ernesto Laclau. In the face of *errejonismo*, which began to identify with the "V" of the Peronism of the resistance (and of Kirchnerism), other political identities were also in play. But these organized themselves in pre-existing political spaces, between the Left, 15M, and the social struggle option associated with social movements.

There are striking parallels here with the efforts by social movements and Left oppositions in Latin America in recent years to counter the bureaucratizing tendencies of Left-wing parties once they had assumed positions in office.

In the internal dispute of Podemos, one of the open debates had to do with the identity that the group would assume. In this sense, the Latin American examples constituted the material of symbolic transactions, which, in reality, was also common within the Latin American political processes themselves. It is common to group together the different progressive governments in distinct subgroups. The Latin American Right, for example, separated the carnivorous from the vegetarian Left (Álvaro Vargas Llosa). Likewise, in the electoral contests of various countries, including Peru, political parties chose to identify with the figure of Brazil and Argentina in order to establish a distance from the negative image of Chávez, to which a significant part of the mainstream media contributed. Similarly, in Bolivia, Vice President Álvaro García Linera argued that, for Bolivia, Lula and the Kirchners were better models for the political project that MAS was seeking to implement. In an effort to distance Podemos from Chavismo, Pablo Iglesias instead mentioned the Scandinavian countries as a model.

The relationship with Greece (see Part I) was important for Podemos until the approval of the memorandum shutdown expectations with regard to the Syriza government. A possible dialogue between dissenting European governments, united against the mandate of the Troika, was closed down. This route was also frustrated in Spain because of the impossibility of forming a government in opposition to Rajoy, despite the fact that a majority of the population supported this option at the polls, if we consider the progressive orientation that, with Pedro Sánchez, the PSOE also adopted, possibly as a reaction to the apparition of Podemos. The dialogue with Southern Europe, however, was pursued in a different manner than that with South America. Podemos maintained a fluid dialogue

with various representatives of the European Left, and in the European Parliament even sought to establish institutionalized party ties with them. But the political importance of the Latin American Left went beyond effective contact, which in many cases was far from entrenched. Through biography, through historical relations between countries, and through the political experience at the time Podemos was created, Latin America served as a political compass in a differential manner.

This relationship is spontaneous, and has roots related to the place of Latin America within the Spanish Left, something which is on a different level to the conjunctural closeness that can be established with the European political framework, for example through Iglesias mentioning Hamon or Corbyn, and the discussion in the space of DiEM25 (Movement for Democracy in Europe, with Varoufakis and others), in which Podemos is involved. Errejón's relationship with Leftist populism in Argentina, in fact, dates back prior to his strategic political campaign positions, and therefore is not reducible to a reaction to the printed press and television which are obsessed with Venezuela. In the case of Errejón, Leftist populism forms part of his interpretation of Latin American politics, and in particular the formation of governments like those in Venezuela and Bolivia. This perspective draws on Laclau's reading, although Podemos also developed political linkages with the intellectuals of Kirchnerism.[21]

Reading Laclau is not an eccentricity for a doctoral researcher in Spain with an interest in Latin America. His work is presented in various political science courses and became more widely diffused during the apogee of the progressive governments, as a common tool for understanding political processes where there is an emphasis on the figure of the leader, on media communication, and on the political construction of a mass movement. The place of discourse, and of a non-pejorative formulation of populism, undoubtedly resonated with these political experiences, as Ernesto Laclau himself made clear when he openly embraced Kirchnerism after years in England, a short while before his death in March 2014, after the founding of Podemos, but before its first contestation of European parliamentary elections.[22]

Although we speak of Laclau, it is clear that in Latin America we find a populist component with its own tradition and political structure, a phenomenon without which it would be impossible to understand the work of Laclau himself. It is well known that Laclau was a militant Left-wing Peronist before his exile, and we can see something similar at work in the development of Podemos and the progressive governments of Latin

America. Various figures of Podemos explained on different occasions that the role of Podemos was to occupy the political space in Spain that would impede the growth of a Right-wing populist option, as we can see occurred in France and England. Thinking of Podemos through a Latin American lens, however, allows for another interpretation. The Spanish political matrix, and especially from the Left, converses more easily with figures like Cristina Kirchner than Anne Marie Le Pen.

Beyond a critical reading of the politics of austerity and the government of the Troika, Podemos was interested in seeking out the average voter. It sought to redefine terms like *la patria*/the nation, breaking with the classic position of the Left, using the Spanish flag, and including in the composition of the lists for the European parliamentary elections figures who would signal this opening of the party. Anti-monarchical republicanism was set to one side insofar as it remained implicit but was no longer foregrounded, with the parameters of discussion limited to the national level. After emerging onto the electoral panorama—in November 2014 Pablo Iglesias was first in the polls—Podemos worked to find voters away from the streets, with whom they communicated through a television presence, who did not come from the core nucleus of Podemos voters—young and Left-wing—and who were distant from radical politics and the memory of 15M.

Speaking of Podemos as a whole, and not only of its *errejonista* tendency, the sense of Laclau is to find a place on the Left, but without abandoning the pretension of being a party of "the people," a party that represents, through the leader, a social majority. This does not mean a front, a vanguard party, nor an ideological party. It is the space that the Peronist Left built in the epoch of Perón's exile. It is with this tradition that the possibility of populist progressivism in Spain is bound up. Iglesias endorses this position, although it is probable that he is more interested in the Laclau of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*—the book Laclau co-authored with Chantal Mouffe in the 1980s, in which social movements feature prominently—than the Laclau of *On Populist Reason*.[23] This constituted one part of the internal debate within the organization, whereas on the other extreme we find Juan Carlos Monedero, who, when he resigned from his position in the party, and on other occasions, wrote "we need less Laclau and more Boaventura de Sousa Santos," or "Boaventura beat Laclau," leaving behind a foundational moment in the party in which distinct political traditions had coexisted.

In the majority camp of Podemos after Vistalegre II, we find Marxisms in dialogue with the popular. In his report on the congress, Iglesias mentioned the name of Manuel Canelas as someone who contributed to the agreement between tendencies, for a path that will possibly renew the Latin American influence within the founding figures of Podemos. The encounter between popular political traditions and the Marxist Left can be found in the political sector of the MAS in Bolivia that Canelas represents, as a kind of Evismo, influenced by the language of Álvaro García Linera. Beyond the role of administration and policy direction in Bolivia, which, we have seen, has not broken with neoliberalism, within the milieu of urban militancy and intellectual life that maintains a close relationship with the government, the role of heterodox Marxism remains important. This is a Marxism that was influenced by autonomist ideas during the 2000s, which places social movements at the center and above the Leninist party form, and which emphasizes the role of popular leaders like Morales, and seeks a dialogue with nationalist traditions.

If Latin America was present at the hour of Podemos finding its political space, it also was an easy tool for the mainstream press to use to discredit Podemos. The relationship with Venezuela even generated allegations of irregularities, but none of these accusations held water. Podemos knew how to deal smoothly with this relationship because, ultimately, distant political experiences helped to situate the party politically, rather than associate Podemos as a new political force with the shortcomings of other processes whose relationship with Podemos was only one of sympathy and shared vision.

It remains to be seen what role this relationship could play in an eventual Podemos government, although the rhythms appear to indicate that progressivism will still be on the wane in Latin America should a progressive Spanish government become a reality in 2019. The importance of Latin America for Podemos, however, also occupies a space within the party's internal controversies, in its debates over possible future paths. It is a political relationship which is sufficiently strong that it will always be there, and which also explains, as we have seen, the capacity of Podemos to influence through its capillaries the militancy and politics of the South American Left.

Successful initially, the question that remains open is how fertile it might be in Spain for the success of a Left-populist project. For some, the position of social democracy cannot be superseded so easily, and from this perspective there is no space for a political force to reorder the playing

field in which for decades PSOE occupied the center and IU the Left. For a Podemos capable of embracing the working class, others still see a Leftist imaginary as a road forward. There will be new episodes that will allow us to evaluate whether this attempt continues to open up into a new political phase.

8.4 Distinct Temporalities of both Processes

After more than a decade of progressive South American governments, these experiences could provide elements that might serve Podemos as it attempts to find comparative political models against which to situate its program and profile. But is that what the still nascent political organization requires? Would it not be necessary, given the Spanish political moment, for Podemos to situate itself in a place similar to where the new governments of Latin America were a decade ago, at their hour of building a path toward government? Podemos could open a dialogue with the experiences of Latin American processes because they did give rise to progressive governments. But Podemos was an instrument that found itself in the same place as Latin American progressivism when the latter gathered sufficient political force to electorally supersede neoliberalism. Podemos could speak from that place of the new, and of the past.

In a sense, the discussion about the extent to which one had to speak of government, and to develop a more profound critique of the regime, is a debate that remains unresolved in Podemos. How to articulate an image of management and responsibility? Or to speak from outside the political system, rejecting with irreverence the methods and languages of formal politics? The Latin American mirror offered an example of what Errejón plotted, using a phrase from García Linera to explain the arrival of the MAS in government: to transform a social majority into a political majority. The maximum objective was, in the face of presidential elections, to garner a majority vote and, in plebiscitary form, open up a political phase that could convene constituent power, an idea that would spread to several progressive governments.

But the parliamentary reality of Spain, from the outset, requires an understanding of the limited possibilities of obtaining majorities comparable to those achieved by Morales, Chávez, Cristina Kirchner, or Correa, in the scenario of a second-round electoral contest. This would open up the necessity of building bridges with PSOE, that would end up choosing Ciudadanos and giving the government to the PP, knowing that, at its

base, Podemos is contesting the political space over the question of socialism. At this moment, a tension is produced between a Podemos that should throw out the old occupants of government, and one that should show responsibility of governance, and achieve government through negotiation.

The progressive Latin American governments were born of revolts, social movements in processes of mobilization, uprisings, and sometimes surprising candidates who won wide majorities when they were able to present themselves as an alternative in front of the exhausted neoliberal epoch of the 1990s—the long night of neoliberalism. The situations were different in each country. Decio Machado and Raúl Zibechi describe the process through which the Caracazo of 1989, the Water and Gas Wars of Bolivia, December 2001 in Argentina, and the cycles of indigenous mobilization in Ecuador, and of peasants in Brazil, among others, were the legacies of leaders who distanced themselves from the streets and, in many cases, from the demands that had carried them into government.

Centralized and vertical governments in some cases assumed the development of, and expressed continuities with, these protests, and in other cases showed sympathy toward them. Kirchnerism was, in large measure, a government that achieved the expression of the accumulation of political forces opposed to Menemism. This had been attempted previously by the Front for a Country in Solidarity (FREPASO), which had earlier expressed a progressive sensibility when Menemism was still in power. And the administration of the Alliance couldn't find the power to govern precisely because the extent to which it superseded Menemism was unclear. Denunciations of corruption (which led to the resignation of Carlos "Chacho" Álvarez, a candidate who expressed much of what Podemos is seeking to express), the election of Domingo Cavallo, a minister under Menem, and a president who came from the ranks of radicalism and whose political position was far from a break with neoliberalism, are what led a majority of voters to find an opposition to Menemism exclusively in Kirchnerism.

Finding a progressive position is a constant task, and one which Latin American governments did not always maintain. Consider, for example, the case of Rousseff, who, after her re-election in 2014, could not sustain her position as a progressive leader. Because she introduced austerity and appointed representatives of the free market to take the lead in economic policy, she created the necessary conditions for her own removal from office. More successful in maintaining this position as a Left alternative was Cristina

Kirchner, despite also introducing policies that blurred this commitment, and that contributed eventually to the defeat of Kirchnerism at the polls. The PT has recuperated this position after having been displaced from government by conservative political forces, and the MAS in Bolivia never lost this position. In Venezuela, the deterioration of political support for Maduro has less to do with his political positioning, which remains relatively on the Left.

What is clear is that, beyond the progressive or Leftist political positioning of these governments, there is a clear transformation between a progressivism that lived through mobilization and was attentive to demands from below, and a form of state administration which assumes the role of managing the security forces and economic governance within the established framework. In the majority of cases, there has not been rupture with these frameworks, apart from the state assuming greater relevance.

With respect to this position of management, returning to the situation in Spain and 15M and subsequent mobilizations, Podemos has offered an argument similar to the one we saw play out in Latin America, and which we have had a chance to evaluate as it reaches the end of its cycle. What is the role of a party which is defined by its origins in a protest of indignation? Latin America occupies an important place in the answers provided to this question by the founders of Podemos. Monedero defined Podemos as a political response similar to the one found in Argentina in the social explosion of 2001. Errejón spoke of representing 15M, because it is not possible to be the party of 15M given the movement's rejection of representation. Iglesias, likewise, speaks of the party as bringing 15M into the institutional framework.

It remains an open question what relationship Podemos would consolidate with anti-neoliberal struggles if these struggles were to propel the party to power in Spain, and what kind of state administration Podemos would offer. Would Podemos retain the attitude of Kirchnerism and Correa on the question of debt and international creditors? Would it know how to defend progressive measures as successfully as José Mujica did in some instances?

The relationship with 15M remains open. Beyond an initial break by Podemos from the logic of the assembly and horizontalism within that political culture, the proposal to consolidate a vertical political party, with strong leadership and without decentralized power, remains openly debated within Podemos. The party's relationship with social movements, with the mobilization of the people, and the enclosure of the institutions are still debated. There is a consensus that tactics must be combined, but

the return of debate shows that these themes are not yet rigidly determined.

In Latin America, the relationship between the early struggles and the progressive governments that these movements gave rise to, has been one of gradual estrangement. The role of mobilization and participation from society has tended to recede. There has also been a tendency for these governments to adopt a discursive politics which, with time, has been in greater discord with the demands of social movements, and which has helped to reignite strong cycles of oppositional protest, for example in the case of socioecological mobilizations against large-scale mining, or movements against corruption. These movements have sometimes been repressed in a fashion similar to non-progressive governments.

On this point, Podemos offers a challenge to Latin America. In moments of closure, of the end of the cycle, Podemos breathes new life into these Latin American party apparatuses and administrations which are encountering difficulties. We will see in the next section how Podemos—and the coalitional progressive municipal governments of Spain—are revitalizing debates in Latin America and inspiring novel political initiatives.

The end of the cycle has quickened since 2015, with the defeat of Cristina Kirchner to Macri, the ousting of Rousseff, the triumph of "no" in the referendum for Morales' re-election, the shaky victory of Moreno in the second round in Ecuador, and the difficulties in Venezuela. From the vantage point of Spain, the question that arises is whether this closing in South America implies a limit to resistance to neoliberalism that will affect the potential political possibilities of Podemos to strengthen its position as a political alternative. Just as the existence of progressive governments in South America sent a message to similar projects elsewhere, so too does their decline.

But the lesson for the Left, in Spain and elsewhere in Latin America, should be a positive one, that the possibility of a Left government in the twenty-first century can revitalize hopes and create a possible way out of the present situation.

Today, various points of dialogue remain open between progressive South American projects and Spain. The territorial organization of the Spanish state is a particularity without correlation in Latin American states, where there are no strong calls for regional sovereignty. The reality of indigenous peoples in Latin America, in terms of their territorial demands for autonomy, also does not have a parallel in the Spanish context. In terms of the political challenge that both of these situations create in each coun-

try, however, there are commonalities in the terrain of debate. In particular, the adoption of pluri-nationality in the new constitutions of Ecuador and Bolivia is today part of the Podemos proposal for Spain—an attempt to navigate the difficult waters of sovereignty and independence. Emerging from the proposals of indigenous peoples, but in the constituent processes of Ecuador and Bolivia being transformed into a merely declarative statement, pluri-nationality has not had any structural territorial effect on sovereignty, beyond the possibility that municipalities with an indigenous majority can declare themselves autonomous—without the possibility, however, of modifying the strict regime of juridical responsibilities.[24]

Pluri-nationality, in terms of state structure, is perhaps less than a federation, but it allows discontented and autonomist territories to remain within the territory of the state—although the vision is seen by independence supporters as Spanish-centric. What is clear is that by defending the "right to decide," Podemos has been able not only to maintain an ambiguous position on the territorial question, but has achieved its best results in Catalonia and the Basque Country, gaining "strategic" independence votes, despite also defending a will to maintain Spain as one entity.

Another area of dialogue between these distinct political realities is the discursive strategy with respect to the interpellated political subject. A theme of Laclau, the construction of a people through floating signifiers that allows for the resonance of distinct demands, has been one of the key areas of dispute and debate within Podemos, in terms of how to classify this "people" whom the party is seeking to represent. Iglesias speaks of the popular classes, but at the same time keeps on board the middle classes who have historically voted for PSOE.

Speaking of political subjects and sociological structure, perhaps it is necessary to make a distinction. The progressive governments see the middle class as a political subject that allows them to focus on poverty reduction, an increase in consumption, and social inclusion, which, in propagandistic terms, speaks to the beneficiaries of the policies of the boom period as the new middle classes, rather than the working classes, or the poor.

If the middle class, as a universal class that appears around the globe, constitutes a political subject for Podemos as it postulates the necessity of rebuilding a welfare state and guaranteeing rights, in South America there is a weaker gesture in that direction. In South America, progressivism responds to more basic demands and a more vulnerable situation, without guaranteed rights and with strong associative networks and organizations,

which, as social movements with a popular base, even if sometimes disorganized, constitute a subject without which it is difficult to imagine the construction of alternative politics.

8.5 Conclusion and Opening

Because of its innovative character, Podemos has become a source of inspiration and discussion for political currents across the continent—in spaces where they are searching for new roads at the end of the progressivist cycle, or where they are building proposals for a progressive government where there has never been one.

The contributions of Podemos and post-15M Spanish politics, including at the municipal level—including other parties and candidacies like the Popular Unity Candidacy (CUPS) of Catalonia, or the now defunct Party X—are multidimensional. One of these is on the organizational level, on what type of political organization we should conceive today. Others are related to political language and discourse, and the challenge of building movements with impact. There is also a more underground debate on the advance of a financialized capitalism, which demands new political tools and responses—national, but also European and global in scope. In relation to this debate, Podemos is opening up a discussion, but is also showing its limits: the party's space of intervention is definitively national and institutional. It is its potential, however, as a possible force contributing to the formation of a political line that articulates Leftist parties and movements at a European level, that remains latent.

Another level of influence is at the municipal level. Podemos made the decision, in its first congress in October 2014, not to dispute municipal elections. With its eyes on central government, and without the operational capacity to achieve this goal, the party set municipal contestation aside. It participated, however, in various municipal initiatives, and, without leading them, is present within the governments of various of these, established in Madrid, Barcelona, and other cities. Together with the new party, municipalism today appears as another product of 15M; there are elements of the municipal dynamics that characterize this movement as autonomous from the birth of Podemos, although undoubtedly it has benefited from the boost in its own support that accompanied the party's growth.

Existing and new political forces in Latin America recognize the experience of Podemos and incorporate it into their discussions. We can see the

continuation of this dialogue and exchange of political proposals in distinct countries. We will set aside for the moment the various cases of Right-wing parties that have also entered into dialogue with Podemos from a political marketing perspective, incorporating some of the Spanish party's symbolic arsenal.

8.5.1 The Broad Front in Peru

Peru never had a progressive government, but the country's political phases in some ways paralleled those of neighboring countries, such as in the expansion of extractivism in the mining sector and the popular mobilizations of opposition that this engendered. In countries like Bolivia and Ecuador, this subject would be a space of conflict between official progressivism and indigenous organizations and their allies. In Peru, these movements fostered the development of a Left-wing party (Land and Freedom), that would be integrated into the Broad Front, itself a space that has incorporated the experience of Podemos and engaged in dialogue with the Spanish party.

The particularity of the Peruvian context made possible the formation of a Left party which, distinct from parties that became progressive governments elsewhere in the region, incorporated into its internal debate the question of post-developmentalism. The Broad Front, that was left in third place in the 2016 presidential elections, presented as its presidential candidate a young woman with university education who explicitly recovered discourses and symbols from Podemos (including the V that Íñígo Errejón brought to Spain from Argentina). Verónika Mendoza, who does not come from Land and Freedom, but rather the nationalist party of Ollanta Humala—as a result of urban alliances—maintains a dialogue with Podemos and critical social movements across the continent, but also with the political spaces bound up in official progressivism. She was invited, for example, to a progressive gathering organized by the Correa government, where no social or indigenous movement was present.

8.5.2 Chilean Autonomism

Emerging from the student struggle, the autonomist movement made a significant leap in 2016, with the first sector of this kind achieving institutional power at the municipal level in Valparaíso. The autonomous sector, comprised of leaders and student congressional representatives—

unaligned with the Communist Party, which has supported the socialist government—is beginning to build political alternatives such as the recently formed Broad Front. The Broad Front in Chile, as in Peru, has significant dialogue with and interest in Podemos and the municipal experiences in Spain. Trying to come to terms with the difficulties of an adverse political system, as in many places Chilean autonomism is engaging in internal debates and coalitional processes for municipal elections.

8.5.3 Argentina: Municipal Experiences

Experiences such as the Future City of Rosario come from a background of independent Left groupings. From that basis they were able to elect local councilors (representatives in the municipal council), maintaining a political dialogue with Podemos and positioning themselves against the Socialist Party which has governed the province of Santa Fé for years and which formed part of the "progressive" opposition to Kirchnerism. In other places, the space of "new politics" has been formed with critics of the Kirchner governments, although in some cases Peronism is also a component of "new politics."

One example of this is Buenos Aires Now, a recent initiative in which distinct social groupings have coalesced, and in which the focus of criticism is oriented against the businessman Mauricio Macri, the new president of the country, who interrupted more than a decade of Kirchner governments. This initiative seeks to convene distinct currents in order to build electoral resonance. In so doing it has drawn on ideas from the Spanish experience, and, in particular, the "populist hypothesis" of Ernesto Laclau. Venezuela is a useful place in which to politically situate these experiences. In the Argentine case, a popular and Leftist position sometimes forms linkages with Chavismo that do not translate into support for Kirchnerism, but rather seeks to attract voters with a critical proposal of going beyond Kirchnerism.

From within Kirchnerism, sectors of La Cámpora—established in 2003 by the son of Néstor and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner—such as ex-Minister of the Economy Áxel Kicillof, present themselves as a possible alternative in legislative elections and make gestures toward Podemos, but they maintain a position of unrestricted support for Cristina Kirchner. Their way of doing politics has nothing to do with the municipal politics and post-15M politics of Spain.

8.5.4 Brazil

In Brazil, the dialogue with Podemos emerges from diverse places. Within the PT, Podemos Mais articulates tendencies that were always critical, flirting with rupture, but betting on party renewal. The Homeless Workers' Movement (MTST), a social movement with wide support within the militant base of the PT, which contributed to the mobilization against the impeachment of Rousseff, finds in Podemos an inspiration for thinking through the eventual foundation of another party, close to groups like Socialism and Liberty Party (PSOL), the Left party that exited the PT quite early in the era of Lula. Inside PSOL the Spanish experience is one possible reference point in terms of a Gramscian or movementist analysis of class and an orientation toward the conquest of institutional spaces.

In an independent way, there are political experiences that find inspiration in municipal politics, and whose point of departure is distinct from the above mentioned forces in Brazil. These municipalist groupings have a distinct reading of the impact and meaning of Podemos and the new municipalism in Spain. The militant Left of the PT can feel affinity with Podemos, from the vantage point of governability that was established since 2003, in a government coalition led by the PT but composed of conservative sectors. It is natural that a reading of the role of the PSOE in Spain was developed, in which a similar space was occupied by the PT in Brazil, a party which gradually accepted close relations and consensus politics with conservative forces. The "PPSOE" alliance in Spain in the face of the emergence of 15M found its echo in Brazil in the protests of June 2013, and in the innumerable local governments of the "PTMDB," phenomena that have probably irreversibly damaged the PT. The alliances in Brazil do not function as parliamentarism, but rather as governments of electoral coalitions with their base in legislative support. The PT alliance with the Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (PMDB) at the national level, which was broken with the ousting of Rousseff, functioned in the October 2016 elections in many municipalities and states.

Without strong electoral impact, but as an incipient articulation of forces that could bear fruit in the future, various citizen movements, electoral initiatives that are independent from the established parties and have links with academia, NGOs, and urban and cultural collectives in distinct fora and spaces of political intervention, can be found in Brazil. In this sphere there have been successful experiences, such as Bancada Ativista in São Paulo (which helped elect candidates linked with activist causes and

rooted in different parties), or the City that We Want/Ciudad que Queremos Movement of Belo Horizonte, that elected municipal representatives through networking and the concept of a "citizen occupation of politics."[25]

Mexico, on the other hand, is perhaps the country that is more concretely moving toward a phase of progressive government. A collateral effect of the Trump presidency, perhaps Mexico will be where everyone turns their attention in a search for new roads for the Left, or from below … with coalitions, citizen platforms, anti-capitalism, and new hypotheses for dialogue with the majority from a minority.

Notes

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CHAPTER 9

Radical Left Populism from the Margins to the Mainstream: A Comparison of Syriza and Podemos

Alexandros Kioupkiolis and Giorgos Katsambekis

9.1 Introduction

Syriza's ascendance to power in Greece in January 2015, along with the impressive performance of its "sister parties" in Spain and Portugal, has brought renewed attention to the distinctive character of the new radical Left in the European periphery. Parties belonging to this "new wave" of the radical Left present strong populist characteristics, significant links with anti-austerity social movements and grassroots protests, as well as charismatic leaders (see Stavrakakis 2015; Pappas 2016). In this chapter, we focus our analysis on what we consider the two most paradigmatic cases of this strand of new Left-wing populism in today's Europe: Syriza and Podemos. Our aim is to highlight their discursive strategies and ideological-political development, while remaining alert to the transformations they have undergone since they established themselves as "key players" in the political scenes of Greece and Spain.

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In what follows, we first briefly clarify our theoretical understanding and methodological approach of populist politics, drawing on the tradition of the "Essex School" discourse theory and the work of Ernesto Laclau (Panizza 2005; Laclau 2005; Stavrakakis 2004). Second, we chart the basic similarities and differences among the two aforementioned parties, focusing on their conditions of emergence (namely the post-democratic mutation of the political system and a severe crisis of representation), as well as on the way that they have constructed the popular subject ("the people") and its political enemy ("the establishment," *la casta*, etc.) in their discourses. Third, we critically assess the development of these parties and their populism as they consolidated their position and came closer to power (Syriza gained power in January 2015, while Podemos has now established itself as the third major party in Spain). Our aim is to highlight and explore the impact of "institutionalization" of Left-wing populism, whether this comes as a result of the ascent to power (Syriza) or as a consequence of a pronounced office-seeking strategy (Podemos), as opposed to the adoption of the role of a fighting opposition.

We thus look into their relations to the state, as well as their transformations on the level of party organization and leadership, as reflected in internal procedures and public discourse. Overall, through this comparison we seek to offer constructive insights into the specificities and varieties of Left-wing populism in today's Europe, but also to investigate a rather under-researched aspect of this field, namely the transformation of Left-wing populism when it moves from the margins of the political system to the mainstream and from there to power. *In both cases, we have witnessed a gradual moderation of their discourse and politics, a move to the center-Left, the empowerment of leadership, and vertical/hierarchical structures.*

9.2 A Theoretical Framework for Populism

Despite the particularly rich bibliography on populism, researchers still seem to disagree over the definition of the phenomenon (de la Torre 2015; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2012; Panizza 2005). However, taking into account the indications of an emerging consensus on the basic characteristics of populism (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017: 5–6), in our analysis we draw on studies produced by discourse-oriented scholars and we broach populism as a *form of discourse*, a discursive strategy or "logic"; in other

words, as a distinctive way of doing politics (Katsambekis 2016b; Stavrakakis and Katsambekis 2014). To be more specific, we understand populism on the basis of Ernesto Laclau's formal-structural approach, which stresses: (1) "the formation of an internal antagonistic frontier separating 'the people' from power" (Laclau 2005: 74); (2) the creation of a chain of equivalence among popular demands that are left unsatisfied by those in power (an "unresponsive elite," an alienated "establishment"), this equivalence being produced through common "empty signifiers" which unify and represent the chain of demands; and (3) the representation of "the people" of populism as an excluded and unprivileged segment of the population which claims to represent the whole of the people as the democratic sovereign (Laclau 2005: 74, 81, 94, 98). When these conditions—or "minimal criteria"—are in place at the same time, we consider it safe to call a party or a movement "populist" (Stavrakakis and Katsambekis 2014: 123).

We need to stress, however, that although we embrace the basic elements of Laclau's work, we do not endorse his approach in full. Importantly, we do not share the view that populism can be equated with politics as such, since this would entail the risk of losing "the conceptual particularity of populism as a tool for concrete political analysis," as Yannis Stavrakakis has convincingly argued (Stavrakakis 2004: 263). We thus understand populism as one way of doing politics among many other possibilities.

The merits of operationalizing Laclau's approach in order to conduct empirical and comparative research on populist parties and movements have already been dealt with at length elsewhere (Kioupkiolis 2016; Katsambekis 2016a; Stavrakakis et al. 2017). In line with these works, we maintain that it is through a "formal" discursive approach that one can avoid a priori assumptions about the specific contents and ideological/programmatic features of a given populist mobilization. We can thus reduce the risk of analytical or other biases. For example, in our approach we do not consider populism to operate necessarily as a homogenizing discourse or ideology that suppresses plurality and divides the social and political field in moral terms, between "good" and "evil," "virtuous" and "corrupt" (see Mudde and Kaltwasser 2012). We consider this just one possibility among many others, as a sociopolitical divide may also emerge in primarily political, ideological, or socioeconomic terms. This has been the case historically in many instances (e.g. Katsambekis 2016a; Stavrakakis and Katsambekis 2014; Prentoulis and Thomassen 2013; Mudde 2016).[1]

Hence, in our analysis, we are first concerned with *how* exactly the various elements and signifiers are articulated in a given discourse, in order to establish whether such a discourse can be safely categorized as "populist." Second, we delve into the ideological and programmatic orientations of a given (populist) discourse, as well as into the forms of organization that it produces, in order to reflect on its overall orientation and potential impact on democratic institutions and the dynamics of social change.

9.3 Post-Democratic Tendencies and Crisis of Representation in Spain and Greece

Now, before moving on to consider the specific characteristics assumed by the discourse of Podemos and Syriza through time, we need to briefly focus on their sociopolitical conditions of emergence, in order to better clarify the context in which their populism has risen as a challenge to the "mainstream." The environment in which a populist movement springs forth is important not only because it can significantly influence its very contents and orientation (Canovan 1999: 4), but also because under certain conditions this environment may produce "triggering" mechanisms (such as a crisis of political representation) that facilitate a successful populist mobilization (Roberts 2015: 140–158).

Since about 2011, the trajectories of democratic politics in Spain and Greece display clear affinities with sociopolitical developments in other European as well as Latin American contexts. Since 2009–2010, the liberal-democratic consensus that had prevailed in the previous two decades in Spanish society has been damaged. The regime that was put in place after the fall of Franco's dictatorship in 1978 has undergone a further "post-democratic" shift, which reinforced already dominant tendencies of civic demobilization and the two-party system.[2] The "post-democratic" crisis consists of the programmatic convergence of the center-Left and the center-Right parties on neoliberalism, the increasing irresponsiveness of political elites and institutions to social demands, widespread corruption, and the growing discontent of citizens with representative democracy and the entire "1978 regime." These phenomena have been exacerbating in recent years as a consequence of the way ruling elites have managed the economic crisis since 2008 (Sampedro and Lobera 2014; Podemos 2014a; Monedero et al. 2014).

The situation seems strikingly similar in Greece, where the outbreak of the recent crisis marked a rupture with the *metapolitefsi* era,[3] which

initially saw the formation of a strong polarized two-party system, with center-Right and center-Left parties (New Democracy (ND) and PASOK) rotating in power. The two parties converged in their programmatic agendas after the mid-1990s and they even collaborated in government after 2011, under the pressure of the severe crisis and rising social tensions. While their emergence and consolidation initially facilitated the transition to a stable party democracy, expanding social and democratic rights, building a functioning welfare state and including excluded sectors of the population, the two parties soon became self-serving and alienated from popular concerns and grievances, while they were beset with several other evils, like clientelism, corruption, cronyism, and so on (Katsambekis 2016c; Lyrintzis 2005; Vernardakis 2011). The establishment of a "culture of consensus" after the mid-1990s and the adoption of similar neoliberal programs exemplified Greece's post-democratic mutation (Kioupkiolis 2014), which was pushed to its extreme in the context of the economic crisis that led Greece to implement the "memoranda" austerity programs (Katsambekis 2016c).

In this context, the outbreak of the economic crisis in the European periphery after 2008 not only challenged the cultivation of a post-political consensus (Mouffe 2005) that had clearly emerged up to that point, bringing sociopolitical antagonisms back to the forefront. It also seemed to act as a *catalyst* for the development of the underlying crisis of representation into an outright crisis of legitimation of the political system in Greece and Spain. This was soon translated into massive grassroots social movements, which were subsequently linked with specific challenger parties.

9.4 The Populism of the Radical Left as a Challenge to the Post-Democratic "Mainstream"

The first of such massive social-popular reactions against the elites was the "15M" Movement, which spread across Spain in May 2011 and voiced popular outrage at material impoverishment and the hollowing-out of democracy, leaving a strong imprint on political culture. The movement failed, however, to effectively change power relations, and the main economic and political institutions remained largely impervious to demands for "real democracy," economic fairness, and the defense of

social rights. As a result, since 2011, various social actors started looking for new means of political representation that would overcome the fragmentation and political impotence of the social movements. Podemos emerged straight out from this search and intended to construct a wider "popular unity" by reaching out to social majorities who agree with the narrative and the demands of the movements but are not interested in their direct democratic practice and are happy to delegate political responsibility (Sampredo and Lobera 2014; Delclos 2014).

The Greek Squares Movement or the so-called Aganaktismenoi (outraged, indignant citizens) followed the same path as the 15M Movement and appeared only a few weeks later, organizing similar rallies in late May and throughout the summer of 2011. The basic claim of the movement was of a populist nature: "the people" had been betrayed by the political elites, which were held responsible for the socioeconomic collapse and could no longer represent them. Thus, immediate and radical change was needed. As in the Spanish case, their main demand was "real democracy," which was soon recast as "direct democracy" (Prentoulis and Thomassen 2013: 175), reflecting the emphasis the movement placed on direct democratic participation and popular accountability, as well as their frustration with established representative institutions.

The Squares Movement in Greece and Spain transfigured the political "common sense," pitting the majority of the citizens against the political and financial elites, calling the political "oligarchy" to account for the crisis, and dismissing political representation. It demanded, instead, effective popular control over democratic government with a view to establishing a "real" or "direct" democracy.

However, the situation regarding the political representation of the Squares Movement in Greece was slightly different compared to Spain. Syriza, a coalition of radical Left parties and groups formed in 2004, was the only parliamentary political force to openly support the Aganaktismenoi and their demands. So, while Podemos literally emerged from the Squares Movement, Syriza was already an established political actor (with its roots in the late 1960s) that managed to address the movement and to capitalize on its dynamic. For Alexis Tsipras, the young leader of Syriza, the Aganaktismenoi prefigured a new social majority that was starting to take shape, consisting mainly of frustrated voters of the mainstream center-Left, but also of the Right (Tsipras 2011). The openly declared objective of Syriza at that time was to express the view of this social majority and to work toward transforming it into a political majority that would effectively

oppose the policies of austerity. Hence, Syriza chose initially to interact "horizontally" with the protesters, motivating its members and supporters to discretely join them. The second step was to effectively represent the movement within parliamentary politics, thus taking a crucial step *from identification* to *representation* (Katsambekis 2016a). The ultimate goal was the formation of a wider "popular unity," which would eventually topple the "old" two-party system of Greece, paving the way toward a radical break with austerity and neoliberal policies.

In this sense, both Podemos and Syriza seem to have arisen as responses to a severe crisis of political representation, confirming Kenneth Roberts' relevant theory on the triggering mechanisms behind populist successes (Roberts 2015). To be more specific, the two parties illustrate a particular "scenario for the rise of populism," whereby established "cartel parties [...] appear to form a closed, self-interested and self-reproducing governing caste that is insulated from popular needs and concerns [...] [and is attached to a] technocratic consensus behind market liberalization policies" (Roberts 2015: 149, 155). Podemos and Syriza managed to effectively express and represent such popular grievances and concerns against established elites, articulating a plurality of demands and identities in their discourses.

Indeed, Podemos' discourse has been populist from its inception in 2014, insofar as it placed at its center the antagonistic divide between the social majority and a privileged minority. This displaced and replaced the divide between Left and Right. The social majority, designated variously as *el pueblo*, *la gente*, *la mayoria social*, *la ciudadania*, is portrayed as suffering from poverty and exclusion from a democracy which has been "hijacked" by elites, and it is opposed to the *casta* which rules the regime and includes the two parties that have been alternating in power since 1978: PP and PSOE (Podemos 2014a: 10–12; *Fort Apache* 2014). A plurality of social demands emerging from the economic crisis and the neoliberal policies of the state—the defense of social welfare and social rights, the end of austerity policies, popular sovereignty—are brought together in a single chain of equivalence around the "empty signifier" of "democracy" (*construir la democracia*) and the charismatic figure of Pablo Iglesias (Podemos 2014b; Iglesias in *Fort Apache* 2014). The third moment of populism *à la* Laclau is also present here. Podemos strives to manufacture a "popular unity" and to "recuperate politics" for the disaffected majority, the "plebs," in order to put public institutions in the service of the common good (Podemos 2014b: 10–12; Iglesias in *Fort Apache* 2014; see also Kioupkiolis 2016).

Moreover, Podemos' discourse sought to connect with popular sentiments and common notions. It has articulated a diagnosis for the present crisis and has put forward policy alternatives by using a plain, "ordinary" language to which people can easily relate, and terms which are not those of the conventional Left but are shared across large social strata. It presents, also, party activists as "ordinary people" (Fominaya 2014: 4). Moreover, in order to break into a wider audience, the spokespersons of Podemos have made intensive use of popular media outlets, including traditional TV channels. The party is also deeply steeped in new digital networks through which it echoes and reconfigures public opinion (Fominaya 2014: 6, Sánchez 2014: 3; Iglesias 2014; Kioupkiolis 2016).

This populist strategy turned out to be very successful for at least a year after the May 2014 European elections, resonating powerfully with the youngest voters, the students, the unemployed, and urban and educated citizens. The latter are affected by the crisis, but they see themselves as middle class, they bear loose party and ideological identifications, they are immersed in digital social media, and they are concerned with specific issues (Sanz 2015; CIS 2015a, b).

Podemos' populism has been effectively *Left-leaning*, since its original program incorporated most contemporary demands of the social democratic Left. Moreover, in contrast to Right-wing populism, the feelings of anger and fear nourished by precarity are projected onto the domestic *casta* rather than on immigrants. Finally, the anti-establishment sentiment is directed not only against corrupt political oligarchies, but also against economic elites, and it is wedded to a project of social justice (Podemos 2014b; Zabala 2014).

Syriza's discourse has followed a very similar pattern, as the party has consistently sought to articulate a series of movements, demands, and identities in a social-popular "unitary front" which clashes with the traditional political forces that are portrayed as the "establishment." For example, its main slogan for the campaign of the May 2012 election, in which Syriza made its electoral breakthrough, was "*They decided without us, we're moving on without them.*" The second key slogan for the campaign expressed this antagonistic logic in its purest form: "*It is either us, or them. Together we can overthrow them.*"

This campaign aimed to capture popular sentiments of frustration and anger against austerity and the way in which mainstream parties had chosen to manage the crisis. At the same time, it sought to point to an alternative path, tapping into popular hope for a way out of the impasse through

collective action and mobilization. It functioned thus as a discursive tool that could set up "chains of equivalence" among heterogeneous frustrated subjects, identities, demands, and interests by establishing and/or highlighting their opposition to a common "other": the "enemy of the people," that is, the "pro-austerity forces," the "memorandum," the "Troika," and so on. In Syriza's discourse, all these forces, also organized through an equivalential logic, were presented as distinct but interrelated moments of the "establishment."

Syriza's discourse thus divided the social space into two opposing camps: "*them*" (the "establishment") and "*us*" ("the people"): power and the underdog, the elite and the non-privileged, those "at the top" and those "below." During the long campaign leading to the election of January 2015, Syriza further developed its call to restore "the people" as sovereign against the established "oligarchy," staging a sharp antagonism between the vast majority of the people and a privileged minority that was profiting from the crisis. The concise program of Syriza in January 2015 opened with an excerpt from Tsipras' speech: "We are counting on you. Not on the oligarchy. […] On the sovereign people" (Syriza 2015). The inclusivity and universality of this appeal was often stressed through the use of the most characteristic slogan of the Occupy Wall Street Movement: "We represent the interests of the 99% of the people that are paying taxes, New Democracy [represents] the 1% that hides, that has high incomes and evades tax" (Tsipras 2015a).

Syriza's populism has also been *Left-leaning*, as its initial programmatic platform embraced most of the demands of the popular anti-austerity movements and various local struggles. It was based on an alternative mix of economic and social policies, involving a rupture with the politics of austerity and a renegotiation of the Greek public debt. Syriza claimed in 2012 that they would raise taxes on big business and the rich, put the banking sector under social control, call a moratorium on debt repayment until the Greek economy starts to grow, provide universal access to welfare, and scrap salary cuts and emergency taxes. At the same time they pushed a radical rights agenda that advocated equal rights for immigrants, refugees, LGBTQ people, and other minorities (Stavrakakis and Katsambekis 2014; Katsourides 2016). Lastly, it is crucial to stress that the anti-establishment sentiments in Syriza's discourse were mostly directed against the political and economic elites in socioeconomic terms, contrasting the logics of equality and social justice to that of profit and deregulation, while

references to “corruption” became more pronounced after 2015 and especially after Syriza rose to power (Katsambekis 2016a).

Hence, the crucial difference with Podemos is that Syriza had already started shaping its peculiar movement-based populism long before the crisis outbreak in Greece. What characterized Syriza’s strategy from its creation in 2004 up to the outbreak of the crisis in 2009–2010 was an effort to create a political space that would facilitate linkages between various movements, resulting in an equivalential chain that was pitted against to the “two-party neoliberal establishment” of PASOK and ND. This strategy proved increasingly successful after the outbreak of the crisis in 2010. The crucial change in Syriza’s strategy came in 2012, when the coalition/party stopped merely pursuing the formation of a more powerful opposition and declared that it was ready to claim power in the name of an “alliance of the Left” (see Katsambekis 2016a: 397; Stavrakakis and Katsambekis 2014: 126).

9.5 Comparing the Two Variants of Leftist Populism in Southern Europe

9.5.1 *The Relationship between Social Movements and Direct Collective Participation*

The rise of Podemos has been facilitated and influenced by the 15M Movement and the shifts in political culture that it brought about: the critique against the elites, the protagonism of the people, the displacement of the Left/Right divide with an antagonism between citizens and the establishment, the promotion of an open and plural participation of citizens. These critical elements account for the form and the language of Podemos’ politics as well as for its resonance with the population (Stobart 2014a; Kioupkiolis 2016). The 15M Movement had been regarded by Podemos’ main theoretical brain, Íñigo Errejón, as a “populist moment” that opened up a window of opportunity in which a politicized minority could represent and create a new popular majority.

Moreover, Podemos has also partly imitated the direct democratic practice of the 15M Movement by fostering the participation of “laypeople” in its grassroots at the time of its foundation in early 2014. The new party set up local and sectorial “circles” of members and sympathizers, who debated politics and formulated policy proposals, it facilitated “online” forms of involvement accessible to all, and it undertook a collective construction of

its program and its electoral lists for the European elections in May 2014 (Espinoza 2014; Tenhunen and Rodriguez 2014).

On the other hand, there are limits to Podemos' identification with horizontal social movements (del Barrio 2014). To begin with, Podemos was launched from the top, at the initiative of a "leading figure"—Pablo Iglesias—and an affiliated group of intellectuals and activists, who have always maintained their grip over the politics of the new formation. Second, against the anti-electoral animus of 15M, the leadership of Podemos has highlighted the importance of the electoral route and has set out to "conquer the state" (Espinoza 2014; Delclos 2014). The persistence of hierarchy, hegemonic representation, state politics, and "traditional" mass media communication attests to the survival of "old-style" representative politics and a strong "vertical" dimension in the midst of Podemos. This clashes with the "horizontal" layer of egalitarian participation and the 15M spirit, leading social activists to denounce Podemos as old politics in a new garb (Fominaya 2014; Taibo 2015).

In effect, the ambiguities and complexities of Podemos' populism reflect the complexity, ambiguity, fluidity, and heterogeneity of the socio-political context in contemporary Spain. While recurrent democratic mobilizations since 2011 have fashioned a new "common sense" which challenges conventional representative politics, state institutions remain in place, relatively unaffected by social protest, and repressing political contestation. Moreover, social diversity and fragmentation, along with minoritarian participation in popular assemblies have prevented the development of an alternative democratic process that would displace established institutions (Monedero et al. 2014; Kioupkiolis 2016).

Syriza's connection with social movements can be traced back to the very name of the party that took the initiative for its formation in 2004 and which was, all along, the dominant constituent within Syriza as a coalition: Synaspismos (SYN), meaning Coalition of Left, Movements and Ecology. The creation of Syriza (acronym for Coalition of Radical Left) emerged as a response to the Greek (non-Communist) Left's long crisis of identity and its stagnating (often disappointing) electoral results. Through this coalition, SYN aimed at broadening its appeal to the youth and to social and political activists, with a view to reshaping its profile.

This transformation was also highlighted by SYN's choice to abandon its self-characterization as "*renewal* Left," to loosen the party's links with the Euro-Communist tradition, and to adopt the self-characterization "*radical* Left," aspiring to express the newest social movements against

neoliberalism. Syriza's strategy as a coalition formation was marked from the very beginning by its support of, and close interaction with a series of youth movements. The most important among them were: (1) the counter-globalization movement, which in Greece was expressed mostly through the "Social Forums"; (2) the massive student protests in 2006–2007 against the constitutional amendment that would allow for the establishment of private universities in Greece; and (3) the youth anti-authoritarian uprising in December 2008, after the killing of a fifteen-year-old boy by a police officer in the center of Athens. These movements became constant themes in Syriza's discourse. They acted as symbols of a broad anti-neoliberal struggle that the party considered necessary for the emancipation of society. Syriza's strategy was to call its members to actively participate in these movements, not from a vanguardist position, but as individuals who respect the movement's autonomous dynamic (Katsambekis 2016a).

This is why Syriza has also been described as a "mass connective party." In contrast to the working-class "mass party" whose main aim was vanguardism and unification, Syriza now sought "to connect in a flexible way the diverse actions, initiatives and movements that embody [...] social, ideological and cultural anticapitalist expressions" into a stable federation, cultivating new forms of political agency and subversive action (Spourdalakis 2013: 103). The "mass connective party" model has indeed shaped Syriza's political action up until its electoral breakthrough and up until the coalition was transformed into a properly unified party in 2012–2013. Now, as the possibility of seizing power became increasingly likely, Syriza focused more on parliamentary procedure and in representing social struggles in its discourse. We could say then that the logic of the "mass connective party" gradually lost its "hybrid" content, which entailed both direct/individual participation *in* the movements and the horizontal articulation of the party *with* the movements, steadily shifting toward a logic of top-down representation.

In this context, Syriza's call on "the people" and against the pro-memorandum "establishment" was combined within the context of the crisis with an emphasis on particular struggles. The latter acted as a symbol of a generalized front against austerity, state repression, anti-democratic tendencies, and neoliberalism. These struggles were highlighted as intensified moments of a broader antagonism, and were thus horizontally linked in a broad *social/popular front* against austerity and the governments that had supported it. The struggles involved national strikes and

demonstrations against salary/pension cuts, labor deregulation, and cuts in social security and healthcare; as well as support for local environmental movements and movements of social disobedience against rising road tolls on Greece's national roads, but also against other forms of debt that were considered unfair (like the so-called Single Property Tax (ENFIA)). Finally, there were struggles of public servants who were either fired in mass lay-offs or were placed in a state of "mobility" (most important here is the closing down of Greece's public broadcaster/ERT and the lay-offs of all of its employees, as well as the "cleaning ladies" that were laid-off by the Ministry of Finance). Syriza thus implemented a strategy similar to the one it had deployed in the past, trying to link and to represent various particular struggles as a broader popular/social front against austerity and the political "establishment."

On the other hand, as in the case of Podemos, there are also clear limits to Syriza's identification with social movements and horizontal grassroots activity, as the party has not promoted grassroots democracy and civic participation within it. Moreover, Syriza has gradually lost its direct links and "horizontal" relationship with the movements from the moment the aim of seizing power replaced its "fighting opposition" strategy. What is more, after the turning point of the summer in 2015, Syriza, again like Podemos, has become a more centralized party dominated by its leader, while social movements have been demobilized and disaffected by the choice of the Syriza-led government to back down and to accept another bailout program imposed by Greece's European partners.

9.5.2 Technopolitics and Reflexivity

There are two elements which clearly differentiate Podemos' populist politics from those of Syriza.

First, the "*technopolitical*" *aspect*, which is a distinctive innovation of Podemos' populism. Social media and new digital technologies are highly popular in contemporary Spain and they were massively deployed by 15M activists. Podemos' organizers did not simply endorse technopolitics, but enhanced digital participation using new tools (Rubiño 2015; Pizarro and Labuske 2015). Podemos constructed its own platforms and technologies, through which thousands of members can "do politics" by proposing, debating, and voting on party policies (Pizarro and Labuske 2015: 98–99). Podemos set up thus a permanent online "agora," called "Plaza Podemos," a reddit channel through which all party members could take part in its

life. By adopting new software for anonymous online voting (Agora Voting), thousands of people managed to participate in Podemos' primaries for the May 2014 European elections and in the Citizens' Assembly in November 2014, which decided the party's structure (Clavell 2015: 115; Pizarro and Labuske 2015: 101–102; Kioupkiolis 2016).

Podemos has thus manufactured a "machine of political communication" which "hacks" public opinion and reconstructs it, multiplying its social impact through diffuse networks and thousands of connections. The embrace of digital media to facilitate information, mobilization, and interaction results in a hybrid party structure which displays features of digital networks and social movements. Hence, through its technopolitical instruments, Podemos has given rise to a new brand of "technopopulism" whereby the people can construct it in and through new social media and more conventional modes of participatory party politics.[4] While its active use of Twitter connected with the youth, the frequent appearances on TV talk shows made their leaders uniformly known across Spanish geography in record time. Podemos' effective use of diverse media to communicate its own political messages and to act as a relay between politics on "the streets" challenges a media-centric thesis which overemphasizes the role of the media themselves in the construction of political discourse (Casero-Ripollés et al. 2016).

Second, Podemos' populism evinces a *reflexivity* without known precedent in populist politics. Ernesto Laclau's hegemonic theory of populism is not merely an apt framework for analyzing Podemos' politics. Along with the 15M political culture and the Latin American experiences of Left-wing populism over the last fifteen years, it has been one of the key intellectual influences on the political project of Podemos (Alemán 2015; Martínez 2014; Stobart 2014b; Kioupkiolis 2016). Podemos leaders are true believers in the performative power of language, in the ability of new linguistic framings to effect social change.

In effect, one could argue that Laclau's thought has informed the political strategy of the intellectual leadership of the new party, the academics based in the Department of Politics at the Complutense University of Madrid, who study and cite his work. Podemos can be seen, to this extent, as an implementation of Laclau's theory of populism (Stobart 2014b; Errejón 2014; *Fort Apache* 2014).

The Gramscian conception of hegemony and Laclau's recasting of it through "discourse theory" accord a decisive role to political communication, the construction of (new) meanings, and the struggle to influence

and reform the "common sense" which enables a political force to gain hegemony. This can account for the emphasis on discourse, mass media communication, and the interaction with "common sense" which has defined the strategy of Podemos from the outset:

> We have managed to place a discourse that serves to explain reality in a different way [...] We have been able to place some words in the public discourse, with a definition of reality that is now assumed by all political actors. (Iglesias in Domínguez 2014: 161–162).

Podemos' discursive-communicative strategy has led critics to claim that it has worked to the detriment of specific and well-grounded programmatic proposals. Programmatic vagueness and volatility can be associated with Laclau's interest in "empty signifiers," that is, words and symbols which facilitate convergences and the making of collective identities (Antentas 2016). Empty signifiers (e.g. "democracy," "justice," "change") are relatively divested of specific content, and this "emptiness" enables various constituencies with different demands and perspectives to identify with them despite their differences.

On the other hand, the contention that Laclau's populist hegemony "moderates" political radicalism is rather ill-founded. The politics of "hegemony" is all about the constitution of social orders themselves, installing new orders or defending established regimes (Laclau and Mouffe 1985).

The most interesting implication seems to be, rather, that a certain reading of Laclau's thought is likely to have reinforced the vertical and centralizing tendencies in Podemos. A reception of Laclau's hegemony which emphasizes the catalytic role of individual leadership is likely to have been affirmed by the experience of Latin American Left-wing populism, which also weighs heavily on the political directors of Podemos (Machado 2014). Although using a different style due to cultural differences between Spain and Latin America, Pablo Iglesias acts as both politician and communicator.

After the launch of Podemos by Pablo Iglesias and an affiliated group in early 2014, followed by the growth of horizontal grassroots involvement, the Citizens' Assembly in November 2014 marked, according to critics, a vertical turn in the actual workings and the constitution of Podemos which was laid down in this convention (Jurado 2014). In contrast with the open primaries and the participatory framing of the program

for the European elections, the tactic of voting for pre-drafted lists and programs in the constituent assembly of Podemos seemed to enact a plebiscitary relationship between the leader and his followers, who were invited to simply ratify his decisions (Espinoza 2014). Since early 2015, verticalism and bureaucratization may have taken their toll on Podemos' popularity. No doubt, the increased centralization has significantly demobilized party supporters and the *círculos* (Casero-Ripollés et al. 2016: 12).

9.6 The "Institutionalization" of Radical Left Populism

Both Syriza and Podemos have undergone significant transformations since their first electoral breakthroughs; transformations that may be linked to their office-seeking strategies, which led to programmatic moderation. In the case of Syriza, the party's moderation was more rapid and serious compared to that of Podemos, due to its ascendance to power under conditions of severe crisis and immense external constraints and pressures.

In the May 2015 local and regional elections, Podemos did not run its own candidates, but participated in broad-based, heterogeneous coalitions with other Leftist parties and citizens' platforms. These emerged victorious in various major cities, including Barcelona and Madrid (Rodon and Hierro 2016: 7–9). In the December 2015 general elections, Podemos ranked third, after the ruling PP and the social democratic PSOE, with 20.7 % of the vote (Medina and Correa 2016: 9). In the repeat general elections in June 2016, Podemos' electoral coalition with IU gained again the third position, coming right behind PSOE. The results reinstated PP in power, but have also confirmed a new, fragmented, fluid, and unpredictable political landscape in Spain, with three or four major political forces in the place of the two-party system (Rodon and Hierro 2016: 1–2, 15).

However, Unidos Podemos did not only fail to achieve its stated objective of surpassing PSOE. It also lost 1.1 million votes from the combined votes of the two parties in December 2015. Several critics have attributed this miscarriage to the gradual bureaucratization of Podemos in its various respects: the absence of civic participation and mobilization; the lack of an organized territorial base; its highly hierarchical, centralized, and conventional party structure; the moderation of Podemos' anti-establishment and anti-*casta* discourse; its ideological ambiguity and political opportunism; the attendant lack of a convincing and specific political program; the

embrace of "social democracy" since late 2015; the electoral coalition with the traditional Left; and the gradual shift away from a radical Leftist populism. In effect, over recent months, Podemos' leadership has rehashed the old antithesis Left vs. Right, giving up on the populist antagonism people vs. the *casta* (Franzé 2015; Antentas 2016) This was a marked diversion from the transversal and cross-ideological approach extolled by the movement's main theoretician and campaign strategist, Íñigo Errejón, who was not supportive of joining with the post-Communist Left IU in an electoral coalition.

All these mutations can be traced back to Podemos' institutionalization. Podemos has been intent on attracting wider constituencies, it has become even more absorbed in parliamentary politics to the detriment of street politics, it has been increasingly incorporated into established institutions and has converged with forces of the *casta*, such as the PSOE, in order to accede to power. This growing institutionalization has stripped Podemos of the aura of novelty and the appeal of the "outsider" in a corrupt and unresponsive political system (Rubiño 2015: 90; Lamant 2015: 85).

On the other hand, the party leadership has ascribed the disappointing results to a "campaign of fear" on the part of the establishment as well as to Podemos' failure to convince moderate voters that it deserves more than a protest vote, as a responsible political party that is also capable of governing. Leaders have thus drawn the conclusion that the first, radical populist cycle of Podemos has come to an end and that, in the new and possibly long parliamentary phase, they need to strengthen its profile as a credible, reasonable, social democratic political force (Iglesias in *Fort Apache* 2016; Antentas 2016). Podemos seemed to be entering now a new, post-populist era. However, the future held some surprises in store for Podemos' "populist hypothesis."

The new party strategy and action were laid down for now in "Vistalegre II," the second general congress of the party that took place in Madrid, February 11–12, 2017. The general assembly of the party would resolve the public infighting that had broken out between the two party leaders, P. Iglesias and I. Errejón. This quarrel was intensely personalized but it appeared to pit two different strategies against each other. Errejón championed his "big-tent" idea of Podemos as a party that transcends Left–Right dichotomies, becomes more toned down, normalized, and better versed in parliamentary politics, appeals even to Right-wing voters, and puts an end to the collaboration with the traditional Left. Iglesias upheld his version of Podemos as a "historical bloc of change" that remains radi-

cal, confrontational, away from today's PSOE and allied instead with the Left, grassroots militants, and protests, keeping one foot firmly on the street and another in the institutions. Reacting to the conflict which divided the party leadership, the party crowds who attended Vistalegre II called regularly for "Unidad," along with the anti-capitalist faction, which rose again to prominence as a force of unity (Fernández and López 2017).

The outbreak of this personalized antagonism can be traced back to the breakdown of the hypothesis of the "electoral war machine." The idea that Podemos could rapidly win electoral majorities and wrest power from the establishment has been refuted several times from Vistalegre I till the latest general elections in 2016. It was this "hypothesis" which allegedly accounted for the centralizing tendencies in late 2014 and the deactivation of the participatory *círculos*, who came to be reduced to supporters and propagators of the leadership's line.

The conflict between the two front men of Podemos has been carried out openly in recent months, producing a grotesque spectacle which damaged Podemos' public image in the same media that Iglesias and Errejón had masterfully deployed to propel the rise of the party and increase its popularity.

Iglesias and his line emerged triumphant from the party congress. He won an absolute majority in the vote on the four main party documents on organization, politics, ethics, and gender equality, and his candidates gained most seats in the State Citizen Council. According to critics, the "Caesarist" or "Bonapartist" tendencies of the party that first surged forth in Vistalegre I were reinforced. The "militant masses" of the party which gathered in the congress gave their enthusiastic backing to the leader. This plebiscitarian populism had been rehashed several times in the recent past when Iglesias, as the general secretary of the party, resorted to popular consultations with party members in order to resolve strategic dilemmas. And, of course, plebiscitarianism could thrive on the lack of real political debate in Vistalegre II and the frailties of political analysis and strategic thought in Podemos. The hegemony of "Pablismo" in the party was further boosted by a voting system, thanks to which the majority is overrepresented in the party organs (Rodríguez 2017).

Almost nothing has remained in place from the meaningful participation of the grassroots in the *círculos* of the early days of Podemos. The party activists have been largely reduced to taking their pick among the political lines proposed by the party leadership. Iglesias is far more popular

with the activist basis of the party, whereas Errejón appeals more to the mainstream media and the higher echelons of the party apparatus (Alabao 2017).

In the aftermath of his defeat, Errejón was replaced as the party's spokesperson in the national parliament, but he sealed a pact with Iglesias, who promised to endorse Errejón's candidacy in the regional elections in Madrid in 2019. Although Iglesias powerfully reasserted his leadership, it seems that both have lost political capital in the eyes of a population that still suffers from high unemployment, precarity, and ongoing cuts in public expenditure (Seguín and Faber 2017).

Far from dealing a death blow to Podemos' populist brand, Vistalegre II staged, thus, a battle between two versions of populism, in which one carried the day. Errejón pleaded for a middle-class populism, which speaks broadly to the people "beyond Left and Right," and is more moderate, pragmatic, and institutionalized. Iglesias, by contrast, championed a more Left-leaning, confrontational, and pro-movement variant, with a patina of radical rhetoric and street activism. Iglesias' current take on populism can thus be described as *neochavismo*, since it mirrors the Leftist, radical, and plebiscitarian populism of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela (Fernández and López 2017; Nichols 2017).

"Technopopulism," of the more spectacular and personalist variant, has also remained in full swing since Vistalegre I. Public competition for positions of power in the party is still waged in front of a rather passive mass of party *inscritos*—the 450,000 people who have registered as party members without having any pre-existing connections or any active participation afterwards. As a result, appearing in the media and accumulating followers in social networks is a strategic priority for any aspirant to higher party echelons and influence (Camargo 2017).

In Syriza's case, the "institutionalization" of the party has been more "violent," since it was significantly accelerated by its rise to power and the confrontation with the EU's severe limitations and constraints. Having to deal with a state apparatus that had crystallized its own typical and atypical structures in the span of four decades under the rule of the mainstream forces of the center-Right and center-Left was a serious challenge itself. The rather hostile and often aggressive stance of the key institutional and political players on the EU level made things even more complicated. Maybe this explains why the Syriza-led government initially chose to pursue some strategic alliances with representatives of systemic and more moderate political forces. Such was the choice of Tsipras to nominate

Prokopis Pavlopoulos, a Right-winger and former Minister of the Interior with ND (2004–2009), as the President of the Republic in February 2015, as well as the appointment of rather conservative ministers and alternate ministers in key ministries.

Despite the noted limitations and constraints, as well as the grim situation of the country's finances, Syriza's official discourse during the first term in office remained defiant and at times rather aggressive against the domestic "establishment," but also against Greece's lenders. However, things changed after Syriza's leadership decided, under immense pressure, to accept a new bailout agreement, a new "memorandum," right after the referendum. So, during the second term in office, Syriza's discourse started to become more managerial and attached to the workings of the state, in an effort to justify the new austerity measures and the need for the Left to remain in power so that it can implement austerity with social sensitivity, while managing public administration in a more efficient and transparent manner.

The signing of the new "memorandum" led to serious internal tensions and strife in Syriza, with around thirty-nine MPs of the party either abstaining or voting against it in parliament in August 2015. Under these circumstances, Tsipras decided to call for new snap elections that were held in September 2015. The party's campaign leading to this election was significantly different from the one that had brought it to power only six months before. In January 2015, Syriza rallied the people around the promise for a radical break with austerity, the reinvigoration of social welfare, and the restarting of the economy. In September 2015, it had to campaign after having just signed a new bailout agreement which furthered austerity and deepened recession.

Declaring that the new bailout agreement was signed unwillingly, under immense pressure, and in order to ward off the risk of "Grexit," bankruptcy, and a complete economic collapse, Syriza's campaign would now put at the forefront the antagonism between the "*old*" (represented by ND) and the "*new*" (represented by Syriza). The main slogan for the campaign read: "We are getting rid of the old. We are winning tomorrow." Tsipras went on to set the basic dilemma for the electorate:

> With ND and their allies, that devastated the country? Or with Syriza and their allies, that bled to get Greece out of the impasse? […] We decide with our hand on our heart and our minds on tomorrow. Not on who is going to sit on the chair. But on whom has stood, is standing and will keep standing straight, next to the people, with the people and for the people (Tsipras 2015b).

After winning the September election, Syriza stressed that despite the limitations of the new "memorandum" the government would move on to implement what it called the "parallel program," which comprised a series of measures that would help ease the pains of austerity and protect the most vulnerable segments of the Greek society, while still pursuing the expansion of social rights. But the implementation of the "parallel program" was again met with hostility by Greece's European partners, leading the Greek government to retreat once more. Thus, after having to abandon significant elements of the "parallel program," Syriza chose to focus more on issues like tackling corruption and fighting tax evasion (Katsourides 2016: 126), a move that led to an increasingly moralizing discourse, stressing the government's "war on corruption." Having seriously retreated on the level of applied policies, especially economic and social ones, Syriza needed to focus on a field on which it could better pick its battles with its main rival, ND.

In the case of Syriza, Tsipras himself has played a role similar to Iglesias, becoming all the more powerful as the party was advancing toward capturing power. It is quite characteristic, in this sense, that while Syriza used to stress collectivity, plurality, and horizontalism in its campaigns, avoiding a focus on the centrality of its leader, in September 2015 it built its campaign almost solely around Tsipras himself, with one of the key slogans reading "On 20 September we vote for a Prime Minister," using Tsipras' face in almost every TV appearance.[5]

It is important to stress, however, that Syriza had a culture that systematically undermined the role of a strong leader up until that point, something that contrasts with Iglesias' central role in Podemos right from the beginning. To be more specific, Syriza had been a polyphonic and pluralistic political alliance from its foundation in 2004 up until its transformation into a properly unified party in 2013 (Spourdalakis 2013; Tsakatika and Eleftheriou 2013). In this sense, it had established an organizational model that recognized and respected different orientations within it, building processes of collective decision-making and organs that held the leadership accountable. It even briefly experimented with practicing collective leadership, in the national election of 2009, where all the constituents of the coalition participated as equals and not under one leader (Tsatsis 2009). Things started to change after the electoral breakthrough of the coalition/party in May–June 2012, as the possibility of rising to power increased (Eleftheriou 2015: 69–71). Things changed even more dramatically after the election of January 2015 and as Tsipras' government

entered heated negotiations with Greece's European partners. Ever since, and to the extent that the government's stability is not seriously threatened, Tsipras' leadership seems virtually undisputed.

Notes

1. Note how Cas Mudde fails to recognize Bernie Sanders as a populist exactly on the grounds that "the main division in Sanders' discourse is one of interests, i.e. of class struggle, not morality" (Mudde 2016).
2. On the notion of "post-democracy" and "post-politics," which captures features of the Spanish "1978 regime," but also the late *metapolitefsi* era in Greece, as outlined in the following, see Crouch 2004; Mouffe 2005.
3. *Metapolitefsi* is a word used in Greek to signify both the moment of the fall of the seven-year military dictatorship and the transition to democracy in 1974, but also the whole era that was initiated at that moment.
4. For an earlier, critical account of "technopopulism" in contemporary parties, see Lipow and Seyd 1995.
5. http://www.syriza.gr/page/video.html [in Greek].

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CHAPTER 10

Southern European Populisms as Counter-Hegemonic Discourses? A Comparative Perspective of Podemos and M5S

Samuele Mazzolini and Arthur Borriello

10.1 Introduction

The prolonged economic turmoil affecting Europe over the last decade has unsettled a number of certainties among its citizenry by casting a shadow over many long taken-for-granted assumptions on the functioning of the economy and, more generally, of society. The question cannot be reduced to a generic dissatisfaction with economic performances and a resentment against the incumbents for their mismanagement or incompetence. If that were the case, the theory of economic voting, which suggests an electoral switch toward opposition forces when the economy goes bad (Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier 2007) would have found a strong empirical support. The reality has been more complex, proving the limitations of such an approach (Kriesi 2014; Bedock and Vasilopoulos 2015), while providing evidence of a much more profound social malaise, whose appear-

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ance is linked, but cannot be conflated to the worsening of many key economic indicators and the relative impact on people's living standards.

A much broader and all-encompassing sense of crisis has permeated Europe, one which puts a strain on its liberal democracies and severely questions the consensus that these enshrine. The convergence between center-Left and center-Right forces on socioeconomic matters, with special emphasis on the supposed inevitability of austerity policies despite their apparent failures, has raised the question of the "strange non-death of neo-liberalism" (Crouch 2011), which has remained unchallenged, if not reinforced, by traditional political actors in the wake of the financial crisis (Blyth 2013; Schmidt and Thatcher 2013). Talk of post-politics and post-democracy has thus intensified in order to make sense of the increasing insulation of the political establishment from social demands, and the general irresponsiveness of its institutions, both at national and continental level, to the growing discontent, which has resulted in a rising disaffection toward mainstream political actors (Crouch 2004; Mouffe 2005).

As a reaction to the impasse, a number of new political agents have come to the fore and embarrassed the traditional working of various national political systems. Their emergence is favored precisely by the decay of mainstream politics, which leaves the door open for a disarticulation and rearticulation of social forces toward the establishment of a new equilibrium. In this context, populism has become an easy label to pin on any force questioning the *status quo* and advancing a critique of the technocratic consensus centering on market policies and the European Union's sway. In common parlance, populism has been employed as a disparaging way of regarding political opponents, to the detriment of a better comprehension of what is really at stake.

Yet, speaking of populism is not a useless exercise provided that we conceive it as a meta-theoretical device and acknowledge the existence of variants. Scholarly debates can be of help here, as they are increasingly converging toward a minimal, "thin" definition of the term that separates a certain political modality from the specific contents through which it can manifest itself (Stanley 2008: 99–100, 107). This structural attempt to define populism isolates a number of abstract characteristics regarding the form of politics, from the various ideological substances that characterize its multifarious instantiations. In other words, populism can have different ideational guises, with their common element lying in the dichotomizing appeal to the people in opposition to an enemy, typically embodied by the elites.

Among the "thin" theories of populism, the one propounded by Ernesto Laclau stands out. His contribution has exerted a profound influence on the analysis of populist phenomena thanks to its rigorous and coherent formalism and the consequent "employability" to make sense of the most disparate cases. In other words, Laclau treats populism as a political logic constantly at play in the making and reshaping of political identities (Laclau 2005a). However, another factor makes Laclau's theorization particularly appealing. The status of populism in his theoretical edifice is not simply analytical, as it also serves a strategic purpose. For Laclau, "constructing a people" is the main task of contemporary radical politics, as provocatively put by the title of one of his works (Laclau 2006): in other words, an emancipatory course that transcends class reductionism and attempts to coalesce heterogeneous demands with the purpose of installing a new order, while ultimately rejecting the possibility of a fully reconciled society (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 177). It is not by chance that Laclau has tied his discussion of populism to the question of hegemony, another category that characterized the originality of his enterprise. Questions remain, however, as to how exactly populism should and can be played out in practice—the density and abstraction of Laclau's writings make the translation of theory into practice not exactly immediate—and whether the strict correlation that Laclau draws between populism and hegemony is, in effect, warranted.

Coming back to the European context, in the attempt to distinguish among different populist variants it is possible to claim that two broad types of populism have emerged. On one side, Western and Central Europe (France, United Kingdom, Netherlands, Austria, Germany, and Hungary) have witnessed a surge of reactionary populist actors that display xenophobic traits; on the other, populist actors firmly located to the Left (Spain and Greece) or uneasy to pin down across the classical political spectrum (Italy) have made their appearance in Southern Europe. Since our interest is, along with Laclau, directed at emancipatory rather than reactionary populism, it is the experiences of Podemos in Spain and the M5S in Italy that we intend to deal with here.

Drawing on Laclau, this chapter first intends to shed comparative light on how and to what extent Podemos and M5S have embodied populist logic. What different features and perceptions of the crisis have favored their emergence? What has been the role of the leader and of the affective dimension? Which demands have they articulated and which one has superseded the others? What has this meant in terms of normative orientation?

As a second objective, the chapter sets out to critically inquire into the different prospective capacities of the two political subjects toward unhinging the current socioeconomic order. It will be argued that, despite the fact M5S is electorally stronger and better placed to gain political power, Podemos is instead the only one of the two to display a counter-hegemonic potential. This in turn requires a normative critique and a critical discussion of the proximity between the notions of populism and hegemony in Laclau. Both exercises will be conducted by reference to some Gramscian insights.

Finally, why Podemos and M5S? Three reasons militate toward this choice: first, in the Southern European area they have in common the fact of still being opposition parties, unlike Syriza in Greece, which has become a governing force and, following the decision to accept a new memorandum in July 2015, abandoned much of its early populist edge (Stavrakakis and Katsambekis 2014; Katsambekis 2016; Aslanidis and Rovira Kaltwasser 2016). Second, while Podemos is to be considered normatively oriented toward the Left, it initially, much like the M5S, attempted to get rid of the Left–Right dichotomy in order to define its own political personality. Third, Podemos and M5S do not emerge from previously existing political formations, but do represent genuinely new forces whose creation cannot be traced back to established political traditions. Fourth, Podemos represents a reflexive application of populism (Kioupkiolis 2016: 110), as it has admittedly drawn inspiration from Laclau (see Iglesias 2015; Errejón 2014). It is precisely the reflexive character of Podemos' populism—in contrast to another more "spontaneous" type of populism, that of M5S—which permits some of the coordinates of Laclau's thought to be revised: in the light of recent information about how the very practice plays out on the ground and the fact the object of study is altered in unanticipated ways, we are in a position to reform some aspects of his political theory (Giddens 1991: 36–45).

The chapter first introduces the Laclauian notions of populism, hegemony, and dislocation. Second, it employs these theoretical tools in order to make sense, in a comparative fashion, of the experiences of Podemos and M5S. Finally, it examines to what extent these two forces can be considered counter-hegemonic.

10.2 Laclau's Theory of Populism

Laclau's latest conception of populism (Laclau 2005a, b) represents the apex of the distinctive theoretical framework he developed—known as Essex School of discourse theory—in which a novel fusion of Marxist,

post-structuralist, post-analytical, and psychoanalytical theory insights is carried out (Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000: 1).[1] Laclau defines populism as a mode of construction of the political itself, rather than as a category describing “positive” characteristics and orientations (Laclau 2005a: 117). He thus shuns any type of definition that attributes ideological, sociological, or even psychological traits to populism and its followers. Rather, a minimalist description is put forward, one which treats populism as a way through which a political practice acquires a particular meaning. In this way, populist practices can display ideological and social connotations entirely at odds with each other. Speaking of populism does not infer its emancipatory or reactionary character.

Populism thus reveals the form of a political practice. From this perspective, populism consists in the expansion of what Laclau calls the equivalential logic at the expense of the differential one (Laclau 2005a: 78). Borrowing from the linguistic repertoire of Ferdinand de Saussure, Laclau sees their interplay as delineating the modes of construction of political signification (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 130). Let us briefly recapitulate what the logics of equivalence and difference amount to. The latter is equated to the paradigmatic pole of language, whereby “two or more elements can be substituted for each other with reference to a common negation or threat” (Glynos and Howarth 2007: 144), making for the construction of antagonistic relations in an “us–them” fashion, with the consequent simplification of the signifying space (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 130). Conversely, the logic of difference expands the syntagmatic pole of language, thereby highlighting the contiguity between the elements and resulting in the tendency to maintain them as distinct and autonomous (Glynos and Howarth 2007: 144). The logic of difference is then responsible for a complexification of the political space (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 130). It should be kept in mind, however, that each political practice is always permeated by both dimensions and that the two logics are never to be found uncontaminated (Laclau 2005b: 46; Glynos and Howarth 2007: 144).

To put it in layman’s terms, populism is about the attempt to articulate a number of elements—which Laclau identifies in those social demands that are not satisfied by the existing institutional channels (Laclau 2005a: 73)—on the basis of their shared opposition to an enemy. Demands per se say nothing of their ideological orientation, as that is dependent on “the way in which they will be differentially or equivalentially articulated” (Laclau 2005b: 40). Laclau treats demands as floating signifiers, since

their meaning cannot be a priori and once and for all fixated, but receive the pressure of rival projects that attempt to hegemonize them (Laclau 2005a: 131). However, as they are equivalentially articulated, demands become moments of a discourse, such that their proximity becomes an analogy, thereby producing the people as a universal political subject (Laclau 2005a: 109). In this way, an equivalence is drawn between them, whereby their common denominator does not lie in positive features, but rather in their common opposition to the same adversary. In stark contrast to populism, "an institutionalist discourse is one that attempts to make the limits of the discursive formation coincide with the limits of the community" (Laclau 2005a: 81). In other words, populism and institutionalism form two ideal poles in the middle of which the field of politics takes place: while the latter provides a dichotomous scheme whereby heterogeneous aspirations are drawn together with the aim of constructing a universal subject that claims for itself the role of the legitimate *demos* against the usurpation of the elites, institutionalism tries to neutralize existing demands in such a way as to maintain the *status quo* and avoid the emergence of antagonism (Laclau 2005b: 45).

The elements assembled by a populist practice form what Laclau calls a chain of equivalences. Among such elements, however, one of them is endowed with a particular force which makes the enchainment possible. This is the empty signifier: empty precisely because it manages to perform the operation of structuring the popular camp by detaching itself from its original signified, while taking on board a vast array of different demands. The empty signifier thus comes to allude to the whole camp; it is an evocative singularity which brings homogeneity to an essentially heterogeneous formation (Laclau 2005a: 100). According to Laclau, we have an extreme but plausible situation when such a function is played by the name of the leader (Laclau 2005b: 40). The empty signifier—and in particular when this is occupied by the (name of the) leader—eases the identification with the popular camp, by presenting itself as an enigma that harbors reconciliation and promises meaning, thereby becoming the site on which a plurality of aspirations struggle to inscribe themselves (Glynos 2016: 99; Panizza 2005: 19).

Further to this, since any political discourse is nothing but a contingent assemblage of elements that cannot be conceptually apprehended, the attribution of a name—both to the "people" and its adversary—is performative. Put otherwise, naming constitutes the unity of the emerging subject and of its opponent: precisely because the unity of the people is not grounded in an undisputable infrastructure, but is the product of a discur-

sive operation, the process of naming is constitutive, providing a moment of unity to the popular subject, but signaling at the same time the precariousness of the dichotomic frontier (Laclau 2005a: 118). It is here where the significance of the notion of hegemony comes into play. Laclau defends a post-foundational stance, which rejects the existence of an ultimate ground and of an universal subject that fixes meaning, while at the same time welcoming the necessity of partial and relative fixations (Laclau 1990: 90–91). In other words, universalism is not entirely swept away as "people need *an* order" (Laclau 1996: 44), but the attention is addressed to its contingent foundations and constitutive processes (Laclau 1994: 2). Since what is at stake in the creation of a people out of heterogeneous elements that bear no relation of necessity with each other is the "naming [of] something which is essentially unnameable," Laclau has equated this operation with the trope of catachresis (Laclau 2005a: 71). In rhetoric, the catachresis is the attribution of a figurative term when a literal one is lacking. A hegemonic relation thus consists in the "operation of taking up, by a particularity, of an incommensurable universal signification" (Laclau 2005a: 70). In a nutshell then, hegemony conveys the capacity of a particular content to become the signifier of an absent communitarian fullness (Laclau 1996: 43).

For this to be possible, Laclau introduces a further element: affect. Affect is considered here as non-dissociable from the realm of signification. In particular, the theme of affect enters the scene through the recognition that the paradigmatic relation which makes the establishment of an analogy between different demands possible is governed by the unconscious (Laclau 2005a: 111). Predicated on the constitutive lack of the subject, this libidinal bond explains, in psychoanalytical terms, how a particular political object is sublimated and raised to the Thing (Laclau 2005a: 119–120), that is, it becomes, so to speak, the target of a radical affective investment of a subject in search of partial objects that generate identification.

Having said this, it is paramount to signal another condition for the onset of populism. As put by Laclau: "the need to constitute a 'people' … arises only when that fullness is not achieved, and partial objects (aims, figures, symbols) are so cathected that they become the name of its absence" (Laclau 2005a: 116–117). Laclau makes sense of this phase through the category of dislocation. Dislocatory experiences are those traumatic events that indicate the limit of every objectivity and make it possible to reconfigure the social space through a reactivation of

antagonisms. Dislocation, which appears through the very manifestation of demands that the institutions are incapable of managing, is thus conceptualized by Laclau as possibility and as freedom, insofar as new avenues become feasible and the absence of a final determination comes powerfully to the fore (Laclau 1990: 42–43).

10.3 The Populism of Podemos and M5S

Both Podemos and M5S have been classified as populist enterprises. The few studies focused on highlighting the similarities and differences between the two have largely addressed their attention to the historical origins, normative orientation, communication strategy, organizational structure, and electoral base (see de Prat 2015; Hartleb 2015; Semenzin 2015). While these comparisons and contrasts are useful, we are interested in going beyond the descriptive, by trying to critically explain the emergence and evolution of the two subjects, as well as advance some tentative remarks on their perspectives regarding their quest for sociopolitical change. Put alternatively, we attempt to express a reflective judgment by applying the populist logic furnished by Laclau to these two political processes, while maintaining an openness that leads us to contest some of its underlying theoretical aspects (Glynos and Howarth 2007: 184).

To start with, it is paramount to bear in mind the particular contexts of crisis from which the two experiences emerge. Despite many commonalities, the extents and contours of the dislocation are slightly different. The economic crisis has hit both countries quite harshly from 2008 onwards, but it is Spain that has paid the highest toll. In fact, Spain has not only witnessed a greater deterioration of many economic parameters than Italy—with the unemployment figures literally skyrocketing from 2008 to 2013 as opposed to a robust but more contained rise in Italy (Eurostat-ESSPROS database 2017)—but has also displayed more violent and scenic manifestations (with the infamous case of the evictions, which in Italy have instead been infrequent). Moreover, the degree of the austerity policies implemented in Spain has been more severe (Pavolini et al. 2015).

Along with the economic crisis, the deterioration of trust toward public institutions in both countries has been one of the distinctive hallmarks of the crisis. Corruption scandals, briberies, and clientelism have been an ever-present feature, making it to the headlines on a daily basis. In parallel, the privileges enjoyed by the political class (such as high salaries, MPs' immunity, life annuities, *lottizzazione*, i.e. the practice of appointing political cronies to positions of public authority, regardless of their competence)

have become a matter of fierce contestation amid the deterioration of living standards for the bulk of the population. In Italy, the incapacity of traditional actors to enact a number of reforms that the public opinion saw as vital (new electoral law, abolition of provinces, cut of politics' costs) as well as the scandals involving two parties that had been at the forefront of the battle against corruption (Italia dei Valori and Lega Nord) further reinforced the feeling of frustration within the electorate toward the political class (Mosca 2014: 45). We should not forget that the so-called "moral question" has never lost political salience in Italy since the Tangentopoli era in the early 1990s, gradually transforming itself into a sort of mythical horizon capable of reordering political loyalties.[2] In Spain, scandals involving the royal family and the territorial question—with the Catalan sovereignty process gaining traction from 2012 onwards—have been two crucial questions further defining the political traits of the crisis. Corruption and territorial claims in Spain are not new issues, but their scale has made them gain much centrality in recent years.

As Laclau suggests, dislocatory experiences translate into the flourishing of demands that the institutions are incapable of meeting. Crises are never objective though: they are nourished by material factors, but their very emergence and unfolding depend on how the materiality interplays with the subjective. In other words, they are always already mediated by representation, which functions as the primary terrain of emergence of the *volonté générale* (general will) (Laclau 2001: 6). As for the specificities, we can say in principle that the economic aspect has been stronger in Spain than in Italy, and that the political one has had more prevalence than the economic in Italy. But the latter is already the product of an overdetermination: it is not simply that the economic crisis was not as harsh as in Spain—although that could have had weight—but also the result of a number of factors that impeded the politicization of the economic crisis despite the political scandals. The social protests that emerged in Spain and Italy have made this particularly visible.

The 15M Movement that developed in Spain in 2011 indicted the Regime of '78 to be mainly responsible for the crisis. What this expression conveyed was not just the cartel-like political arrangements between the PSOE and PP, but "a set of political, economic and cultural consensuses that came into existence with the democratic transition in Spain and that for three decades permitted the economic and political elites to manage relatively successfully the labour, territorial and cultural conflicts" (Rendueles and Sola 2015: 32). Through slogans such as "*no nos representan*" (they do not represent us) and "*no es una crisis, es el sistema*" (it is not

a crisis, it is the system), the movement questioned the *status quo* as a whole through a political jargon that cut across the Left–Right divide and, in so doing, managed to reorder the system of political loyalties (Errejón 2011: 132). Crucially, despite its internal heterogeneity, it was the same actor that channeled both economic and political frustration, ushering the success of other subsequent like-minded experiments (such as the Mareas movements against the cuts in education and healthcare, the Plataforma de Afectados por las Hipotecas against evictions, and the Marchas de la Dignidad in defense of public pensions) that connected the indignation toward moral decadence and collusion in the political realm with a questioning of the bitter economic realities (austerity policies, discontent among the youth toward precarious employment and unemployment, the EU's control over much of the process of economic policy-making). One of the summoning mottos of the 15M "*No somos mercancía en manos de políticos y banqueros*" (We are not merchandise in the hands of politicians and bankers) is vivid proof of the link drawn between the political and economic crisis. In this sense, corruption stopped being seen as a phenomenon involving some "bad apples"; rather, corruption was increasingly understood as the result of an economic model based on real-estate speculation (Franzé 2015: 3).

The Italian case was different. The attempt to give birth to an Italian 15M following the transnational day of action called by the Spanish Indignados failed amid the violent clashes between a group of demonstrators and the police that took place on October 15, 2011, in Rome. A series of misunderstandings, tensions, and internal struggles in the period leading up to the demonstration can account for this fiasco (Della Porta and Zamponi 2013). More generally, it can be argued that the structure of civil society and contentious politics display different traits in the two countries. While Italy may have a stronger civil society, the Spanish one seems to be more autonomous and less tied to trade unions and parties (Riley and Fernandez 2014: 453–459). In an article exploring the protest patterns of the precarious generation in Italy and Spain, Andretta and Della Porta come to the following conclusion:

> It seems that the more structured, and party-dominated, civil society in Italy is being preventing the precarious generation to find the space to build a new collective identity and new forms of organizations. There, young people need to adapt to the pre-existing "bins" of the old collective identity in which they identify less and less. (Andretta and Della Porta 2015: 61)

In Italy, the critique of the economic system has thus been somewhat ruined by the predominance of pre-existing Leftist actors, both of moderate and more radical inclination, facing problems of credibility beyond a steadily declining circle. This explains why much of the discontent in Italy has been channeled somewhat atypically by the precursor of M5S: the figure of Beppe Grillo, with his blog and the local gatherings that he organised with the name of 'meetups'. The slant of his political activity has differed from that of the 15M. In particular, the critique levelled during the two V-days (V standing for *vaffanculo*, f**k off in Italian) he organized in 2007–2008 was exclusively aimed at political questions: the presence of convicted people in Parliament, the electoral law impeding voters expressing personal preferences, the lack of a limit of politicians' parliamentary terms, the need of state permission for press publications, and public subsidies for newspaper and periodicals (Turner 2013: 181). Reference to the dire condition of the economy was notably absent.

Let us now explore the different types of populism used by Podemos and M5S. In the first place, a clarification is needed. While M5S was the direct political translation of the opinion movement generated by Beppe Grillo himself, which in turn fed itself with a pre-existing popular feeling, Podemos was not the organic transformation of the Indignados into a political party, even though a number of those who took part in the social protests then joined the party led by Pablo Iglesias (Martín 2015: 108–109). Rather, as clarified by the then second-in-command of Podemos, Íñigo Errejón: "the cultural climate and modification of the common sense inspired by 15-M have been fundamental to imagine a counter-hegemonic intervention" (Errejón 2015: 233).[3] Nevertheless, both forces have put forward a dichotomizing narrative that pits the people against the elites. Behind the label "caste" as a way to define the enemy that both employed, however, there is a different understanding of the term. In line with the different politicizations of the crisis, while caste alludes in Italy only to the political class made up by the traditional political parties, in Spain the term received a further twist, thereby also encompassing the economic elites, with special reference to the role of bankers and the intertwinement of high politics and high economics, epitomized by the revolving-door phenomenon.

Similar rhetorical exercises have been employed by the two parties to equate their political adversaries: while Podemos has used the formula PPSOE (a contraction of PP and PSOE to indicate their similarity), M5S has employed the slogan "*PD meno elle*" (PD minus L, to highlight the proximity between the Democratic Party—PD—and the now extinct

center-Right party the People of Freedom—PDL). As for the naming of the popular subject, the M5S has tended to refer to it as *gente* (people, intended in the uncountable form, not as a national-cultural subgroup), *cittadini* (citizens), or *onesti* (the honest ones). Equally, Podemos has made reference to *gente* (same meaning as in Italian) and *ciudadanía* (citizenry, citizens being the name of another political party). *Popolo* and *pueblo* (people in the countable form) have used less frequently, in the case of Podemos admittedly because of the sinister resonances that this signifier may have generated (Cano Cuenca 2015: 67)—due to the organicist allusion that the term has historically taken up—, and possibly for the same reason in the case of M5S.

However, the political frontier erected with respect to the rest of the political system has been somewhat blunted over time in the case of Podemos. As well analyzed by Franzé in Chap. 3, a change occurred from January 2015 onwards: while Podemos continued to stage an us vs. them representation, the latter has been exclusively embodied by the political conduct of the caste, and not by the institutional structure of the Regime of '78. The confirmation of this is the dropping of the demand for a constituent process, which was advanced in the early months of Podemos, and the recognition that the problem does not lie so much in the institutions per se, but rather in their bad employment. The appeal to the need to construct a "modern country," one of the central signifiers of the democratic transition, is possibly the most revealing aspect of the legitimacy granted by Podemos to the current Spanish political order (Franzé 2015: 13–15).

Other two related trends account for this. On one side, Podemos made alliances at a local level with PSOE in order to dislodge PP from power. Moreover, it opened a debate on whether it should form a coalition with PSOE or not at a national level, although this possibility has not materialized in the end. The reason for doing so is that, despite attempting to reject its classification as a radical Left force, Podemos has been normatively anchored to the Left, an element clearly reflected in the ideological provenience of its voters (Rodríguez-Teruel et al. 2016: 577). The widespread urgency to defeat PP among these voters has induced Podemos to alter its initial uncompromising stance toward the socialists and their historical role, with a reappraisal of social democracy ("voting socialist today is voting Podemos" being the utmost expression of this trend).[4] A similar line of reasoning may be applied to difficulties inherent in multilevel electoral competition in a country characterized by the presence of strong centrifugal forces. Podemos has backtracked from its original attempt to challenge regional parties, forging local alliances with all kinds of political groups,

with consequent concessions toward devolution and identitarian demands. However, even though this move has been electorally beneficial, in the long run this may "become a source of party contradictions, conflicts, and even electoral heterogeneity" (Rodríguez-Teruel et al. 2016: 562).

On the other side, Podemos has become progressively closer to IU, to the point of forming a political coalition before the general elections in June 2016. Although IU was not precisely the enemy that Podemos took issue with, it is still possible to claim that it was part of the "constitutive outside" on which the very creation of Podemos was predicated. More generally, the leader of Podemos, Pablo Iglesias, has recently retrieved much of the Leftist symbolic heritage that Podemos had previously repudiated. While presented as a way to defend the alterity of his party with the rest of the system and avoid institutional cooptation, the capacity of such a move to redraw the existing political allegiances is doubtful. It should be remembered that populism is first and foremost about creating a new bloc out of heterogeneous elements. It is not only the us/them differentiation that defines it, but, importantly, its articulatory potential.

Conversely, M5S has been recalcitrant about striking any deal with other political forces, both at local and national levels. Its electoral base is much more ideologically variegated than that of Podemos. As analyzed by Biorcio and Natale, M5S has four groups of supporters. The "militants," with a variable past voting history and deep loyalty to Grillo, account for 25% of the total; the "Leftists," who come from a history of voting Left-wing parties and are less enthusiastic about Grillo, amount to 20%; the "rationals," 30% of the total, lend a more utilitarian type of support to the movement; and finally "the least worse," who have a more conservative leaning, make up around 25% of the supporters (Biorcio and Natale 2013). Because of such an ideological indeterminacy, M5S is not compelled to avoid the victory of another political actor that is perceived as a greater threat than another: all other actors are thus treated as equally harmful for the interests of the country from its perspective. Since populism is not a taxonomical category in Laclau, but rather one of the two extremes of a *continuum*, it is fair to say that M5S has displayed more populist politics, as it has maintained a much clearer dividing line between the people and its enemy, while managing to articulate a larger array of political identities.

A closer look at the type of demands that the two movements have articulated can shed further light on their diversity. Let us start with M5S. The five stars enshrined in the symbol and the name indicate five of its key issues: water, connectivity, development, energy, and environment. In actual fact, M5S has tapped a much larger number of themes, often

adopting what seemed to be the most widespread position among the electorate on each of them. Among the electorate, resentment against politicians' privileges, requests for more investment in renewable resources as well as in public education and healthcare, and opposition to large public works stand out. On issues such as the immigration and the economy, the position of M5S has been rather ambivalent. On the former, Grillo often made polemic remarks, not without a xenophobic flavor. However, the question is far from central and has proven to be deeply divisive internally, with the grassroots of the party and several MPs often demonstrating in favor of holding a different view (Corriere della Sera 2014). As for the economy, M5S has shown "a very eclectic radicalism, which is dominated by ideas that have been the domain of the far left … as well as introducing ideas that are either extraneous or in opposition to the far left" (Turner 2013: 201). More generally, policy proposals on a variety of issues have been rather vague and lacking an overall political coherence. Against the latter charge, M5S has proclaimed itself to be post-ideological and beyond Left and Right, in the name of an ill-defined technique that discriminates unequivocally good from bad decisions (see Borriello and Mazzolini forthcoming). While such a benign stance on technique (with emphasis on digital technology) is itself ideational as it embodies a position on the matter that is all but neutral, the various attempts to define the political collocation of M5S are self-defeating. The reality is that its policy proposals point in different directions and that its populism is, from a normative point of view, intrinsically ambiguous.

On the contrary, Podemos has championed a clear expression of a normatively Left-wing type of populism. After all, its early disavowal of Leftist liturgies and symbolism has not meant a distancing from the historical equality/hierarchy divide (Franzé 2015: 12). The chain of equivalence engendered by Podemos has been chiefly made up of demands emerging from the crisis, such as "the Right to employment, housing, social protection, health, education, the cancellation of unjust debt, the end of austerity policies, the restoration of popular sovereignty" (Kioupkiolis 2016: 103), as well more political demands aimed at fighting corruption and giving more power to its autonomous communities. The policy solutions that have been presented are linked to the Leftist repertoire. However, typical struggles of the Left that lacked a majoritarian consensus, such as those pertaining to monarchy/republic, confessionalism/laicism, and proletariat/bourgeoisie cleavages, have been largely neglected (Franzé 2015: 10). In a sense, it could be argued that the discourse of M5S is a

static snapshot of Italian common sense insofar as it reproduces its inherent ambiguities, while Podemos has drawn from a variety of its elements, in order to tie them to an overall Left-wing proposal.

Of all the elements articulated, which one has occupied the nodal point in the two cases? As highlighted above, Laclau attributes particular emphasis to the role of the empty signifier, which in many cases is represented by the leader. Undoubtedly, the function of the leader has been of primary importance in both instances. Several authors have claimed that Podemos and M5S would not have developed as they have without Iglesias and Grillo. Their capacity to unhinge the political inertias in both countries has been a decisive factor. A detailed phenomenological account of their leaderships cannot be pursued here. These figures have been key in injecting passion into each organization's political discourse, which can account for the capacity to reconfigure political loyalties and mobilize sectors that were showing themselves increasingly apathetic toward politics. Grillo, a former comedian, employs a satirical style that, by mocking any type of opponent in an irreverent way, has made it possible for contents that are traditionally unutterable to get into the political arena and connect with a widespread feeling of frustration (Biorcio and Natale 2013: 13–14; Turner 2013: 193). Equally, Iglesias, whose public image was constructed through his participation in, and direction of, political talk shows prior to the emergence of Podemos, is known for his direct, empathic, and straightforward messages (Rendueles and Sola 2015: 258), which prevented him turning into one of those contracted and radical figures that the media tends to stereotype (Cano Cuenca 2015: 69).

However, some strong differences exist between the two types of leadership. While Grillo has systematically shunned debate with political adversaries, thereby limiting his interventions to unilateral addresses, Iglesias' communication form has been intrinsically dialogical. This attitude is clearly reflected in the internal working of the two political forces. M5S can be described as a top-down experience, where the participation of all members has been subordinated to their blind obedience to the leadership (chiefly composed by Grillo and, until his death, Gianroberto Casaleggio, the internet guru who helped the former to set up the movement, and has now been replaced by his son). Internal dissent has been dealt with through the expulsion of those who dared to polemicize with the upper echelons of M5S. The political directives are issued by the top leadership without any internal programmatic discussion. Participatory digital devices are set in motion to consult the affiliates only through ad hoc consultations that leave little

room for surprises. This in spite of the fact that Grillo has never run as a candidate, and at times has even reduced his public visibility. Grillo, despite the famous slogan *uno vale uno* (one is worth one), is thus very far from embodying the role of a *primus inter pares* that Laclau envisaged for populist leaders (Laclau 2005a: 59). The case of Podemos is different. A lively debate has existed within Podemos since its inception and has intensified in the wake of the last congress. A clear challenge to the arguments defended by Iglesias was mounted by the former number two of the party, Íñigo Errejón, without this implying a threat of expulsion for him and his followers. No doubt the role played by Iglesias and the top leadership has eroded much of the early horizontal rhetoric and the importance of the grassroots (represented by *los círculos*—the circles), but this has not thwarted internal discussion.[5] Importantly, Podemos' democratic centralism still provides the possibility of affiliates renewing their leadership. As a whole then, it can be claimed that the type of populism embodied by Podemos has been more deliberative and democratic in comparison to that of M5S.

Nevertheless, it is not just a question of leaders. No matters how essential a leader may be in the formation and performance of a political project, it is the capacity to intercept and embody the most central demands that makes a difference. This differentiation belies a certain ambiguity in Laclau, for whom the empty signifier could be represented by a demand or a leader. However, if the empty signifier is embodied by the leader, this cannot be prior to the structuring of the popular camp; conversely, if the empty signifier is a prominent demand in society that acquires a mythical and salvific value, this does not pertain necessarily to a specific political agent, as different projects "can compete in their efforts to present their particular objectives as those which carry out the filling function" (Laclau 1996: 44). We think that the two forms are not mutually exclusive and, even more crucially, that more than one singularity can play an articulating function. In other words, the existence of a strong leader does not impede a specific battle within the organization to empty itself of its own specific contents and allude to a variety of struggles; and, equally, this does not impede the fact that there will be more demands to occupy that centrality in the articulatory process.

In the case of Podemos, we propose that two signifiers have played that role: democracy and *patria* (fatherland). Since the emergence of the Indignados, democracy has possibly been the most visible signifier, with reference to the growing detachment of political elites from the citizenry, as well as to the rigging of the democratic process at the hands of powerful

interests that subvert the popular will. Talk of democracy permits the related signifier *demos* to be foregrounded, which, in the case of Podemos, conjures up the performative construction of a new subject with a hegemonic vocation: the people (Franzé 2015: 11). As for *patria*, Podemos interestingly incorporated a signifier that has been traditionally alien to the Left. This appropriation has been conducted by way of a resignification of the term. In fact, the discourse of Podemos deploys it not in chauvinist or nationalist terms, but rather by claiming that love for the fatherland can only be genuine if the welfare of its people is guaranteed through the defense of state hospitals and schools against austerity cuts, which is at odds with the practices of the Right and its members that privatize public spaces, dodge taxes, and hide their fortunes in tax havens (Franzé 2015: 11). In the case of M5S, the "moral question," that is, transparency of the *res publica*, intended as a fight against corruption and for public officials' accountability, has been at the forefront of its discourse. It is fair to argue that the empty signifier of M5S is relatively emptier *vis-à-vis* that of Podemos in the sense that its moral as opposed to political character has made it possible to accommodate a greater number of demands and political identities. This has facilitated a greater expansion of the appeal of M5S and this can partially explain its relatively higher electoral performance. But should we take its slightly more populist edge and its capacity to attract a vaster array of voters as more conducive to hegemony?

10.4 Populism is Not Hegemony: Problematizing Laclau

By putting together a number of demands and signifiers traditionally pertaining to opposite political discourses, the operation of M5S is reminiscent of Juan Domingo Perón's attempt to appeal to very diverse and heterogeneous groups, as described by Laclau (2005a: 214–221). This has made for a hypertrophic development of the equivalential chain that finds its origin in the utter emptiness of its anchorage point. As put by Laclau:

> [T]he tendentially empty signifier becomes entirely empty, in which case the links in the equivalential chain do not need to cohere with each other at all: the most contradictory contents can be assembled, as long as the subordination of them all to the empty signifier remains. To go back to Freud: this would be the extreme situation in which love for the father is the only link between the brothers. (Laclau 2005a: 217)

While the father in the example of Laclau is represented by Perón, here we deem that it is not so much Grillo, who is not particularly liked by various segments of his voters (Turner 2013: 202), who plays that role. Rather, the father is the moral question itself. The problem, however, lies in the overstretching of the chain that, according to Laclau, is likely to make the unity of the people very weak (Laclau 2005a: 217). In this sense, we share the skepticism of Corbetta and Vignati, who claim that, if the M5S were to take power, any decision taken would elicit the discontent of a chunk of its supporters, making the movement much more fragile than it currently appears to be (2013: 58–59).

By the same token, can a movement like M5S that lacks a unifying ideology nurture any counter-hegemonic pretensions? We are convinced that M5S cannot be considered to be a counter-hegemonic force in Italy, while Podemos, though not without its own difficulties and contradictions, does play a counter-hegemonic role in Spain. In order to substantiate these claims, we advance a normative critique of the political discourse of M5S and a theoretical discussion on the notion of populism and hegemony in Laclau, with an application to the two contexts.

As for the normative critique, Briziarelli and Martínez Guillem argue, in the wake of Gramsci's concept of Americanismo, that the discourse of M5S should be conceptualized as a sort of neo-Americanismo. Accordingly, by placing emphasis on the rising importance of information and communication technology and digital modernization, while upholding values such as radical individualism, libertarianism, and anti-state ideology, M5S's discourse is resonant with the so-called Californian ideology (2016: 90–92). In a further move, they claim that

> neo-Americanismo could be interpreted through the frame of a passive revolution because it encompasses the tendency of capitalist countries to sufficiently involve the forces of production in political economic re-structurations without necessarily improving their conditions or integrating them in the political process. (2016: 94)

The adherence to a liberal utopia that leaves intact the market mechanisms that lie at the heart of the malfunction of the neoliberal project shows the complicity of M5S with many of the coordinates of the current order and evidences their limitations insofar as their counter-hegemonic potential is concerned. Even though M5S has grown increasingly critical of banks' and corporations' behavior, the failure to articulate such ele-

ments via a coherent systemic framework of analysis and critique throws doubts on its capacity to replace the current order with a new one.

Our pessimism toward the counter-hegemonic and emancipatory potential of M5S is further reinforced by looking at some of its internal features. In assessing the historical weakness of Italian political parties, Gramsci had observed a disequilibrium in favor of agitation and propaganda, to the detriment of the development of theoretical activity, which in turn entailed the impossibility of engendering proper leaders (Gramsci 1971: 227–228): "Hence, squalor of cultural life and wretched inadequacy of high culture. Instead of political history, bloodless erudition; instead of religion, superstition; instead of books and great reviews, daily papers and broadsheets; instead of serious politics, ephemeral quarrels and personal clashes" (Gramsci 1971: 228). Despite the different historical background that the Sardinian thinker was analyzing, the incapacity to engage intellectuals, the overheated and contumelious oratory of Grillo, and the allergy displayed toward informed discussion make M5S fit perfectly into the type of party analyzed by Gramsci. On the other hand, the balance between propaganda and analysis has been carefully cultivated by Podemos. The direct involvement of a whole new generation of young intellectuals (the very top leadership is composed by several academics) as well as the quality of the internal debate casts light on its inclination to reconcile high culture and propaganda requirements.

Even more tellingly, M5S does not replicate the characteristics of modern mass parties, whereby "a close link is formed between great mass, party and leading group," such that they can move together as a "collective-man" through a feedback system that Gramsci calls "living philology" (Gramsci 1971: 429). Rather, M5S is entrapped in a model by which the connection with popular feelings does not happen through a critical engagement, but is rather the product of hunches on the parts of the leaders, "backed up by the identification of statistical laws, which leaders then translate into ideas and watchwords" (Gramsci 1971: 429).[6] It is precisely the search for a passive and indirect type of consent as opposed to a direct, active, and participatory involvement of single individuals (Gramsci 1975: 1771) that distinguish M5S from Podemos. In this sense, the horizontalist rhetoric of M5S is belied by a hierarchical and despotic structure, which in turn reinforces the gap between rulers and ruled and leaves no possibility of a future in which this opposition may be transcended (Gramsci 1971: 144). Conversely, Podemos has managed, despite the limitations highlighted above, to uphold a pedagogical approach, which does not imply an

ex cathedra contact, but rather a reciprocal relationship, "so that every teacher is always a pupil and every pupil a teacher" (Gramsci 1971: 350). Moreover, the "policing" traits of its democratic centralism still maintain a deliberative aspect, as opposed to the purely executory character of the bureaucratic centralism of M5S (Gramsci 1971: 155).

As anticipated, there is a further reason for claiming that the two populisms at stake differ insofar as their counter-hegemonic potential in concerned. As we have seen, M5S is tendentially more populist than Podemos. This gradational question anticipates nothing about their counter-hegemonic prospects, even though we contend that, by and large, a dichotomous narrative is needed for a political agent to effectively challenge a given order. However, the theory of Laclau postulates an unwarranted closeness between populism and hegemony, to the point of almost conflating the two. As put by Arditi:

> [T]he specific difference that populism introduces vis-à-vis hegemony is the division of society into two camps to produce a relation of equivalence among demands and construct a frontier or antagonistic relation between them. This is why populism can be said to be a species of the genus hegemony, the species that calls into question the existing order with the purpose of constructing another. This genus has at least one other species, institutionalist discourse, whose essence is to maintain the status quo. (Arditi 2010: 492–493)

Laclau's take oscillates as to whether populism should be intended as already hegemonic per se or as a road to hegemony. Be this as it may, we should warn against this excessive proximity between the two notions. In this sense, while we deem that the analogy between language and society enshrined in the psychoanalytical and linguistic tools that Laclau employs has an important explanatory value, we are less prone to accept that symbolic representations have the all-encompassing "society effects" that he attributes them (Howarth 2004: 269). The contestation of an extant political formation, and the concomitant articulation of existing demands and signifiers under a new political project, does not automatically lead to the formation of a new hegemony. In other words, even when a populist project that professes its alterity to the existing socioeconomic system manages to put together a number of frustrated aspirations and win elections, this does not mean that a new order is being put in place. In order to separate populism from hegemony, we propose a different understanding of the notions of time and space. Since this is not the place to advance

a fully-fledged critique of how Laclau treats them throughout his corpus (see Mazzolini forthcoming), we advance only a very succinct reformulation.

As for time, each present is, according to Gramsci, pierced by two temporal forms: one plural, and the other singular. The plural temporality is characterized by the confrontation between different political projects, whose outcome varies continuously. It is, in other words, the sphere of the occasional as it allows for rapid twists: the victory of one project can be undone a moment after by another project. On the contrary, the singular temporality (also called hegemonic) consists of much longer and relatively more permanent structures that set the ground and establish the contours within which the plural struggle among different projects can take place. We may think of it as the spirit of an époque: far-reaching sociopolitical processes that show a certain degree of stability and draw the perimeter within which the game of the plural temporality can occur. The conjunction between the two forms of temporality happens when a project emerging in the sphere of plural temporality is capable of transcending that camp and imposing a new singular temporality (Filippini 2016: 105–121). We thus deem that populist practices do not necessarily rise to hegemonic temporality, because even when they conquer power, most often than not they leave unaltered many coordinates of the social formation that they allegedly attempt to outdo.

In order to better understand this, we propose in parallel a plural conception of space, in the sense that the social cannot but be thought of as composed by different sites. Despite maintaining a very close relationship and being reciprocally influenced, such sites cannot be conflated as they can even display different and contradictory dynamics. Here, Stuart Hall helps us to understand that hegemony is obtained only when the struggle is successful on a variety of fronts. Indeed, hegemony is, for him,

> the struggle to contest and dis-organize an existing political formation; the taking of the "leading position" … over a number of different spheres of society at once—economy, civil society, intellectual and moral life, culture; the conduct of a wide and differentiated type of struggle; the winning of a strategic measure of popular consent; and, thus, the securing of a social authority sufficiently deep to conform society into a new historic project. (Hall 1988: 7)

As we can see, spatiality here is not metaphorical, but real: to each of these social sites (culture, economy, leisure, religion, etc.), there correspond concrete places in civil society that Gramsci calls fortresses and

earthworks (Gramsci 1971: 238), even though the relationship is not clear-cut and unequivocal, but rather loose and amendable. The pervasiveness of hegemony is ultimately given by the capacity to adjust the civilization and morality of the masses to a given project, by which a pressure is exerted on subjects without the need of sanctions, making certain habits and customs the natural way of behaving (Gramsci 1975: 1566). The electoral victory of a populist experiment thus does not take place on a smooth plane, whereby the victory entails an immediate redrawing of the whole social formation: rather, in line with the Gramscian conception of the organic state, the road to hegemony is made up of a combination of a slow war of position in civil society and a war of maneuver aimed at state institutions.

In this sense, we think that Podemos has manifested a distinguished bent for the electoral. It is not by chance that Errejón declared that Podemos had to turn into an "electoral war machine" (Público 2014). Here, we share the preoccupation of Figueroa and Thielemann on the fleeting nature of elections, which, in spite of good results, do not necessarily produce the necessary social alliances and politicization for structural change (2015: 54–56). Nevertheless, the *blitzkrieg* electoral strategy was not entirely devoid of sense for Podemos: the sweeping and initially unexpected electoral consensus that it has received made it possible for a political force defending certain theses to come out of the marginality to which the radical Left had been confined. The change of pace proposed by Errejón following the last general elections of June 2016 seems to confirm the Gramscian intuition of the need to combine a war of position and war of maneuver. By envisaging a of work of "cultural and institutional craftmanship" that entails a slow process of penetration into the different sites of social in the attempt to reconfigure social relations, Errejón recognizes that the first phase of assault with regard to the institutions is over, and that now what is needed is a foundational putting down of roots (Errejón 2016).

As for M5S, we think that its populist discourse says nothing about its counter-hegemonic potential. Grillo's movement is structurally unequipped to play such a role, as it has been incapable of building a party leadership worth the name, and of providing sound and coherent explanations and alternatives for the order that they nominally take issues with, beyond the proposal of a number of "best-practice" solutions. Its populism can only be played out within the contours of the plural temporality, as it does not put under discussion the main coordinates of the current socioeconomic system, namely neoliberal capitalism. Finally, its strict focus on the electoral moment further reinforces our suspicion of its inherent inability to make inroads into other sites of social formation.

10.5 Conclusion

This chapter has carried out a comparative analysis between Podemos and M5S by deploying the theoretical tools of Ernesto Laclau. Both political projects have found fertile terrain in the proliferation of social demands arising from the mixture of economic crisis and political discreditation of mainstream traditional actors. However, the phase of protest that preceded their advent shaped the public understanding of the crisis: while in Spain the 15M Movement drew a close connection between corruption and the economic system, in the Italian landscape the discontent took the shape of a mere questioning of the old political class.

Both Podemos and M5S have deployed a populist discourse, as they have tried to articulate different social demands on the basis of their common rejection of an adversary. However, even though captured by the same term—the caste—Podemos has indicted both political and economic actors through its deployment, while M5S has tended to restrict its scope to existing political actors. Over time, the political frontier of Podemos has been blurred, by way of some concessions to PSOE and regional actors at the local level and IU at the national, as a result of alliances with them, and the abdication of giving birth to a constituent process. Instead, M5S has maintained a complete alterity with the rest of the political system. Normatively, even though both actors presented themselves as beyond the Left/Right cleavage, Podemos and M5S have differed: the former has been a distinctively Left-wing type of populism; whereas the latter has maintained an ambiguous and contradictory ideological orientation. In both cases the role of the leader has played a fundamental role; however, we identify in democracy and fatherland for Podemos, and in the moral question for M5S the empty signifiers around which the two actors have conducted their articulatory processes.

Even though we conclude that M5S is in principle more populist than Podemos as it has managed to articulate a larger array of identities and demands and maintained a sharp political frontier, we think that only Podemos can, though not without contradictions, play a counter-hegemonic role. In order to substantiate our claim, we have shown that the hypertrophic development of M5S's equivalential chain runs the risk of bringing its inherent ambiguities to the fore once it reaches power, precisely because of the lack of ideological coherence. Moreover, M5S fails to question some key aspects of the current order, is uninterested in the formation of an intellectually prepared leadership, lacks any sophisticated analysis of the socioeconomic situation, and replicates a number of

hierarchical relations in its internal functioning. While the latter are not entirely absent in Podemos, we think that it is much better equipped for nurturing the seed of a different society.

Finally, we question the proximity between the notions of populism and hegemony in Laclau. The fact that M5S is relatively more populist than Podemos and has, so far, done better electorally does not mean that it is more hegemonic. Rather, we think that the construction of a people and electoral victory may not have the far-reaching effect of ushering in a new order. In this sense, we propose a quick reformulation of the notions of time and space. In particular, thinking of space in plural terms makes it clear that the electoral moment is key but not sufficient, as hegemony can only be constructed through a war or position in a number of different sites. The ultimate yardstick is given by the capacity to instill new habits and consensuses among the population. Both M5S and Podemos have so far focused on the electoral, but while the former has entirely neglected any possibility of transcending the political sphere, the latter has shown the intention of shifting its focus to other sites.

Notes

1. Laclau already dealt with populism in his early *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory* in which he advanced a version of the notion informed by Althusserian Marxism (Laclau 1977). Although not entirely at odds with the latter, his latest conception clearly displays the signs of Laclau's engagement with some strands of post-structuralism and psychoanalysis. It is to this version that the chapter will refer. The same should be said of the concept of hegemony. Howarth individuates three models of hegemony in Laclau's corpus (Howarth 2004: 268). It is to the one developed from *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time* (Laclau 1990) onwards that we shall be concerned with here.
2. In this regard, it is worth noting that the moral question has been called upon most forcefully by actors as diverse as the then Secretary General of the Italian Communist Party, Enrico Berlinguer, in the 1970s and 1980s, and the two journalists of the historically liberal newspaper *Corriere della Sera*, Gian Antonio Stella and Sergio Rizzo, authors of the popular book *La Casta* (The Caste) (2007).
3. In this sense, it should be noted, although only in passing, that some tensions emerged within the 15M Movement before the "hegemonic hypothesis" of Podemos. Many Leftist sectors that composed Indignados did not regard the party option and the institutional road favorably (Cano Cuenca 2015: 58–59).

4. The matter has been one of the main controversies between the two main figures of the party toward the last congress in February 2017. Errejón defended the necessity to maintain a more cautious approach, recognizing the pervasiveness of socialist political culture among the popular sectors: for him, attracting those voters entails respecting their views through the adoption of a tactical approach. On the contrary, Iglesias manifested the necessity of reaffirming the diversity of Podemos with respect to the socialists in the name of a rupturist position. While not putting under discussion the collaboration at a local level, the victory of the latter at the congress may imply a more vigorous attitude toward the socialists (see the congressional party documents: Errejón et al. 2017; Iglesias et al. 2017).
5. Kioupkiolis has rightly emphasized the plebiscitarian drift of Podemos, which became especially evident in the pre-drafted lists of candidates and programs toward both internal congresses, the minimal involvement of the rank and file, and the manipulative use of digital technologies for decision-making (Kioupkiolis 2016: 111–112). While sharing this preoccupation, we would not go as far as equating these phenomena with the personalist leadership of Hugo Chávez as the author does.
6. In the original translation, watchwords is rendered as "words-as-force". The term in Italian is *parole-forza* (Gramsci 1975: 1430).

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CHAPTER 11

Between the Populist Left and Right: Discursive Structure and Ideological Interventions in Podemos and the National Front

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11.1 Introduction

Populism has become an increasingly salient dimension of the electoral processes that shape European politics. Facilitated by the political opportunities offered by the European Parliament's representational structure—in terms of both added visibility and as a rhetorical foil (Rydgren 2005)—a number of minor parties with only slight success in their respective national electorates have nevertheless been able to effectively use their EU platform to loudly voice the concerns of their respective constituencies. This tendency toward the fringes in national politics came to an end, however, when on January 25, 2015, the radical coalition for the Left, better known as Syriza, won the snap Greek general election (Jones 2015). This marked the first instance in which a radical outsider, and by many accounts "populist" political party, had attained control of a government in a post-Maastricht national election.

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Riding the subsequent wave of attention and interest in populism is Spanish Radical Left Party (RLP), Podemos. Headed by Pablo Iglesias, a professor of political science at the Complutense University in Madrid, this infant party has aligned with Syriza and other European radical Left parties in positioning itself as a legitimate oppositional force to what it believes to be stagnant, corrupt bipartisanship at the national level (Buck 2014), and a series of systematic, anti-democratic incursions upon sovereignty at the level of the European Union. As a result, not only is Podemos strictly opposed to the particular policies of incumbent Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy and his governing center-Right PP, but it is also opposed the prevailing mode of representational politics in the country as a whole (Errejón 2015).

As with the newer parties, older and more established populist parties have also been reinvigorated in the wake of Syriza's success, despite the majority of them being on the Right. Of these, France's Front National (FN) has grown to become the second most-voted political party in local elections in France (Scarpetta 2015). After a strategic shift toward the slightly more conciliatory positions taken by current party head Marine Le Pen (*The Economist* 2015), the party was able to attain the most overall votes after the first round of voting during the December 2015 regional elections (Chrisafis 2015).

Although representing opposing ideological views, as well as addressing different concerns in vastly different social and political contexts, Podemos and the FN share three important attributes: a disdain for the austerity policies handed down from the European Union, an abundance of media attention in their respective countries, and the label of populist. The set of circumstances that has thrust both parties into positions of political relevance has opened the way for research that has previously not been attempted in any large capacity—a comparative analysis of the differences between radical Left and radical Right populist parties (RRPs) that aims to contribute to the empirical understanding of populism as such, while at the same time bringing those particular differences into sharper relief.

In this chapter, I address the general question of the distinctive ways in which Podemos and the FN discursively construct "the people" as the central point of reference for their respective political projects. Following this general question, a series of more specific typological questions must be posed, in order to address and elucidate certain theoretical points that remain ambiguous in the prevailing approach to the study of populism,

particularly that of Cas Mudde's "populism as thin-centered ideology." The questions are as follows:

1) How does populist discourse differ when programmatically infused with political ideology of either the Left or the Right?
2) Does this infusion result in any discernible morphological differences, at the structural level of discourse, when comparing Left populism and Right populism?
3) Is it possible to better account for apparent ideological discrepancies in party positions, such as in economic policies, without the need to resort to principles that are external to the theory?

To this end, I apply the discourse analytical method developed by Ernesto Laclau in his seminal work *On Populist Reason* (2005a) to a variety of textual sources produced by Podemos on the one hand, and by the FN on the other. Looking at each party's manifestos, along with other primary sources such as interviews and speeches, I conduct an analysis of the particular meanings emerging from the relations among the signifiers used in the construction of "the people" in each case. Additionally, the analysis identifies the set of attributes used to define the particular "antagonist" from whom "the people" are to be differentiated. Furthermore, by focusing on the points of articulation among the various demands that each party ties together, it is possible to better understand the ways in which such a collection of demands gives rise to a nascent popular political identity. The primary aim, therefore, is to systematically build a profile not only of each party's political subject "the people," but of the dynamics of populism as a mode of political identity construction.

11.2 Approaches to Populism

Existing work on populism is as extensive as it is varied. Unlike "thick" political ideologies (Freeden 1998) such as conservatism, liberalism, or socialism, the variegated nature of the concept of populism, in both empirical as well as theoretical formulations, has traditionally allowed for very little in the way of a clearly defined set of predicative attributes that would indicate something like an internally consistent worldview. As Paul Taggart aptly puts it, "[f]or such a commonly used term, it is surprising how little attention populism has received as a concept. Where it has been dealt with systematically, populism as a concept has found little agreement surrounding it" (Taggart 2000, 10).

More recently, however, there have been major advances in operationalizing populism through adherence to theoretical parsimony, which, in turn, has paved the way for a much more focused and clear research program. The most notable advocate of this method is Cas Mudde, who takes populism to be a "thin-centered ideology" (2004) that is flexible and yet definite enough to be adapted to studying the phenomenon as it is manifested through its various ideological commitments on the more familiar Left–Right scale. Following this approach, the literature has settled on a number of key features that are shared by most, if not all, empirical cases of populism. Following Kriesi and Pappas, these features include "the existence of two homogeneous groups—'the people' and 'the elite'; the antagonistic relationship between the two; the idea of popular sovereignty; and a 'Manichaean outlook' that combines the positive valorization of 'the people' with the denigration of 'the elite'" (Kriesi and Pappas 2015, 4).

In Mudde's own terms, populism involves a "thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' and the 'corrupt elite,' and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté generale (general will) of the people" (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2013, 8). A number of recent works on European RRPs (Kriesi and Pappas 2015; Jungar 2015; Ylä-Anttila and Ylä-Anttila 2015) explicitly make use of the "thin-centered ideology" approach in providing conceptual tools to better classify, and, ultimately, better understand, the functional dynamics of this type of political party, especially in the European context of ideologically partisan variants, where populism has recently attained its most sustained and stable expression.

While illuminating and incisive, these works generally suffer from problems that can be attributed to the presuppositions maintained by the framework. The principal problem—one that is consistently repeated—in this approach, is that by characterizing populism as a "thin-centered" ideology without substantive content beyond its orientation toward the (people/antagonist) dimension of political contestation, it is thereby reduced to a dependent, and thus supplementary, feature in relation to the more mature "thick" ideologies with which it is necessarily found in conjunction. And yet, its subsequent impact on those "thick" ideologies provides the basis for distinct ideologies, such as radical Right populism, that are not reducible to either of these constituent parts. This highlights a fundamental difficulty in distinguishing between *distinct* ideologies whose

"core patterns" are "unique to [themselves] alone," and *full* ideologies, which "provide a reasonably broad, if not comprehensive, range of answers to the political questions that societies generate" (Freeden 1996, 750). This is primarily due to the unlikely incidence of a "thin-centered" yet *distinct* type being found without its "thick," *full* complement.

In such cases, a party's populism merely determines the broad structure of social antagonism within rhetorical limits, while the remaining attributes of the "thick" companion ideology play an ambiguous role in their relation to the defining attributes of the novel hybrid type—in this case, RRP—which calls into question both the thick/thin distinction as well as the relation of RRPs to the "thick," Right-wing ideology from which their name is derived. Consequently, the gap that emerges between empirically observed attributes, and their attempted subsumption under the extrapolated typological schema—the circularity of which is well known to Mudde (2007, 13)—creates inconsistencies that cannot be overcome without invoking some external principle or typology by fiat. As Paris Aslanidis has argued, this is due in part to the spurious nature of the category "thin-centered ideology" itself, whereby "almost any political notion can acquire the status of a thin-centered ideology as long as it contains an alleged 'small' number of core concepts that the claimant perceives as being unable to supply a comprehensive package of policy proposals" (Aslanidis 2015, 4). As a result, the concepts "[render] us unable to distinguish between thick and thin ideologies if we are unwilling to rely on arguments from authority" (2015, 4), while wholly ignoring what is taken to be the "single most unchallenged dimension of ideology in the literature," namely "coherence." (2015, 2).

Mudde attempts to address the problem in his explicitly typological study, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe* (2007). Here, he makes one of the first convincing cases—seemingly obvious today—against the idea that neoliberal economics was part and parcel of radical Right populism. Despite the importance of this finding, Mudde's approach cannot properly integrate it into his typology. In the same text, he argues that where radical Right parties promote economic policies that seem to contradict the party program of the traditional Right, these policies "proceed from the core tenets of their [RRPs'] ideology (i.e. nativism, authoritarianism, and populism) rather than determine them, and can be and are consequently instrumentalized to attack competitors and attract voters" (2007, 132–133). Beyond the easy associational inference that intuitively ties welfare chauvinism to nativism and populism on the one hand, and the

evasion of the question as incidental rather than determinative on the other, no substantive explanation is given as to why we ought to think of the economic dimension as exempt from typological identification in what is ostensibly a "complete ideological base" (Ylä-Anttila and Ylä-Anttila 2015, 57). Doing so would be contrary to Freeden's claim that "entertain[ing] … practices [or] conceptual fundamentals pertaining to welfare policies" is "a feature of all major ideological systems" (Freeden 1996, 750). Subsequently, in maintaining that only an instrumental relation holds between RRP ideology and welfare chauvinism, Mudde attempts to establish both a logical, generative relation between the terms, while at the same time effacing that very relation by denying its specificity. As a result, welfare chauvinism—as a phenomenon consistently appearing in RRP policy—cannot be theoretically integrated into RRP typology. Due to its fundamental relation to that ideology, however, it is tacked on nonetheless, albeit in an ad hoc manner.

In light of the preceding discussion, we may draw a number of possible conclusions. Either it is the case that economic concerns are external to RRP ideology, rendering it "thin-centered" despite its "thick" Right-wing base, or it is the case that precisely because of populist parties' "schizophrenic" (Mudde 2007, 135) economic commitment to both welfare chauvinism for the poor and tax cuts for the middle class, they do not belong in the category of Right-wing parties at all; hence, the RRP type is a sort of instrumentalized hybrid between Left and Right, which begs the question of its categorization as Right-wing in the first place. Finally, a third possible conclusion is that populist party positions are not generated by a fixed, pre-existing ideology at all—something hinted at by the irreducibility of RRPs to traditional Right-wing ideology. Rather, these positions are generated from the interaction between the political demands which a populist party articulates *and* an underlying ideological inclination that is itself shaped through constant communication within an evolving political space, and by distinguishing itself from the salient attributes of its "antagonist" at any given time.

11.3 Populism as Logic of Political Discursive Construction

An alternative framework that is in some ways similar to the aforementioned thin-centered ideology approach, while avoiding many of the pitfalls, is Ernesto Laclau's particular brand of the discourse analytical

method. In his book *On Populist Reason* (2005a), Laclau jettisons the opposition between "thick" ideology and "thin" supplement, and instead describes populism as an overarching political "logic" (2005a, 18) that drives the process of the discursive construction of political subjects and their concomitant political positions. In elaborating his system, Laclau identifies three primary categories along which the populist identity of "the people" is constructed: *the equivalential chain of demands*, the *dichotomic frontier*, and the popular-democratic *signifiers* whose meanings are contested in the ensuing struggle for hegemony.

According to Laclau, the construction of a political identity begins with an unmet demand and the antagonistic relation this creates *vis-à-vis* those in power. He argues that "from the beginning we are confronted with a dichotomic division between unfulfilled social demands, on the one hand, and an unresponsive power, on the other" (2005a, 86). Where a large number of these unmet demands exist simultaneously, the symbolic framework that underpins social relations in their normal day-to-day operations—otherwise referred to as the hegemonic order—begins to disintegrate, and a dividing line appears between these various demands on the one side, and the antagonistic hegemonic order on the other.

While at first representing a merely negative equivalence among the distinct demands, reflecting the lack which they share in common *vis-à-vis* the hegemonic order, these demands "crystallize … in a certain discursive identity which no longer represents democratic demands *as* equivalent, but the equivalential link as such. It is only that moment of crystallization that constitutes the 'people' of populism" (93). It is important to note here that this crystallization of a concrete identity is always a function of differentiation from the antagonist, and reflects, on two levels, the difference in the set of demands that define the new political bloc, and the predicates that identify the interpellated subject.

In order to achieve political identification within this equivalential link, a novel *syntax* has to develop parallel to that of the hegemonic order, while providing the symbolic means to integrate all of the preceding demands into a new chain. Here I use *syntax* in order to highlight the structuring function of articulation and its generative properties with regard to meaning. These demands, borrowing from the existing popular-democratic symbolic lexicon, take on novel connotative associations as a consequence of being articulated to one another within the new syntactic structure. As Laclau stresses in one of his earliest formulations, "classes cannot assert their hegemony without articulating the people in their discourse; and the

specific form of this articulation in the case of a class which sets to confront the power bloc as a whole, in order to assert its hegemony, will be populism" ([1977] 2011, 196).

Finally, these popular-democratic symbols—also called *empty signifiers* or *floating signifiers* depending on the structural role they play—serve the dual function of both representing the unity of "the people" *qua* equivalential chains, and serving as individual loci on which the struggle for discursive hegemony will take place. Whereas an empty signifier "[steps] in and [becomes] the signifier of the whole chain" (2005a, 131), a signifier is floating, or "suspended" when "its meaning is indeterminate between alternative equivalential frontiers" (131), or, in other words, alternative hegemonic projects.

The foregoing summary of Laclau's analytical system serves to highlight the key difference between his approach and that of Mudde: integration. As Laclau is quick to emphasize, in accordance with his post-structuralist background, the various signifiers that constitute populist discourse, and concomitantly, the identity of the populist subject who is interpellated (Althusser 2014) by that discourse, can be defined only in relation to their opposites, and only within a totalizing, integrated system of differences that seeks to close off or "suture" (Laclau and Mouffe [1985] 2014, 184) the discursive field according to its own logic. From this, it follows that the parties' political positions ought to reflect the logic of the commitments that constituted the identity in the first place.

One of the principal benefits of this approach over the thin-centered variety, therefore, is that discourse analysis ought to be able to explain seeming discrepancies in party positions as *internal moments* within the unfolding political "logic," by ultimately referring back to how "the people" are defined. Laclau's own view on the subject is clear. He insists that inscription "should proceed not in terms of purely external comparisons or taxonomies, but by determining internal rules which make those variations intelligible" (2005a, 175). Consequently, the relation between economic positions and the party's political ideology ought to be explainable as a logical consequence of this definition, rather than by referring to a tenuous, external connection to an underlying political ideology that is unable to justify that connection in accordance with its own theoretical principles.

From the preceding, therefore, it may be concluded that Laclau's discourse analytic approach offers a promising way to integrate and explain populist party positions and morphological differences between ideologically opposed parties in a way that, for the reasons stated above, the

thin-centered approach cannot accomplish on its own. In spite of this, however, Mudde's insights into typological resemblances should not be discarded, but rather elaborated with a strict adherence to the formal "internal logic" of the discourse in question. Despite Laclau's expulsion of "secondary elements," such as the economic, from his analysis of the formal structure of populist discourse (Aslanidis 2015, 11), regularities noted in the expression of "welfare-chauvinist" economic policy, across multiple RRPs by research of the thin-centered variety, are indicative of similarities at play that cannot be dismissed by reference to radical heterogeneity or mere external semblance. Indeed, Laclau's discourse analytical method ought to be able to subsume welfare-chauvinist discourse within the method's formal structure of articulated demands, thereby explaining external similarities among parties through the analysis of the internal logic at work in the discourse in each case. As argued by Aslanidis, among others, "formal discursive elements are implicit in Mudde's ideological definition" (2015, 11). Therefore, although it may be the case that typological thinking in reference to populism could possibly lead to "mistaking particularities of populist instances in different regions for essential characteristics" (11), the focus on the "thin" form has nevertheless yielded content-based regularities that, while not necessarily indicative of populist universal types, fundamentally contribute to a empirically substantive understanding. By bringing Laclau's discourse analysis into conversation with Mudde's findings on typological regularities, it becomes possible to both clarify and supplement theoretical issues in Mudde, while adding an empirical element to Laclau's more theoretical framework.

11.4 Reading the Texts: On Source Materials

The analysis in this chapter looks at a variety of textual media sources treating the subject of the discursive construction of "the people" in both Podemos in Spain, and the FN in France. The primary sources under scrutiny are the party manifestos of each party. These are "Notre Projet: Programme Politique du Front National" (Our Project: Political Program of the National Front), and both "El Programa Del Cambio" (Program of Change), and "Documento Final Del Programa Colaborativo" (Final Document of the Collaborative Program) for Podemos. Where the FN has only a general program, Podemos has both a general program, and a specific program for the regional elections.

In addition to the manifestos, English-language daily newspapers—primarily the *Guardian* and *Huffington Post*—are used in conjunction with Spanish and French language textual sources,[1] including French cultural magazine *Les Inrocks* and Podemos' own *La Circular*. Furthermore, I analyze a number of interviews with Pablo Iglesias and Marine Le Pen available on youtube.com. Because each politician is the head of their respective party, the likelihood of unrepresentative views is low. Additionally, source texts were gathered from media of varying political leanings in order to lessen the likelihood of bias or misrepresentation.

The analysis employs discourse analysis, following the aforementioned categories of empty signifiers, demands, articulation, and antagonistic frontier. An important point about discerning the meaning of a particular signifier is its twofold relation to articulation. While signifiers exert their power by virtue of how they are articulated to other terms in a signifying chain, it is equally important to note which terms they are opposed to. This opposition is an indispensable tool in discerning the particular connotative texture that a term takes on in a given discourse, and articulation must take into account both affirmative and negative connotative possibilities.

To facilitate the search for signifiers, a word frequency count of the texts was performed. The most frequent signifiers with political connotations that appeared simultaneously in all of the texts were then isolated, and the analytical method was applied in finding the articulatory, connotative meanings of the terms as each party has attempted to define them, against the signifiers to which they have been opposed (Table 11.1).

11.5 Analysis: The Front National: Le Petit Peuple de la "France réelle"

Starting with the "Political Program of the Front National" (Le Front National, 2015), the first and most striking point to be taken into consideration is the party's vision of a satisfactory French nation.[2] Attempting to hegemonize the signifier *souveraineté* (sovereignty), the party opposes popular sovereignty to the incursion of European politics. Throughout the text this signifier also conspicuously appears to be connected to the concept of *identité nationale* (national identity) (2015, 13, 48–50). For the FN, identity as a separate national concept, endowed with its own set

Table 11.1 Word frequency table for politically significant signifiers

Podemos—El Programa Del Cambio		*Podemos—Documento Final Del Programa Colaborativo*		*Front National—Notre Projet: Programme du Front National*	
cuidadanía	51	ciudadanía	27	citoyen	18
economía	49	economía	29	économique	174
acceso	26	acceso	24	acces	30
democracia	13	democracia	48	democratique	38
corrupción	13	corrupción	2	corruption	3
estado	12	estado	19	L'etat	244
Gente/pueblo	11/2	gente/pueblos	1/6	peuple	33
progresivo	10	progresivo	8	progressive	44
defensa	6	defensa	11	défense	26
emigración	6	emigracíon	7	immigration	65
soberanía	3	soberanía	6	souveraineté	31

Note: Numbers in the table include all permutations of the root word found in the text, excluding instances where the word appears in title, subtitles, or section headings. The word count for *democracia* includes all instances of the root word: (*democracia*, *democratico*, *democraticos*, *democratica*, *democraticas*, *democratizar*, *democratización*, and *democraticamente*).

of cultural traditions, is inextricably linked to self-determination *vis-á-vis* the political strictures of membership in the European Union. According to the party, French national sovereignty has been eroded to a large extent by the influence exerted over its leaders by the EU. In an interview with the BBC, Marine Le Pen expressed the opinion that the economic malaise in France was caused not only by "thirty years of bad management by the right and left-wing parties" but by "being subject to the dictates of the EU" (BBC 2015).

With this gesture, Le Pen is able to expel members of an internal political class from her construction of the French "people" by creating an identitarian link with the external force of the EU. She makes this move concrete by wholly identifying former presidents of the Republic with their roles as representatives within the greater European Parliament. To this end, she states "we haven't had a president of the republic for a long time in France. We've got European civil servants who get the route map and apply it" (2015). In characterizing the decisions taken by political elites internal to France and external policies deriving from the European Parliament as being cut from the same cloth, she thus creates one half of the party's antagonistic bloc.

One important feature to note is that, for the FN, the antagonistic bloc is not unitary, but consists of two opposing poles. The other half of the antagonistic bloc is made up of a sector of society which typically constitutes an adversarial pole in the discourse of the radical Right: immigrants, and in this case, particularly those who are Muslim. While Marine Le Pen has considerably softened her stance in comparison to her father Jean Marie Le Pen on a variety of subgroups whose positions within hegemonic discourse have been normalized, such as homosexuals, blacks, and Jews, she has focused all of her rhetorical efforts on channeling that once-held animus toward one subgroup in particular, through the use of the coded language of anti-extremism. Speaking on immigration in general, and about Muslims more specifically, Le Pen asserts that "Assimilation is a very French concept, which consists of saying that one who arrives must indeed abandon a part of who one is, to meld into the national community" (*The Guardian* 2012).

In contradistinction to the purported Anglo-Saxon model of "integration," which Le Pen claims supports retention of the "integrality of what makes one's specificity" and in which "everyone co-exists in a [segregated society]", she firmly positions herself against what she views as stubborn immigrant practices of keeping the customs of their country of origin in public, holding these actions to indicate the refusal to take on specifically "French" identities. The most referenced of these practices is that of public displays of religious observances. To this end, the party manifesto seeks to set up a ministry of secularism, or *laïcité*, to ensure the enforcement of this doctrine. On this view, secularism is no longer a negative political prohibition on religious interference in government, but becomes a positive social secularism which seeks to remove religion from the public space in toto, thereby effectively prohibiting public displays of religion to suit the end of a unified and unitary "French" people.

It comes as no surprise then, that curbing immigration is one of the FN's top priorities. Among the policies the party would like to implement to address immigration are the reduction of the number of immigrants allowed to enter each year from 200,000 to 10,000, the suppression of familial regrouping in France while reducing the budget for people seeking political asylum, and, finally, repealing the existing version of *jus soli* which affords French citizenship to any individual born on French soil irrespective of the nationality of their parents (Le Front National 2015).

With the construction of this dyadic antagonist, it is obvious that two of the demands that the FN links in its chain of equivalences are

anti-immigration, and a Euro-skeptic anti-austerity. These two demands reflect the attributes of the party's particular iteration of the "French people" as being self-governing and socially and culturally cohesive.

11.6 Economic Policies: The Politics of Contradiction?

Along with the two preceding demands, the FN supports a set of more progressive demands, which seem to call into question the party's classification as belonging to the radical Right. One such demand is that of a progressive tax system, which favors PMEs,[3] or small and medium-sized enterprises over that of larger corporations. This is contrasted to a denunciation of the "globalist parties, fiercely favorable to the deregulation of the global economy, and the internationalization of production" (2015, 29). The party preference for small entrepreneurs stands out as a well-preserved element of the party discourse from its earlier days as an offshoot of Poujadism (Wieviorka 2013), which has taken on explicitly anti-neoliberal connotations, and which further establishes the characteristic features of the political antagonist. As a consequence, elements within France's third largest workers union, Force Ouvrière (Workers' Force) have surprisingly come out in support of the party (Les Inrocks 2015). Smaller progressive demands on more current issues include the promise to provide a robust child welfare system available to French parents, in order to increase the birth rate (Le Front National 2015, 36); re-establishing independence of the press by means of prohibiting the close linking of big media organizations with government (2015, 78); promoting French cultural exceptionalism abroad while denouncing the London protocol's favoring of the English language in international patents; using state power to promote and encourage French cinema; and defending net neutrality and digital privacy (25).

Before jumping to conclusions about the FN's miscategorization as a radical Right party, it should be noted that where social welfare policies on the Left are typically made universally available on the basis of need, the FN explicitly reserves its social welfare for the "French people" according to the aforementioned definitional attributes. Claiming that in the year 2000, the program l'Aide Medicale d'Etat (Medical Aid of the State), specifically reserved for clandestine migrants, passed the 600 million

euros-mark, (11) the FN proposes drastic reductions of welfare aid to residents of non-French origin. Along the same ethno-protectionist lines, the party claims that in the midst of an economic crisis, with the consequent high rates of unemployment, a policy that allows professional migrants or foreign workers to reside and work in France deserves condemnation (11).

It is clear from the above that although apparently contradicting the party's stance on a host of other issues, these economic policies uphold its dedication to its image of the "French people" as *le petit peuple de la "France réelle"* (the little people of the real France). This is supported by Mudde's observation of "welfare chauvinism" (Mudde 2007, 130) in RRPs. Contrary to Mudde's conclusion, however, this purported instrumental gesture has been shown to be inextricable from the underlying structural articulation of the party's conception of its constituent "people."

11.7 Participation: Real or Imagined?

On the question of participation, the signifier of sovereignty is brought back into the picture, this time in connection with democracy and *the* democratic instrument *par excellence*: referendum voting. This desire is engendered by what the party takes to be a lack of opportunities for the democratic expression of the people within the current system. As stated in the program, "the absence of an almost systematic recourse for the people via the organization of referendums, or worse, the negation of the referendum vote, as was the case in 2008, seriously undermine democracy and take away the nonetheless fundamental idea from the people that they are masters of their own destinies" (Le Front National 2015, 102). As a result, upon entering government in the 2017 national election, the party asserted that it would immediately hold a referendum to revise the Constitution in which "the president of the republic shall be elected for a non-renewable term of 7 years" so that "a pledge of honesty and efficacy in politics taken by the head of state who must act only based on the commitments made to the French and not in regard to future reelection" would guide the actions of the president. Here we may ask whether this is not a "yes" to the question of increased democratic participation?

First, the type of democratic participation outlined here is limited in a number of ways. The terms of the referendum voting system provide no avenues for active citizen engagement beyond the act of voting. According

to the party program, the aim is to create a system of constitutional amendment via a referendum against the current method of parliamentary voting (2015, 103). While offering an opportunity where none existed prior, the possibility of citizen initiative or participation in either drafting or adding articles to amendments is non-existent.

Second, the party's proposal to change the term of the presidency to seven years has no bearing on existing democratic participation, but does bring to the fore the underlying *Bonapartist* ideal conception of direct representation in a unitary France.

Third, the party proposes an "organic law" (103), meant to establish proportional voting that is more fairly representative of actual vote shares in granting seats in the National Assembly.

While it is certainly true that proportional representation is a requisite condition of fairness, the active participation and engagement of the French people in and with their government is scarcely to be found in this conception. Instead, we find a party cleaving to traditional modes of representation while merely reconfiguring their components. As far as the French citizenry are concerned, the only way that their objectives can be made known to the government is either through voting on referenda handed down to them from above, or through voting for representatives of a particular political stripe rather than those of another. In either case, citizen participation is reduced to an aggregate-level data-building exercise. The program assumes that, with increased proportional representation, the need for direct participation can be circumscribed to the realm of referenda voting and that, moreover, this is sufficient.

11.8 Podemos: All Power to the Commons rather than to the Caste

For Podemos, the construction of its vision of the people centers on a negative definition in terms of that which it is not—*la casta* (the caste). The antagonistic bloc that is encapsulated in the signifier of the caste is neither a concrete group, nor is it an association of identifiable individuals. Rather, it is a

> term that was created by some Italian political scientists to describe what was happening in their country, and that was that in the last instance, a fundamental part of the political class that made the decisions were a type of majordomo of the economic powers, of the banks, that is to say, not people

representing the citizenry, mailmen of the citizens, but rather majordomos of the banks (El Politico 2015).

In other words, it is a combination of two types of actor under one heading, consisting of political elites and economic elites who manipulate their actions to the detriment of the people. It is defined by an attitude of not having to answer to one's constituents because of the nature of one's social standing (Cuatro 2014). The "people" which Podemos seeks to construct is therefore a people which is distinguished from the corruption of *la casta*, and which stands against a German-led austerity that is seen as crippling the living standards of the Spanish people. This vision of the "people" is one reflected in the demands of the Indignados Movement and of mass participatory democracy. In fact, among the major problems that Podemos has taken into its equivalential chain is the problem of forced evictions that catalyzed the aforementioned massive demonstrations that shook Spain in 2011.

Taking upon themselves the mantle of representing the political movements that incidentally gave birth to their platform—the 15M Movement of the indignants (*indignados*) who occupied the Puerta del Sol in Madrid as a sign of frustration, and the anti-eviction party Movimiento por una Vivienda Digna—Podemos affirms in their official national party program, the "Law 25 of Social Emergencies," that the party is "committed to paralyze evictions that affect debtors of good faith who have not been able to maintain timely payments due to a situation of economic difficulty" (Podemos 2015, 63).

It is here that Podemos differentiates itself from a party like the FN with regard to its ideological convictions. It is no coincidence that Podemos takes the issue of forced eviction to be immediate and urgent given that a large number of those affected are migrants living in already precarious social situations. In the party manifesto alone there are multiple mentions of improving the situation of immigrants, including "the certification of resumé" (2015, 27)—meaning that qualifications obtained elsewhere will be accepted as sufficient proof of skills—as well as extending "public health resources" to all children, paying special attention to "children of migrants in irregular situations [legal status]" (50). Thus, Podemos ensures the incorporation—in line with its Left populist categorization—of migrants, the disadvantaged, and the socially vulnerable, into its vision of the people, not as groups responsible for social and cultural disintegration, but as groups who are adversely affected, in the same way as everyone else.

11.9 Demands: Economy, Transparency, and Accountability

Against the political and economic caste, one of the party's most important demands is economic self-determination. Posited as a necessary condition for the "democracy" that serves as the empty signifier in Podemos' discursive strategy, for Iglesias it is the economy "that determines the conditions of possibility of the dignity of the people" (Machuca 2014). While a democratically controlled form of economic development is impeded on the home front by the political elite class, it is stifled from without by the austerity measures of the European Union. In their program for the European Parliament, the first point is titled "recover the economy, construct democracy" (Podemos 2014, 2). Some of the key proposed policy changes contained in that document are the abrogation of the labor reforms of 2010, 2012, and March 2014, as well as a substantially increased minimum wage, coupled with a substantially decreased maximum wage—a not-too-veiled reference to managerial and administrative pay (2014).

The demand for economic self-determination that has been framed as a condition for and reference to the signifier "democracy" also goes hand in hand with the party's anti-austerity stance. In an interview with *Democracy Now!*'s Amy Goodman, when asked about the meaning of austerity, Iglesias responded by stating that austerity means "that people are expelled from their homes, … that the social services don't work anymore, … that public schools don't have the elements, the means to develop their activities, … that the countries don't have sovereignty anymore, and we became a colony of the financial powers and a colony of Germany," and that "austerity probably means the end of democracy" (*Democracy Now!* 2015).

There can be no economic self-determination of "the people," however, without a concrete starting point. This is why a further demand extended by the party is that of fiscal reform and anti-corruption policies aimed at curbing the fraud that Podemos sees as being one of the crucial hindrances to establishing the type of government that would represent its particular vision of democratic politics. To realize that state of affairs, it is necessary to establish full governmental transparency (Podemos 2015, 63).

Reform, however, is not the end game toward which Podemos is playing. Ultimately, their aim is not merely reforming the political process, as in the case of the FN, but a complete overturn and subsequent re-establishment of a wholly other type of political order. In writing for the official magazine of Podemos' theoretical wing, head of party campaign strategy Íñigo

Errejón asserts that "in order to understand the present moment … we must think to what extent the transition was an exercise in passive revolution" (Errejón 2015). The transition he is referring to is the regime change that occurred in 1982, when Spain officially became a democratic country. Because the Spanish Constitution is framed by the party as a sort of placebo, whose legitimacy is disqualified a priori due to the conditions under which it was written—by high-ranking officials in Franco's government at the time immediately after his death—Podemos urges its "people" to agitate for the "democracy to come" (Derrida 2005), or, in other words, the as yet unfulfilled promise of mass participatory mobilization.

11.10 Participation: Citizen Mobilization in Social and Political Life

In characterizing the populist radical Left, it has become almost cliché to assume the politicization of daily life, in what is referred to as the "self-regulating anarchist commune" (Worsley 1969). How much participation does Podemos deem sufficient to include in its program?

The party program states that "necessary reforms shall be undertaken in public institutions in order to engender a qualitative leap in matters of citizen participation and of transparency" (Podemos 2015, 42). To achieve this, the program devotes an entire section to the establishment of institutions for a democratic practice. In the opening paragraph of the section, the party program states: "We want institutions that are permeable to participation, that advance the feeling hand and the warmth of the people: in sum, profoundly democratic institutions, where there will be no dead ends for the eyes of the citizenry, because change means equipping ourselves with the highest democracy possible" (2015, 63).

Proposals for citizen participation include extending legal support and a path toward voting rights to émigrés; creating a commission for citizen petitions in order to "channel, through parliamentary means, petitions solicited by the citizenry, in either individual or collective form, directly to the parliament" (69); instituting popular legislative instruments that allow for initiatory popular legislative measures" (69); and finally the establishment of citizen counselors in every autonomous region who "will remain in full public visibility throughout the duration of their tenure" (70).

Because of the way in which corruption is constructed as a principal characteristic of the political class, democracy carries procedural implications not only in terms of political organization, but also in setting limits

to the economic activities of elected officials. In one such example, the Podemos party program states that all elected officials must "perform a declaration of monthly expenses relative to the exercise of their function (expenses of representation, telephone bills, etc.)" (64). A further stipulation requires that they "inform of their public agenda, where visitors, and the entities they represent, will be specified, as well as the topic of meetings, along with the inclusion of any document that has been debated over" (64). With these safeguards in place, the party believes that the institutionalization of citizen participation would be better reinforced and protected from the type of corruption that is born out of the "revolving doors" established between government and consultancies in private firms.

As has been shown, Podemos has a both wide and deep commitment to citizen participation as expressed in its party program. In contrast to the FN, whose principal priority is one of fine-tuning the structures of representative bodies, Podemos seeks to vastly enlarge the purview of citizen power in deliberating on matters of governing. Therefore, it may be said that insofar as the party program is representative of the goals of the party, Podemos is dedicated to broad democratic participation.

11.11 Conclusion

The preliminary findings indicate that two primary differences exist between Podemos and the FN when viewed from the point of the structure of discursive construction: the morphological difference in the definition of an antagonist, and the way in which democracy is conceived. While it may be true that both follow a populist logic of distinguishing between (people/antagonistic bloc)—each party positioning itself against an antagonist that serves as an obstacle to the establishment of a social *plenum*, or harmonious social totality—where Podemos draws a single, clear line, dividing Spanish society into two blocs, the FN constructs a heterogeneous enemy that is itself not singular. Here, the antagonistic block is split between the corrupt economic and political elites, typically identified in populist discourse, on the one hand, and a culturally subversive and economically draining immigrant or migrant population on the other. These findings reinforce much of the populism literature on RRPs and their exhibited ethno-nationalism. As a result, "the people" of the FN appear as a culturally, if no longer ethnically, homogeneous bloc, asserting itself politically through a self-rule that is mediated by public officials devoted to the nation; in this case equivalent to "the people" in this

restricted sense. Furthermore, the party posits that direct participation in managing day-to-day political affairs is not a requirement for upholding representational integrity. Therefore, democracy for the FN does not stray too far from the tenets of representative democracy, but, rather, problematizes the existing organization of the representational system in France. For Podemos, however, "the people" appear as a mass social bloc, consistent with that of the image of the anti-austerity 15M Movement, and of the occupation of the Plaza del Sol throughout the Indignados protests. Here, the difference between the two parties on the ideal degree of popular participation seems to validate Peter Worsley's Left–Right populist typological hypothesis, whereby

> [t]he search for direct people-leadership contact is one point along a continuum stretching from total non-involvement of the mass of the people at one end to the ideal anarchist self-regulating commune at the other. In my view, these two extremes are a very large part of what I mean when I use the terms 'Right' and 'Left' (Worsley 1969, 245).

It is nevertheless clear, however, that in the case of both parties a certain ideologically-determined conception of "the people" is clearly at work. For Podemos, the people ought not to have any defining characteristics beyond opposition to "the political caste." The relation between the two is purely political, and the particular "subject-position" arises as the result of political contestation, where the process itself is constitutive of the characteristics of both "the people" and of the antagonistic bloc. For the FN, on the other hand, the regulative idea is political but also cultural. There is an overwhelming "French-ness" that is consistently referred to, regarding the tenuous position of French patrimony *vis-à-vis* exogenous cultural threats, whether in the form of absorption of foreign cultural elements into "pure" French culture, austerity, globalization, or from a declining French culture industry resulting from the two preceding processes coupled with the prominence of English as the global language of choice. The project is one of reclamation. For Podemos, the significance of culture lies in the value of civic culture as a project, namely one that is to emerge from the restructuring of political life. Consequently, Spanish culture is something that must be changed and improved rather than protected, and for this reason, immigrants as well as nationals are seen as having a role to play in the reformulation of and participation in government institutions (Table 11.2).

Table 11.2 Discursive Positions of Podemos and the Front National

	Podemos	*Front National*
Signifier	Democracy: Economic self-determination; Transparency; Equal access to political institutions	Sovereignty: National self-determination; Anti-EU; Power over borders; Immigration
People	1. Everyone not in the caste including illegal immigrants	1. Culturally French, middle class, small-business owners
Antagonist	2. Political and economic elites [single cleft]	2. EU and globalization-friendly elites + Publically pious Muslims and economic migrants [double cleft]
Chain of Equivalential Demands	End to forced evictions; Public health for the needy; Anti-corruption/no revolving door; Minimum wage increase	Social welfare for the "French"; Support of French industry and culture; Anti-immigration/border sovereignty; Economic support for small and medium-size businesses
Participation	Citizen legislative initiatives; Citizen councils; Citizen parliamentary petitions	Fair representation in Parliament; Citizen referenda on constitutional reform; Seven-year presidency: pledge of honesty

Despite the differences in their respective target publics, however, both parties nevertheless share a vision of incorporating a "people" that has been left out of political participation. In addressing themselves to a "people" in a universal sense, rather than making a claim on behalf of a particular group, each party shares in the structural element of populist discourse. The qualitative distinction between this discursive tendency and one that remains at a lesser stage through its investment in particular demands, is that even when a particular demand is highlighted in populist discourse, it always already aims at the impossible task of filling the empty place of "the people" through an articulatory connotative chain that is saturated with universalist overtones (Laclau 1996, 53). What this universalism accomplishes is the representation of a hegemonic vision attempting to establish its own "distribution of the sensible" (Ranciere 2010, 36).

While constituting only a first step in the direction of a discourse analytical research program devoted to typological constructions of RLPs and RRPs, the findings suggest that an engagement with Laclau's method provides a fruitful means of defining and organizing meaning-making at the level of the discursive construction of novel political subjects that is not available to other theories of populism. The theoretical coherence and internal consistency in Laclau's approach should not be overlooked, even when favoring the concreteness of case studies. In fact, insights into apparent typological regularities exhibited in empirically motivated research are illuminated by Laclau's firm commitment to internal logic and to unfolding both the synchronic dimension of internal articulation, as well as the diachronic articulations of terms over time, (Laclau 2014) inherent to contestation between hegemonic projects. Although this is recognized as implicit in the thin-centered approach, it nevertheless remains inchoate. By bringing the two into conversation, it is hoped that novel research avenues may be opened up, thus contributing to a better, more nuanced understanding of what it is that separates radical Left and radical Right populists from one another, what makes either type populist, and what makes them irreducible to both their "thick" base ideologies of the Left and Right, and to one another; in other words, what makes each specific.

Notes

1. All translations of Spanish and French-language sources done by the author.
2. "Le petit peuple de la 'France réelle'" translates to "the little people of the 'real France'."
3. Petite et moyenne entreprise.

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PART V

Conclusion

CHAPTER 12

Left-Wing Populism and the Assault on the Establishment

Óscar García Agustín and Marco Briziarelli

The 2017 elections in France reflected a new political panorama for the country as well as confirmed broader tendencies in the continent, highlighting the emergence of a new political cycle, which opens up opportunities for the Left but also the risks of reactionary backlashes. The expectations of votes for the Socialist Party were at an all-time low while the conservatives were fighting for the third position with limited possibilities of reaching the second electoral round. The recently created En Marche! party, led by Emmanuel Macron, and the FN of Marine Le Pen were the forces with the strongest options. While the former aimed to renew the space of social liberalism and vindicate the role of Europe, the latter, as a radical Right-wing party and openly xenophobic, attributed to itself the defense of national sovereignty.

However, in the last days before the first round there was still room for a surprise and, according to some, a potential political earthquake: the possibility of Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the Left-wing politician from France Insoumise, passing to the second round. Mélenchon's charisma, an

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innovative and massively supported media campaign that used video games and holograms, and a strategic move to the ground of Left-wing populism (Kellaway 2017) without ideological dependence on the Communist Party contributed to the opportunity of gaining results far beyond the 11.1% he received in 2011.

The panic reactions came immediately. *The Economist* emphasized how uncertainty, which financially translates into market volatility, had increased. The campaign was predictable and not particularly worrying until the irruption of Mélenchon:

"The script for France's presidential election was supposed to be clear. Investors accepted that Marine Le Pen, the anti-European Union, pro-Russia, far-Right candidate, would make it through to the second round. But markets presumed that, just as when her father made the second round in 2002, voters would flock to the alternative candidate, either François Fillon, a Catholic conservative, or Emmanuel Macron of the center-Left (Buttonwood 2017)."

In sum, investors did not consider the elections to be a real risk. However, a hypothetical election between Mélenchon and Le Pen would turn into the "nightmare option." An electoral victory to Mélenchon, only a few months after Brexit, would have provoked a new European crisis, since he would have been a French version of Hugo Chávez and the consequences of the Venezuelan economy would have been brought into the heart of Europe.

Mélenchon assumed the position as the candidate going against the economic and political elites as part of his political project and in this way joined more general European trends. In the closure of his campaign he gathered Marisa Matias, MEP from the Portuguese Left-wing party Bloco de Esquerda, and Pablo Iglesias for the event "A People's Europe." During the meeting Mélenchon made an interesting remark when he referred to his international guests from Southern Europe as members of "the more than 10% club." With the only exception of Syriza, Bloco de Esquerda and Podemos represent two of the most consolidated Left-wing parties demonstrating how to come close to power or influence it.

Both parties, along with France Insoumise after the results of the first round, entail options to govern in a European context marked by the decline of the social democratic project (as a prolongation of the ideological crisis of the center-Left already initiated by the foundation of the Third Way), the increasing presence of the radical Right-wing and the consequent redefinition of the center-Right political space. Although the

economic crisis did not lead to an electoral growth of the radical Left wing and the promotion of a genuinely anti-capitalist program, the consolidation of "the more than 10% club" in Southern Europe deployed the window of opportunity to foster a new political cycle.

Grounding it in the political experiences in Spain and other European countries, in this final chapter we want to focus on three main features that characterize this cycle: the importance acquired by the establishment as an antagonistic subject and the anti-establishment as a necessary moment of response; the shaping of a populist Left-wing, capable of expanding the social support and electoral horizon of the radical Left but also of clearly distinguishing its message from the radical Right populism; and finally the radicalization of the center as a response of the establishment in order to start a phase of passive revolution which could diminish the possibilities of such a Left-wing populist initiative.

12.1 Anti-Establishment as the Terrain of Struggle and the Left-Wing Political Iconoclasm

The aforementioned window of opportunity that allowed the constitution of the "More than 10% club" did not happen in a vacuum but in particular social historical context in which anti-establishment forces, on both the Right and the Left, could raise above marginality, go beyond the typical rapprochements of radical subversion and political violence, and therefore become the channel of expression of broader societal malaises.

Given that by "establishment" we broadly refer to the hegemonic bloc that since the aftermath of World War Two imposed and reproduced (neo) liberal democratic regimes around the globe, but especially in many Western countries, its rejection represents the passage from a consent-driven scenario marked by the rhetoric of social contractualism to one more leaning toward conflict and antagonism. Dialectically enough, current anti-establishment political projects respond to capitalism's relative success in fighting previous social and political cycles propitiatory for the Left. In fact, in order to defuse the energy of the social unrest of the 1960s and 1970s, capitalism incorporated some of the social demands and the communicational and organizational practices of social movements of the same period into the productive organization (Boltansky and Chiappello 2005). Thus, from this point of view, neoliberalism cannot simply be understood as a reactionary class response to newly empowered labor, strengthened by welfarism and unionism (Harvey 1989), but also

comprises a reformist moment generated by the incorporation and internalization of progressive social demands which, as we will suggest later on, exemplifies the extraordinary capability of self-reproduction of this system via passive revolutions.

However, this apparently forward-looking capitalism, with its abandoning of hierarchical Fordism for a post-Fordist model (Hardt and Negri 2000), the expansion of neoliberal globalization via utopic multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism (Tomlinson 2003), the diminishing of direct labour control and granting employees initiative and autonomy, and finally the intellectualization and ludification of production through the emergence of the so-called knowledge economy (Lund 2014) came with a dramatic price in terms of material and psychological precariousness and even more pronounced income inequalities. In this sense, Inglehart and Norrris (2016) document how precarization of labour, the erosion of welfare safety nets and the imposition of neoliberal austerity policies fueled anti-establishment sentiments to both the Right and the Left. Then, when such a context of existential insecurity had been aggravated by the recent global economic downturn, and the incapability of existing social and political institutions had become manifest, the rejection of the current social order seemed like an existential necessity more than a political choice of radicality.

Even when considering only the Left-oriented kind, the radicalism of such anti-establishment impetus varies in degree, form, and how it approaches the question of whether to remain within or without the framework of the democratic process. As a matter of fact, there is clearly a tension between pertaining to the "more than 10% club politics" and advancing a radically transformative and anti-capitalist project. The distance between the two manifestations of anti-establishment politics can be conceptualized through Mouffe's distinction between antagonism and agonism (2005). For Mouffe, antagonism implies an existential incompatibility between political adversaries, thus establishing us vs. them and "friend–enemy" relations. Conversely, in an agonistic situation, opponents recognize each other and agree to play by a common set of rules of political action.

While agonism and antagonism could be considered as generating anti-establishment projects at different levels, they often coexist, as in the case of Podemos, but also Syriza and M5S. An image that could be used to describe such a liminal position within the anti-establishment is the one of political iconoclasm. By that we mean a twofold approach that considers iconoclasm in both reductive and expansive denotations. On the one hand, as the etymology of the term suggests, that is, image breaking, many aspects

of current anti-establishment here considered privilege the level of discourse, representation, and signification as the main terrain of political struggle. On the other, political iconoclasm opens up to a much broader vision in which a given anti-establishment project aims at a political reform that is not always and necessarily accompanied by a social one. In this sense, the level of integrality of such reform may provide us with a conceptual way to distinguish between Right and Left kinds of anti-establishment project: while the former primarily aspires to change the inhabitants of the state but without essentially revising its morphology, the latter aspires to reconfigure the totality of social relations, in both civil and political society.

As will be explored in more detail in the next section, the thrust toward rejection of the establishment has produced a variety of social and political phenomena that can be grouped within the notion of populism, which in both its Right- and Left-wing manifestations shares the capability to significantly challenge the status quo (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2013), allegedly on behalf of a previously abandoned and successively reconstituted "people."

12.2 The Left Wing and the Populist Moment

Talking about populism has become very common in the mass media, and articles on populism are typically accompanied by pictures of Marine Le Pen, Donald Trump, and Nigel Farage, together with Alexis Tsipras and Pablo Iglesias. Most of the time there is no interest in distinguishing between them but rather to present them as a common enemy for well-established democracies. Indeed, if one aspect is shared by Left- and Right-wing populism, besides the anti-establishment sentiment and the figure of outsiders, it is the perception of populists as representatives of illiberal democracy. This reductionist perspective (all populism, regardless of its form, is illiberal) can easily turn to emptying the concept entirely and making it completely useless, both academically and politically: when everything becomes populism, populism barely means anything. However, there is at least an instinctive feeling of witnessing completely different phenomena when different political parties and leaders, labeled as populism, start to be compared with some degree of rigor. This basic comparative work can also be found in the pages of *The Economist* when reflecting on the meaning of the word "populism":

> Donald Trump, the populist American president-elect, wants to deport undocumented immigrants. Podemos, the populist Spanish party, wants to give immigrants voting rights. Geert Wilders, the populist Dutch politician,

> wants to eliminate hate-speech laws. Jaroslaw Kaczynski, the populist Polish politician, pushed for a law making it illegal to use the phrase "Polish death camps". Evo Morales, Bolivia's populist president, has expanded indigenous farmers' rights to grow coca. Rodrigo Duterte, the Philippines' populist president, has ordered his police to execute suspected drug dealers. (*The Economist* 2016)

As made clear by this enumeration of different kinds of populism, it would be better, firstly, to talk about populisms in plural (each understood in their contexts) and, secondly, to look for similarities without omitting (quite often intentionally) huge differences when talking about Right- and Left-wing populism. There is always the option of doing like the conservative member of the European Parliament of the Spanish People's Party, Esteban González Pons, who at his party's national congress claimed:

> Who says that the people is not taken into account? Puigdemont or Le Pen? Both. Who says that the Spanish people are subdued by Germany? Iglesias or Le Pen? Both. Because nationalism and populism divide the world into the elected and the guilty ones, into the pure and the impure ones. (quoted in Del Riego 2017)

That is a good example of the consequences of comparing both kinds of populism and stating that there is no difference. In this case, the conservative leader goes even further and shows that Right-wing populism shares the same goal as nationalist separatism. The same politician who criticizes divisions creates another one himself: between those in favor of democracy (liberals) and those against (populists). This distinction, according to him, is historical since democracy has been threatened before by fascism and communism. This would be a happy liberal ending to get rid of the traditional Left and Right political division.

Cass Mudde and Cristobal Rovira Kaltwasser (2013) make an interesting reflection about the different kinds of populism found in Northern Europe and Latin America and establish a distinction based on exclusion (of ethnic minorities), on the one hand, and inclusion (of marginalized groups: poor, women, indigenous people), on the other. This could imply that progressive populism could play a democratic role through expanding inclusiveness and participation of those groups that are excluded or do not feel represented in the existing institutional order. However, Mudde (2015) recognizes that repolitization and the critique of exclusion has a price: the imposition of majoritarian extremism, which denies legitimacy

to opponents' political positions and weakens the rights of minorities. All in all, despite its inclusionary role, the application of mechanisms of inclusion/exclusion in the construction of the "people" makes Left-wing populism a "black and white" and polarizing way of doing politics. Being Left or Right, it would still be illiberal politics.

The main problem of this opposition between liberalism (as democracy) and populism or illiberalism (antidemocratic forces from both Left and Right) is that the traditional antagonism Left–Right, which has defined the political conflict, is usually ignored. When talking about populism, the differences between Left and Right remain, wrongly, in the background. When the similarities between all kinds of populism are emphasized, the differences between Left and Right tend to become insignificant. This explains why Ernesto Laclau's approach to populism has been so positively embraced by the Left, the case of Podemos being a clear example. The definition of populism as discourse, a form of articulation, which strengthens democracy instead of undermining it, offers an alternative to conciliating the Left with the populist tradition, or at least one of them. In her conversation with Íñigo Errejón, Chantal Mouffe explains how the symbiosis between the Left wing and populism occurs without it being at the expense of Left-wing ideology. Mouffe noticed that the frontier Right/Left, as an agonist struggle, seemed to be the most adequate way to radicalize democracy, but she realized that the new forms of neoliberal domination should be contested by the construction of a new transversal and progressive collective will (Errejón and Mouffe 2015).

The emergence (as well as the need) of Left-wing populism must thus be understood in the current political situation, what Mouffe calls the "populist moment." Pablo Iglesias (2016) echoes that idea to stress that Left-wing populism is needed to stop Right-wing populism, magnified by Donald Trump's victory. Iglesias rejects any similarity between Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders as populists because, as he points out, populism does not define the political options but the political moments. Now for Iglesias, with all its implications for Podemos' official political line, the political moment is the populist one and not the moment of politics of the establishment. The framework of the populist moment is useful to understand the changes in the Socialist Party in Spain. After losing the support of his party, Pedro Sánchez resigned as general secretary of the socialist party but did not renounce the possibility of coming back and regaining the leadership of the party. This opportunity became real and Pedro Sánchez undertook a double turn: one to the Left and another one to populism. Against the establishment of his party and the total absence of

ideology (being the PSOE immersed into an unquestionable social liberal line), Pedro Sánchez did populist politics to show that the party establishment was in crisis and demonstrate the denial by the establishment of any option, which would not include embracing neoliberalism. In the current political moment, Left- and Right-wing populism should lead to diametrically opposed options. Judith Butler (quoted in Daumas 2017) is quite clear about that: Right-wing populism can lead to fascism while Left-wing populism must lead to radical democracy.

The populist moment is not only political. There are important material conditions: impoverishment of the middle class, decomposition of the working class, transnational capitalism, crisis of welfare systems, and so on. These conditions are often simplified under a new dichotomy: globalization–populism. Populism would be a reaction to globalization which entails a threat to people's sense of security, national identity or labor conditions. Thus the argument about Left- and Right-wing populism being the same would resonate since the conflict is replaced by cosmopolitans-liberals against nationalists-populists. However, the problem, as Butler (2016) says, is in reality neoliberal economics which "produces precarity throughout the population without discriminating between Right and Left". Those who blame migrants are just identifying wrongly the root of the problem. In this case, we witness again that some common elements can be found by comparing Left- and Right-wing parties due to the populist moment, but the globalization–populism dichotomy is not capable of comprehending the Right–Left confrontation and accounts for a Left-wing populism whose aim is to fight against global capitalism (not even necessarily against globalization) and increase equality and welfare. Despite the use of similar concepts (e.g. defense of sovereignty or social protection), their policies present huge differences, not to mention that in Northern Europe the Right-wing parties are in coalition with conservative and liberal parties and not with progressive parties. The main concerns on the Left remain more or less the same: the shaping of a transnational elite, the consequences of free trade agreements, the role of debt, the imposition of austerity politics, the cuts in public services and welfare policies, and so forth.

The material conditions enhanced by global capitalism and the political situation, defined by the populist moment, have created a new space in which Left-wing populism must be capable of setting up a genuine Leftish agenda. They should do this through the assumption of progressive populism to draw on the political conflict between elites and people, and the

promotion of wide social and political alliances, like those seen in the demonstrations against Trump, capable of maintaining a vibrant civil society and its plurality of voices and claims.

12.3 Radicalizing the Center: Time for Passive Revolution?

The populist moment, and the redefinition of the way of doing Left politics, does not imply that the situation cannot lead to a comeback for non-ideological politics (the blurred distinction between center-Left and center-Right politics), also known as post-politics. Since Right-wing populism entails a challenge for the establishment, it is likely that the establishment will react to avoid the rise of Left-wing politics aimed at electoral majorities and refuse to be placed in the margins of institutional politics. As Iglesias mentioned, the party of establishment (under Hillary Clinton) was not capable of defeating Right-wing populism in its Trumpist form. This does not mean that the hypothetical victory of Bernie Sanders would have been desirable or an option to be taken into account.

Just after the success achieved by Podemos in the electoral elections, the president of Santander Bank, Josep Oliu, proposed to create a new party like Podemos but a Right-wing version. The goal of such a party would be to promote private initiatives and economic development, since Podemos "makes us a bit scared" (quoted in EFE 2014). He added that neither PP nor PSOE represents company interests at all and the time to say enough to more regulation had arrived. The president of Santander Bank proved to have a visionary understanding of the populist moment. The creation of Right-wing populism would not be an option but neither would it be to trust the existing parties of the establishment. There was a third option: to radicalize the center (as the empty space for post-politics) as the opportunity to deepen neoliberal politics.

A few months later, Ciudadanos decided to make its move from regional Catalan politics to the national arena. Maintaining its ideological definition (but abandoning its definition as a social democratic party) and its defense of Spain as a unified nation (in opposition to nationalism), Ciudadanos was reformed as the best way of stopping the electoral growth of Podemos, which was worrying in the eyes of the establishment. The irruption of Ciudadanos as a national party enabled it to compete with Podemos in a terrain in which PSOE and PP never could: the new politics. The axis of new vs. old politics introduced by Podemos was counterbalanced

by Ciudadanos, including the same statement that it was a party neither from the Right nor from the Left. Although both parties pretend to be transversal, they do it from different positions: Left-wing populism in the case of Podemos, and an ideology based on efficiency and technocracy in the case of Ciudadanos.

Nancy Fraser has been very astute in understanding and explaining the political situation. The victory of Trump occurred in the context of a confrontation between progressive neoliberalism and reactionary populism. Trump's voters did not reject neoliberalism but progressive neoliberalism, defined as "an alliance of 'new social movements' (including feminism), on the one side, and the high-end 'symbolic' and service-based business sectors (Wall Street, Silicon Valley and Hollywood), on the other" (2016: 281). There was a convergence between emancipation (progressive ideas, associated with multiculturalism, women's and LGBTQ rights) and financialization. This hegemonic formation was already set by Bill Clinton and Tony Blair, and it complicated the development of an alternative Left. Chantal Mouffe referred to a similar phenomenon as "progressive neoliberalism" when she identified a new kind of center represented by Tony Blair's New Labour: "Unlike the traditional center, which lies in the middle of the spectrum between Right and Left, this is a center that transcends the traditional Left/Right division by articulating themes and values from both sides in a new synthesis" (1998: 11).

"Progressive neoliberalism," defeated by Trumpism, or the "radical center," still responsible for the ideological crisis of identity of the Left, is now at a crossroads. It opens up space for a potential counter-hegemony, says Fraser (2017), consisting in a new progressive-populist combination of emancipation with social protection. When Podemos was the first or second most voted-for party in the polls, it is not strange that Ciudadanos appears to radicalize the center. It is also a new synthesis of Left/Right but with the difference of being part of the new politics and the objective of diminishing the impact of Podemos and any possibility of populism taking power. "When the old politics fails, populisms emerge," claimed Albert Rivera (quoted in Torres 2016), leader of Ciudadanos. His party would be the solution to the new wave of populisms from Golden Dawn and Syriza to Trump, Le Pen, and Podemos. How can Ciudadanos contribute? Rivera says that it would be useful. Useful for what? That should be a relevant question.

As we have already seen, the new radical center has proven to be even more efficient in France. In this case, Macron aimed to keep Marine Le Pen, as a Right-wing populist, away from the presidency. There are indeed

some similarities with Ciudadanos, such as strong leadership and weak party structure and organization. However, Macron constitutes a more sophisticated example of how to stop a progressive counter-hegemonic formation through the identification of the radical Right wing as the main enemy and risk to democracy (nothing to refute here), as well as through the distinction from the parties of the establishment. It is not casual that Macron has been called a centrist populist (Esparza 2017) or an anti-populist populist (Bordignon 2017). In his reading of the populist moment, En Marche!, as well as Ciudadanos (although to a lesser degree), succeed in representing anti-establishment despite coming from (and being supported by) the establishment.

The idea of new politics includes (or maybe neutralizes) some of the popular demands of recent years: more participation and involvement in politics, direct communication between citizens and leaders, and leaders capable of listening to people and favoring identification processes. It was curious to see how Podemos faced difficulties in expressing its opinion in relation to the second electoral round in France. Podemos' leaders recommended not voting for Le Pen but they avoided recommending a vote for Macron. This reflected how the new radicalized center represented a political space, which is more of a challenge to Left-wing populism than one of the parties of the establishment. Macron talked about "revolution," and certainly it could be, but a passive one.

The notion of passive revolution leads us straight back to our previous discussion about the distinction between Right- and Left-oriented anti-establishment as their variation depends on what exactly is being considered as the "established" element to be rejected: the Right-wing version aims at replacing the "establishers," the political elite, rather than the establishing process, while the Left-wing anti-establishment politics derives its radicalism from being willing to reorganize the primary social relations of production and property (and therefore sovereignty).While ideologically distant, both kinds of worldview can lead to what Gramsci (1975) defines as passive revolution—in other words, a dynamic that comprises both revolution and restoration, progressive and regressive tendencies, Cesarist and populist, demagogic and national popular.

For Gramsci (and for Marx), while political projects such as Podemos, Syriza, and the Pink Tide governments in Latin America exemplify a humanistic conception of history according to which people, when collectively mobilized, make "history," they do not always make it according to their own objectives. Passive revolution in this sense, to use Gramsci's terminology,

is to be understood as both a subjective and an objective account of the difficulty of implementing a political project. Subjectively, it can refer to two distinct phenomena. It can describe a purposeful way to advance and/or conserve an already established social order, as in the case of the radicalized center of Macron, and Sanchez' visions. Second, passive revolution can refer to the potential danger for a progressive project, such as that of Podemos, when its social base risks alienation, and therefore lack of involvement, or when the meanings associated with its project risk being appropriated or hijacked by another political force (as in the case of Ciudadanos).

The other aspect of a passive revolution, which we could define as "objective" in so far as it describes structural social relations, has to do with the systemic dynamism of capitalism and its remarkable capability to revolutionize important aspects of the social production of a given society (e.g. think of Americanism and Fordism) but without changing the fundamental property and productive relations. Thus, applying the concept of passive revolution to the present analysis means suggesting that the so-called radicalization of the center—embracing rather than rejecting neoliberal capital—remains structurally confined in between two not so distant poles, both representative of a position that in the end denies the progressive value of an anti-establishment project: either complacent agonism or power-jealous antagonism.

All in all, Podemos' experience so far offers important elements to help us understand the new political cycle, which cannot be reduced to Spain, and the emancipatory potential of Left-wing populism for articulating alternative progressive politics aimed at a social majority (the more than 10% club) and for achieving radical change (democratizing institutions and challenging austerity policies). However, there are also constraints and contradictions. Some of them can be explained through the passive revolutions, but others result from tensions between different ways of conceiving politics or even personal interests. Unified political leadership or party movement? Popular party or Left-wing party? Reformist or radical? Protest or government oriented? There are many debates, which are still ongoing (and far from being solved), and they make it interesting to look at Podemos as an organization in which all these tensions are taking place and how the practices and actions of the party aim to give answers to them. The contributions of this book place themselves within these lines of debate and aspire to enrich them, in terms of both presenting answers and reconsidering the questions. The role that the Left wing, and parties such as Podemos, can play in the future is still open, but the major steps to consolidate Left-wing populism as a serious alternative are already being taken.

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