The populist radical left in Greece: Syriza in opposition and in power

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The Populist Radical Left in Greece: Syriza in opposition and in power[i]

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Abstract

The contribution of this chapter is threefold: First, it offers an original and extensive survey of the discourse of Syriza while in opposition and critically assesses it in terms of its populist character and ideologico-political contents. Second, it delves into the peculiarities of Syriza's populism to highlight specific shortcomings in mainstream approaches to populism, while advocating for a minimal discursive definition based on the theoretical contribution of Ernesto Laclau. Third, it offers an assessment of Syriza's populism in power, linking the empirical findings of this particular case-study with broader theoretical questions regarding populism's transition from opposition to power.

Introduction

Syriza's rise in Greece during the years of crisis and austerity did not only trigger a major realignment of the Greek political system, leading the old party establishment to collapse. It also acted as a symbol of defiance in a Europe dominated by neoliberal policies and a proof that the radical left was not anymore just a 'fighting opposition,' but it could be regarded as a viable contender for power. This seemed to be reaffirmed by the dynamic of Podemos in the Spanish elections of 2015 and 2016, as well as that of Jean-Luc Mélenchon in the French presidential election of 2017. The euphoria of the Greek radical left's victory in January 2015, however, lasted roughly six months, as Syriza had to retreat and accept a new bailout programme in July 2015, right after a divisive referendum, unprecedented in Greece's post-authoritarian history. But this major setback did not bring about the collapse of the Greek radical left, as it had done with the centre-left PASOK some years earlier. So, even after Syriza's major retreat, and with the old party establishment of Greece unable to bounce back, the party managed to win another election in September 2015, staying in power, to implement now a very different programme than the one that it initially had brought it to power: one that continued austerity (the so-called 'third memorandum').

Despite the immense attention by global media and international scholars, we are still lacking a comprehensive account of Syriza's trajectory from the margins of the political system to power. Responding to the need for such an assessment, this chapter aims at an in-depth exploration of Syriza's discourse and strategy over time, covering the period from its emergence as an electoral coalition in 2004 up until the recent

developments after its ascendance to power. The contribution of this study to the relevant literature is threefold. First, it offers an original and extensive survey of Syriza's discourse while in opposition, and critically assesses it in terms of its populist character and particular ideologico-political contents. Second, it delves into the peculiarities of Syriza's populism to highlight specific shortcomings in mainstream approaches to populism, while advocating a minimal discursive approach inspired by the work of Ernesto Laclau and following the recent work of the POPULISMUS research team (see Stavrakakis et al. 2016; 2017). Third, it offers a critical assessment of Syriza's development after taking power, linking the empirical findings of this particular case-study with broader theoretical questions regarding populism's transition from opposition to power.

Defining populism

The ongoing debates around the definition of populism, as well as the need for the formulation of minimal discursive criteria for the analysis of the phenomenon, based on the 'Essex School' tradition, have already been dealt with at length (Stavrakakis & Katsambekis 2014; De Cleen et al. 2018). They are also discussed extensively in this volume's introduction, so I won't be dealing with definitional issues in detail here. Moving beyond the scope of the 'Essex School,' and taking into account a consensus that seems to emerge around discursive, performative and 'ideational' approaches to populism (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017; Moffitt 2016; Panizza 2005; de la Torre 2015), two operational criteria are utilised in this chapter for the empirical analysis of populism. For a particular actor to be qualified as populist, they should (1) articulate their discourse around the nodal point 'the people' or other equivalent nodal points, and (2) they should represent society as ultimately divided between two antagonistic camps: the 'elite' (the establishment, the oligarchy, etc.), on the one side, and 'the people' (the underdog, the non-privileged, etc.), on the other. Yannis Stavrakakis refers to these two discursive criteria as *people-centrism* and *anti-elitism* (Stavrakakis 2017: 528). When those two criteria are both in place at the same time, it is rather safe to categorise a party, a leader or a movement as populist (Stavrakakis & Katsambekis 2014: 123).

The minimal discursive approach follows the ground-breaking work of scholars that have stressed the merits of Sartorian minimal definitions for conducting comparative research (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017; van Kessel 2014; Rooduijn 2014). But it disagrees with studies operating within the 'ideational' paradigm on the assumption that populism is a predominantly *moralistic* politics which has a necessarily *homogenising* effect on the subjects it calls upon ('people' and 'elite'). For scholars like Cas Mudde and Kirk Hawkins, the terms along which the 'people' and its opponents are constructed seem to be determined *a priori*: the people of populism is conceived as 'pure,' 'good,' and 'homogenous,' while the 'establishment' is necessarily 'corrupt' and 'evil' (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017: 12; Hawkins 2010: 5). I maintain that such claims, even if they seem to cover many historical instances of

populism, do not stand empirical or theoretical scrutiny and can be proven problematic when analysing recent instances of left-wing or more generally progressive populism, like the one studied here. Moreover, this transpires forcefully when we turn our gaze to populist social movements that have risen within the context of the Great Recession (see Gerbaudo 2017; Grattan 2016; Kioupkiolis in this volume).

Indeed, binding populism to moralism and anti-pluralism creates a series of questions that have not been adequately answered so far. Why cannot we conceive of a populist discourse that is not moralistic, but primarily *political*, centred on competing social and economic interests? Why should 'the people' be necessarily homogenous and not rather *unified* and/or connected, linked, despite an acknowledged heterogeneity and plurality? Dealing with such questions, Pierre Ostiguy has shown that the very *impurity* of 'the people' has actually been a key element of classic populist discourses in Latin America: 'the subordinate strata, the plebs, while certainly "deserving," "suffering," and "being treated unfairly," are most certainly not viewed as morally pure and virtuous' (Ostiguy 2017: 91). The same applies to Syriza leader, Alexis Tsipras, whom at times has clearly implied that 'the people' have their own vices and flaws, which however should be understood with reference to their subordinate and marginalised position, as responses to a political power that has become suppressive and alienated.[iii] In other words, it is this subordination of 'the people,' the fact that they are 'below,' reduced to an inferior position *vis-à-vis* the 'establishment,' which gives meaning to the 'us versus them' populist dichotomy (see also de Cleen & Stavrakakis 2017). Not a moral signification of this divide as a struggle between 'good' and 'evil.' What is more, the task of representing the popular strata in populist terms does not mean that 'the people' necessarily become homogeneous. As shown by Paolo Gerbaudo (2017: 17-18), one of the most distinct characteristics of the recent 'squares movement' in Spain and Greece was the fact that they constructed a sense of popular unity while stressing the primacy of *the individual*, the citizen; hence the term 'citizenism' which he suggests in order to grasp this movement-based subtype of populism.

In this context, I suggest that in order to be more alert and sensitive to the plurality of populist hybrids, we need to avoid attributing specific ideologico-political, moral, or other contents to populism a priori. Since it is now common ground that populism can be either on the left or on the right, in the streets or in government, leader-centric or leaderless, statist or neoliberal, we should be able to acknowledge that populism can also be more or less moralistic and indeed more or less pluralist in its conception of 'the people.'

With these brief theoretical observations in mind, I will now proceed to examine the particular logics that have governed Syriza's discourse, the core signifiers around

which this discourse is enunciated, as well as the socio-political preconditions of the party's success.

Syriza and the Greek politics of consensus

The rise to power of Syriza, once a fringe political force, can be seen as one of the main by-products of the severe socio-economic crisis that hit Greece in 2009. Formed in 2004 as an electoral coalition of leftist parties, organisations and political groups, ranging from the so-called 'renewal left,' the radical left and minority rights activists, to Trotskyists and Maoists, Syriza gained momentum within a few years, with its vote rising from a mere 4.6% in 2009 to 36.4% in 2015. To understand this impressive dynamic and the role that populism played in it, one should take into account the recent developments within the Greek political system and society.

Since 1974, Greece had been governed by parties of the centre-right and centre-left, which rotated in power and formed stable one-party governments until 2011, and then governed in coalitions until the early 2015. New Democracy (ND), on the centre-right, and the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK), on the centre-left, competed in a polarised political system throughout the 1970s and 1980s. After the early 1990s, they steadily converged towards the centre, reaching consensus on various policy areas, especially regarding the economy, Europeanisation and public administration (Lyrintzis 2005; Spanou 2008; Katsambekis 2014a). PASOK gave up on its left-wing populist and egalitarian agenda for a 'third-way' Blairite orientation, while ND abandoned most references to its right-wing conservative identity in order to occupy what it understood as the political 'middle ground.' Structural reforms, competitiveness, privatizations, the 'rationalisation' of fiscal policies, the advocacy for a society of dynamic individuals and a hostility towards collective forms of organisation, along with a vocal anti-populist stance became central themes of their common language. By the time the global financial crisis hit Greece, they had converged to such an extent that they could now govern in coalition for more than three years.

In October 2009, PASOK, under the leadership of George Papandreou (son of the founder of PASOK, Andreas Papandreou), won the elections by promising – among others – the redistribution of wealth through a fairer taxation system in favour of the lower and middle social strata. He also campaigned on the promise of a more participatory democracy, 'green growth' and electronic governance. However, once in government, and with the Greek economy crumbling, PASOK performed a U-turn, signing an emergency bailout agreement (the so-called 'memorandum') with European institutions and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). This agreement imposed a series of harsh austerity measures to the Greek society in an outright neoliberal fashion. This meant a severe hit to the social groups that had traditionally supported PASOK, but also a circumvention of the popular mandate, which immediately triggered frustration and anger within Greek society. As social unrest

was mounting and the PASOK government stood on the verge of collapse, George Papandreou resigned to make room for the formation of a coalition government with ND and a smaller radical right populist party, LAOS (Popular Orthodox Rally), in November 2011. Lucas Papademos, a non-parliamentarian technocrat, was appointed as Prime Minister. Papandreou was pushed to this decision under the pressure of a massive grassroots anti-austerity movement that had swept the country, notably the so-called 'movement of the squares' (the *aganaktismenoi*), and its aftermath.

The birth of the Greek 'squares movement' and the crisis of representation

The Greek *aganaktismenoi* surged forth just a few days after their namesake *indignados* had occupied several squares in Spain's largest cities in May 2011. This was a massive grassroots movement which emerged spontaneously, following calls in the social media that urged the people to voice their indignation against austerity (Katsambekis 2014b: 180-184; Gerbaudo 2017: 37-38). The key claim of the movement was of a populist nature: 'the people' had been betrayed by the political elites, which were held responsible for the socio-economic collapse of the country and could no longer represented them. Thus, immediate and radical change was needed for the people to regain power and democracy to be restored. As in the Spanish case, the movement's main demand was 'real democracy,' which was soon re-phrased into 'direct democracy,' emphasising direct-democratic participation and popular accountability (Prentoulis & Thomassen 2013: 175). The movement was an expression of the frustration that broad segments of Greek society felt with the administration of the crisis by traditional political parties. But it was also a sign of generalised social fatigue with the long established two-party system of Greece. It is no surprise, in this context, that protesters often turned against the whole political system, rejecting parliamentary politics and other established institutional forms of representation all together (e.g. trade unions). In this sense, what this movement revealed was a deep crisis of representation or even a crisis of legitimation within the Greek political system.

Crucially, Syriza was the only parliamentary political force to openly support the movement and its demands from the very beginning. Here, one can trace a major difference between Syriza and Podemos. While the latter almost organically emerged out of the squares (Kioupkiolis 2016), Syriza was already an established political actor that managed to effectively address the movement and capitalise on its dynamic.

Before discussing the relationship that Syriza built with the 'squares' and the broader anti-austerity movement, I will take a step back and examine the social linkage strategy (see Tsakatika & Lisi 2013) that the coalition had followed since 2004, as this was reflected in its official discourse.

Syriza pre-crisis: a case of minoritarian populism?

Syriza was born in 2004 as a coalition of parties and groups of the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary left. The initiative belonged to the party Coalition of Left, Movements and Ecology (SYN), which was the dominant constituent within the alliance, representing more than 80% of its cadres, and the only one with parliamentary representation. Through this coalition, SYN aimed at broadening its appeal towards the youth and social/political activists, and thus at reshaping its profile. This transformation was also highlighted by SYN's choice to abandon its self-characterisation as '*renewal* left' and to loosen the party's links to the eurocommunist tradition, adopting instead the self-characterisation '*radical* left' and aspiring to express the newest social movements against neoliberalism.

The main reason behind this orientation was the growing influence that the counter-globalization movement and the legacy of the so-called 'Social Forums' exerted on SYN. This development had already influenced the party's internal balances, leading to the empowerment of its left faction and the pursuit of a more active role by younger members. Squeezed for several years between centre-left PASOK's progressive cultural agenda, and the KKE's old-school sectarian vanguardism, SYN now adopted a vocal anti-neoliberal agenda, articulating socio-economic as well as post-materialist demands, and directly targeting as its main political opponent the established bipartisanship of PASOK and ND, in the pursuit of a clearer and more distinct position within the political system.

The fourth congress of SYN in 2004 is a landmark in this radical transformation and it represents what is commonly described as a 'left turn' (Eleftheriou 2009). In its political resolution, the party's main objective was described as the 'joint action with all workers, regardless of differences, in order to face the common big and small problems, through [action in] trade unions, local and regional institutions, autonomous initiatives, social struggles and movements,' aiming at forging 'a broader anti-neoliberal front against bipartisanship' (Synaspismos 2004).

This new strategy emphasised cross-class alliances and solidarity with social movements, while the then leader of SYN (and predecessor of Tsipras), Alekos Alavanos, actively pushed for a stronger connection of the party with the youth, which was described as 'an autonomous social category with inter-class character' (Synaspismos 2005). Hence, from the very beginning, Syriza's strategy was marked by a close interaction with various movements related to younger people. The most important among them were: (1) the counter-globalisation movement, which in Greece was expressed through the 'Social Forums;' (2) the student protests of 2006-2007 against the constitutional amendment that would allow for the establishment of private universities in Greece; (3), the youth anti-authoritarian uprising in December 2008, after the killing of a fifteen year old boy by a police officer in the centre of Athens. These movements became leitmotivs in Syriza's discourse, and acted as

symbols of a broad anti-neoliberal struggle that the party considered necessary for the emancipation and progressive transformation of society.

Syriza called upon its members to actively participate in these movements not from a vanguardist position, but as individuals that would respect the movements' autonomous dynamic and, at the same time, would try to learn from them. They were then expected to return to their party with experience and knowledge that would assist in transforming its identity, bringing it closer to society and rendering it more alert to concerns among the popular strata. This rationale was encapsulated in the calls by Syriza's leadership to 'let the movements destabilise us,' to 'learn from the movements,' to act 'within and beside' them (Alavanos 2004). This strategy aimed at and, indeed, generated a *process of learning* for Syriza, the importance of which the party has explicitly acknowledged recently (SYRIZA 2016: 4).

Therefore, if the first step of this strategy implied the active individual participation of Syriza's cadres and members in various social movements (*identification*), the second step was to represent them in the central political scene, in the parliament as well as in media venues (*representation*). Importantly, this strategy would be consistently followed during the years of crisis, playing an important role in the party's breakthrough and electoral success.

One of the declared aims of Syriza during its early years was the establishment of polarisations whenever the opportunity arose, in a bid to force social subjects that were involved in various kinds of struggles to take sides and become actively politicised. Having diagnosed a prevailing centrist neoliberal consensus across the political landscape, the core constituent of Syriza declared that it would actively try to *disturb* the 'prevailing homogeneity' of the socio-political space, so the 'true dividing lines might come to surface' (Synaspismos 2005). Syriza thus actively took up the role of representing certain social struggles and demands by way of establishing '*us* versus *them*' polarities, in which the *us* camp was portrayed as the losers and the victims of neoliberal globalisation and deregulation ('productive forces,' 'youth,' 'precarious,' 'unemployed,' etc.), and the *them* camp as the few winners and power holders (political-economic-media 'establishment,' elites, the two-partyism of PASOK-ND, the banks, the 'oligarchs,' etc.).

In this context, we can highlight traces of Syriza's populist discourse throughout the 2000s, in the sense that the 'youth' and the 'movements' seemed to function as 'empty signifiers' (Laclau 2005: 41-43) – as general equivalents to the whole of society and especially the precarious sectors – structuring around them various demands in an 'equivalential chain' (ibid.: 37). This 'equivalential chain' included students' struggles, the labour movement, environmental initiatives, movements for LGBT rights and gender equality, as well as immigrants' rights. Represented as a front, these groups and demands were discursively linked and collectively pitted

against the neoliberal 'establishment.' The goal of this strategy was the construction of 'a new social unity. A kind of unity that would represent the working people, the vulnerable social strata, the youth, the social groups that are marginalized' (Tsipras 2008a). It is in this sense that, on the organisational level, Syriza has been described as a 'mass connective party,' since it aspires

> to connect in a flexible way the diverse actions, initiatives and movements that embody these [political, social, ideological and cultural anti-capitalist] expressions into a stable federation, and to concern itself with developing popular political capacities as much as with changing state policy. (Spourdalakis 2013: 103)

Until the outbreak of the crisis in Greece, and while having consistently followed the above strategy, Syriza had managed to establish a strong presence within social movements and activist initiatives, yet remained a marginal force, polling around 5% at the national level. Its appeal towards the youth, the precarious and the social movements was consistent, but failed to lead to an electoral breakthrough. This can be explained by the fact that the various struggles to which SYRIZA appealed were fragmented. They were not communicating with each other, nor were they oriented towards a common goal. At the same time, the middle classes were still relevantly well off, maintaining their commitment to PASOK and ND. Put simply, up until the outbreak of the crisis, Syriza's populism was articulated from a minoritarian position, failing to set up an effective dialectic of representation between particularity and universality (between the 'youth' and 'the people,' between the movements and the whole of society). It is no coincidence that until 2011 SYRIZA had never mentioned the possibility of exercising power, which means that the coalition did not actively pursue a counter-hegemonic project. However, as the Greek crisis deepened and austerity hit the majority of the population (especially the middle and lower social strata), causing a broader destabilisation of the system, the preconditions for a unified anti-austerity and anti-establishment movement began to take shape.

Peculiarities of Syriza's early populism

Syriza's early populism exhibited some distinctive traits worth reflecting upon. First, it seems to contradict approaches which define populism as an ideology that constructs a homogenous 'people' against an also homogenous 'establishment.' What we have shown, rather, is that Syriza made an appeal to a 'plural people' and expressed an effort to empower the marginalised and excluded groups within society (*particularities*), which were then identified with the whole community (*universality*). This type of populist interpellation corresponds to what Carlos de la Torre – drawing on Jacques Rancière – describes as a 'politics of cultural and symbolic recognition.' This 'consists in making what is unseen visible, in making what was audible as mere noise heard as speech' (de la Torre 2015: 8). Interestingly, Tsipras has repeatedly

stressed that Syriza's main aspiration is to give voice to 'those without a voice' (Tsipras 2008b; 2008c).

Second, we do not just encounter a politics of recognition based on a pluralist worldview, but also a politics of *inclusion*, since through their symbolic representation as 'subjects-that-matter', various groups that are pushed at the margins of society (the youth, precarious workers, unemployed people, immigrants, LGTB people) were symbolically restored to their status of equal citizen or even of quasi-universal subject representing broader struggles. In this sense, Syriza's early discourse, especially when compared to discourses of the populist radical right (see Stavrakakis et al. 2016), confirms the division between inclusionary and exclusionary manifestations of populism within Europe (for a comparison between Europe and Latin America, see Mudde & Kaltwasser 2013). It also confirms Luke March's point that European left-wing populism is distinctive in the sense that it 'emphasizes egalitarianism and inclusivity rather than the openly exclusivist anti-immigrant or anti-foreigner concerns of right-populism' (March 2011: 122).

Finally, Syriza's discourse during its early years challenges mainstream theories of populism on one more level: that of the meaning of socio-political divisions, which is supposed to be a primarily moralistic one, dividing society between 'good' and 'evil' (Mudde 2017; Hawkins 2010). Society is divided between two camps, those 'without a voice' and the 'neoliberal establishment,' but this division is understood in predominantly political, ideological and socio-economic terms. It is only on a secondary and peripheral level that this division is combined with moral elements assailing the establishment's corruption, clientelist culture and cronyism. Such findings highlight the need to rethink the validity of the widespread, but rarely tested, assumption that populism is all about moral divisions. This is not to say that moralist framing is not an element of populism at all, as it does indeed manifest. But this happens with different intensity, consistency and significance in the discourse of various populist actors across the world. In this sense, what I want to challenge here is rather the argument that moralism constitutes a necessary *defining trait* of populism.

Moreover, challenging the 'moralist thesis' in populism studies, brings forth a series of questions: how can we establish that the moralist criterion is primary over other criteria in the making of populist polarities? Shouldn't this be evident in the operation of specific signifiers within a given discursive articulation? And shouldn't this be somehow measured? It is high time that contemporary research, and especially scholars working within the ideational paradigm, deal with such methodological issues. At the same time, it is crucial to keep in mind that the moralisation of political discourse, 'the displacement of politics by morality,' has been, according to some scholars, a defining characteristic of non-populist consensual politics all along (Mouffe 2000; 2005; also Stavrakakis et al. 2017: 424). Indeed, Jan Zielonka (2016)

notes that '[m]oralistic rhetoric is used by the ruling elite itself on a daily basis: remember the "axis of evil" on the eve of the 2003 Iraq invasion?'

Against the overreliance on moral categories (corrupt/evil vs. pure/virtuous), a truly minimal definition of populism, based on discursive criteria is probably the most apposite framework through which we can understand, analyse and categorise specific populist appeals. First, this does not ascribe to a given populist discourse a specific content (moralist or other) in advance. Second it provides the tools for a proper discursive analysis of nodal signifiers that give the predominant tenor to each discourse and determine its contingent content (which may indeed be a moralist one, as in the case of Podemos in Spain or *Chavismo* in Venezuela, but could also be one primarily based on stressing different social interests, as in the case of Syriza or that of Bernie Sanders).

The Greek crisis: dislocation and SYRIZA's new equivalential chains

Within the context of the severe crisis that hit Greece in 2009-2010, marked by the re-emergence of a new cycle of social unrest, Syriza advanced a strategy that aimed at the construction of a new political majority, which was expressed in a campaign for the formation of a 'government of the Left.' By developing a project to form a government that would include political actors beyond Syriza, the coalition presented for the first time a hegemonic strategy and managed to attract voters from other left parties and organisations. The coalition also changed its name prior to the May 2012 elections to Syriza-EKM, with EKM standing for Unitary Social Front, as the coalition included new groups and politicians that had defected from PASOK.

In this context, and as social unrest was mounting, Syriza gradually abandoned its abstract calls to the 'youth' and the 'movements,' replacing them with a more inclusive call to 'the people.' By late 2011, the crisis had initiated a twofold process that transformed both Syriza's discourse and its virtual constituency. On the one hand, growing impoverishment, frustration and anger led large sections of voters across the political spectrum to abandon their previous party preferences and enter a more fluid stage. On the other hand, as Syriza realized that it could take a leap towards representing a potential new social majority, it started to address broader audiences, speaking in the name of 'the people,' in the name of the vast majority of citizens. This 'people' was constructed as a diverse set of anti-austerity struggles and demands as well as 'ordinary people,' forming a chain of equivalence that was pitted against the policies dictated by the 'memoranda' of austerity as well as against the bipartisanship of PASOK and ND. In the place of youth's struggles, new social movements were now brought to the fore as central points of reference.

The most significant among these struggles, with which Syriza interacted and tried to actively represent, were: (1) the environmental struggle of villagers in Skouries (Northern Greece) against mining activity that had serious environmental impact for

their region; (2) the anti-landfill protests on the outskirts of Athens in Keratea, which had been met with police brutality; (3) the civil disobedience movement 'I Am Not Paying,' which focused on the dramatic rise of road tolls at Greece's national roads that were operating under private companies – this movement then developed into a broader movement against all sorts of private debt that was considered socially unfair; (4) the struggle of employees from the Public Broadcaster (ERT) after it was suddenly shut down by Antonis Samaras' government in June 2013, resulting in the loss of approximately 2,700 jobs (BBC 2013); (5) the struggle of the 'cleaning ladies' that were placed in a state of mobility in September 2013 and then fired from the Ministry of Finance (Marti 2014). These cleaning ladies, as was the case with the working people in ERT, represented in Syriza's discourse the struggle of thousands of public sector employees that were laid off in order to fulfil Greece's terms for the bailout programme (SYRIZA 2014b; 2014d).

In this sense, Syriza followed the same strategy it had deployed with the youth's movements in the past, trying to link a series of struggles into a broader social front against austerity and the political 'establishment.' But the most crucial point in this strategy was Syriza's interaction with the 'squares movement,' the so-called *aganaktismenoi*. This movement helped in unifying and symbolically representing all the aforementioned struggles as one broader social/popular front. Syriza chose to first interact 'horizontally' with the protests, motivating its members and supporters to participate as individuals (Eleftheriou 2016: 297). Thus, the political organisation pursued *identification* with the mobilisations, by becoming part of them in a discreet and often spontaneous way. The second step was to represent the movement within parliamentary politics (see Tsipras 2011b), taking a crucial step from *identification* to *representation*. It is worth taking a closer look at how this strategy worked in practice.

When the movement emerged in May 2011, Syriza called its members to participate in the demonstrations and square occupations individually, as citizens, without trying to actively propagate their party's positions. At the same time, Syriza celebrated the *aganaktismenoi* as 'an autonomous and promising movement, a manifestation of popular indignation that can render society and the common people the leading actors in the upcoming developments' (Synaspismos 2011). For Tsipras, the *aganaktismenoi* prefigured a new social majority that was starting to take shape, and was mainly consisting of frustrated voters of PASOK, but also of ND. The declared aim of Syriza was to express this social majority and to work towards transforming it into a political majority, building a new alliance among progressive actors that had been consistently opposing austerity (Tsipras 2011a). As such, this new political project reflected the heterogeneity and subversive character of the squares themselves: 'The squares are the space and the bond that articulates various heterogeneities, many particular movements that seek a new way to mobilise and politicise, and constitute a significant force of dispute, resistance and subversion' (SYRIZA 2011).

The period during the mobilisations of the *aganaktismenoi* and its immediate aftermath was a turning point and a precondition for Syriza's breakthrough for two main reasons. *First*, it led to a significant transformation in its public discourse. From this point onwards, SYRIZA adopted as its core discursive cleavage one that divided society between the *'pro-memorandum'* and the *'anti-memorandum'* forces. This cleavage supplemented or at times reinforced the divide between Left and Right, identifying the anti-memorandum political camp with the popular masses, and the pro-memorandum political camp with the elites. The aim for Syriza was to establish itself as the most viable voice of the anti-memorandum forces within the party system, as the political representative of anti-austerity, anti-neoliberal and anti-establishment sentiments within Greek society. It thus broadened its calls to various social groups, mainly defectors from PASOK, in a bid to occupy the space increasingly left empty after the latter had implemented an agenda of restrictive fiscal policies and severe budget cuts.

Second, this moment, as a major point of rupture, was the catalyst that unlocked Syriza's prospect of becoming a viable challenger party and a contender for power. To put it in Laclau's terms, the emergence, persistence and massiveness of the movement of the *aganaktismenoi*, fuelled by a plurality of frustrated demands, revealed an already present structural crisis, a *dislocation* of the Greek political system (Laclau 2005: 46). This dislocation triggered an uncontrolled dynamic of de-identification and defection of voters, creating a new pool of 'floating' subjects. Syriza was placed in a favourable position from where it could effectively address broad social strata that were frustrated and searched for channels to express their anger and opposition to austerity. The other political forces on the anti-establishment camp were already dismantled for different reasons.

The Greek Communist Party (KKE), on the Left, was hostile to the movement, since the Party couldn't control it and chose to regard it as utterly harmless to the 'capitalist establishment.' Hence, instead of opening up to the anti-austerity protests, it chose to organise its own separate demonstrations with its unions and members, tightly controlled and organised by the party hierarchy (see Tsakatika & Eleftheriou 2013). The populist radical right party LAOS, on the other side, was unable to address the protests because it had chosen to support austerity policies. And with ND unable to communicate with the movement, Syriza posed as the most probable political formation to capitalize on the anti-austerity wave. When, in November 2011, ND officially declared that it would support the 'memoranda' and austerity, the political space to represent anti-austerity sentiments was left wide open to Syriza, while social anger would now be directly expressed against both pillars of Greece's bipartisan system.[iv]

Prefiguring an alternative, capturing power

Calling upon 'the people' and advocating the ousting of the 'austerity governments' was only one component of Syriza's populist strategy. The party at the same time tried to put forth a radical alternative. In this effort, Syriza embraced most of the demands of the anti-austerity movements and local struggles. Its new programme was based on an alternative mixture of economic and social policies, mainly of neo-Keynesian and social-democratic orientation, involving a decisive break with the politics of austerity and a renegotiation of the Greek sovereign debt. In May-June 2012, Syriza called for a broad coalition among parties and organisations left to PASOK that would lead to a 'government of the left,' which would fight to annul the 'memoranda,' while securing Greece's place within the Eurozone. This government would raise taxation on big business and the rich, put the banking sector under social control, call a moratorium on debt repayment until the Greek economy restarted to grow, provide universal access to welfare, and scrap salary cuts and emergency taxes (Stavrakakis & Katsambekis 2014: 126). Renewed democracy, popular sovereignty, as well as social and human rights formed significant pillars of Syriza's programme too (SYRIZA-EKM 2012: 4). In its electoral *Declaration*, the party set out to stage the core division within the Greek society, pitting 'the people' against the 'two-party establishment.'

> They decided without *us*, we move on without *them*. The upcoming critical elections will determine the present and the future of the country. NOW is the time for the struggles of our people to be vindicated, for two-partyism to be punished and defeated, for the memoranda and the troika to be condemned. A new social and political majority, with the radical Left in its core, can overthrow the rotten two-party political system and create alternative government structures, where the people will be a protagonist.
> […]
> Now, the people are voting! Now the people are taking power! In these elections [the people] can and should close a sad parenthesis with their vote; [the people can] end the regime of the memoranda and the troika and open a new page of hope and optimism for the future (SYRIZA-EKM 2012: 1, 6; emphasis added).

The terms of this antagonism are spelt out within the text. The enemy of the people is 'this particular economic and social system,' which is aligned with 'globalised capitalism' and understands speculation and profit as guiding principles in organising society (ibid. 6, 2). The ones who profit from the system are also identified: private banks and bankers, big businessmen, international speculators, big industrialists, etc. Thus the terms of society's division between two antagonistic camps – between the *few*, that are the winners, and the *many*, that are the losers – is primarily cast along ideologico-political and socio-economic terms. It is the logic of profit and individualism, which lies in the heart of contemporary globalized capitalism, that is

recognized as the main problem.[v] Not the corrupt or evil nature of the elites that are supressing the pure people. In other words, the main division here is one of interests, not morality.

It is also important to stress that during the 2012 campaign Syriza for the first time put forth a straightforward claim to power (Tsipras 2012a; 2012b). Until then, the aim was rather that of a strong, militant opposition which could act as a disruptive force within the parliament, trying to block certain policies. From that point on, however, the party started to aim at the overthrowing of the then-hegemonic political forces of the centre-left and centre-right, envisioning a radical break with the previous order and declaring that is was now ready and able to assume government responsibility (Tsakatika 2016).

Syriza lost the 2012 elections, but maintained its upward dynamic. Two years later, and after having become a unified party, it managed to overtake the then incumbent ND in the European elections of May 2014 (26,56 % to 22,72 %). The central slogan for its campaign for the European election of 2014 was typically divisive: 'Our patience is over. On May 25 we vote, they leave' (SYRIZA 2014a). On the one side, 'the people' ('workers, farmers, the youth, the unemployed, pensioners, craftsmen, intellectuals') were called upon to unite, claiming a protagonist position in a new political era. On the other side, Syriza attacked the 'triangle of corruption […] the political establishment – bankers and real estate moguls – systemic media,' which 'should be left in the past' (*ibid*.). The people's protagonist position was constructed around a programme which emphasised a series of key objectives: (1) the immediate recession of the humanitarian crisis; (2) the satisfaction of social needs; (3) the reconstruction of the productive sectors; (4) the reinvigoration of democracy; (5) the redistribution of wealth; (6) the expansion of social and collective rights. The European elections were seen as the 'chance for the Greek people to highlight the incompatibility of the government's politics with the popular will,' but also a chance to show to people throughout Europe that there can be an alternative to austerity, triggering a wave of pan-European change (SYRIZA 2014a). The concluding statement of SYRIZA's campaign leaflet for this election highlighted the polarity that the party wanted to establish, while it also illustrated the way in which its discourse was affectively invested, with a strong emotional language that purported to generate both negative passions of rejection (against pro-austerity forces) and positive ones, of hope (projected on SYRIZA):

> This May belongs to the people. We can and we must win. [...] Let's end those that supported or tolerated the memoranda, the troikas, austerity, racism and fascism. Citizens of Greece, people of Europe, unite! So that we can put an end to the degradation of our life. So that we can regain democracy (SYRIZA 2014a).

After winning the European elections, and as Greece entered an undeclared pre-electoral period, Syriza focused on communicating its programme to the public. The key signifier in the party's new optimist and forward-looking campaign was 'hope,' an *empty signifier* par excellence: 'Hope is coming: Greece moves on. Europe changes' read the main slogan for the new campaign. The passionate rejection of bipartisanship and austerity, the strong emphasis on what the Greek people had lost during the years of the crisis (emphasised in previous campaigns of 2012 and 2014), was replaced with the prefiguration of a possible alternative that would benefit the majority of the 'have-nots' and force the few 'haves' to pay their fair share. The most emblematic moment of this campaign was probably the so-called 'Programme of Thessaloniki' (SYRIZA 2014c), which – after amendments – provided the platform for Syriza's first term in office.

During the run up to the election of January 2015, Syriza further emphasised its calls to restore the sovereignty of the people, while attacking the established 'oligarchy': '[…] you are SYRIZA. And you are the only ones we are counting on. We are not counting on big enterprises, on bankers, or media owners. We are counting on you. Not on the oligarchy [...] On [you] the sovereign people' (Tsipras in SYRIZA 2015a). Referring to Greece's anti-austerity movement and linking it to similar social movements in Europe, Tsipras pledged to protect the interests of the '99%' against the '1%' of a privileged elite (Tsipras 2015), echoing the well-known slogan of the Occupy Wall Street movement that had erupted some years earlier in the US.

After five years of social devastation and fear for a looming bankruptcy, Greek voters chose 'hope' over 'fear' in the election of January 2015, giving Syriza an overwhelming victory over its main opponent, ND (36,34% to 27,81%). Syriza then immediately formed a coalition government with the Independent Greeks (ANEL), a small anti-austerity nationalist-populist party, formed after a split from ND in 2012. The new government was soon faced with a series of difficulties and impasses that eventually led Syriza to drop most of its pre-electoral promises and pledge to continue austerity in July 2015, signing yet a new bail-out deal with the European institutions. However, the party did not shed its populist profile. Syriza's populism actually transformed, in a way that seems reminiscent of Ostiguy's concept of 'dirty institutionality' (Ostiguy 2014).

Syriza in power

So, how did Syriza manage to cope with the paradox of *populism in power*? That is, how did the party try to stay consistent with its populist and anti-establishment appeals once it assumed office? We can discern two different phases that correspond to Syriza's *first term* (January 2015-August 2015) and *second term* in office (September 2015-today).

Syriza's official discourse during the first term remained defiant against Greece's foreign lenders and the domestic 'establishment,' but operated mostly on the symbolic level, with little impact on tangible policies. Things changed after Syriza's leadership decided to accept a new bailout agreement, a new memorandum, right after the referendum of July 2015. During the second term in office, Syriza's discourse started to become more managerial and attached to the workings of the state apparatus, in an effort of the government to justify the new austerity measures and the need for the party to remain in power. The argument was that they would implement austerity with social sensitivity (in a 'defensive' manner), while managing public administration in a more efficient and transparent way. At the same time, during this second term in office Syriza managed to pass a series of significant reforms in accordance with its programme, which had a more tangible effect. Such reforms focused on enhancing minority rights, making the electoral system more proportional, restoring some of the labour rights that had been abolished in previous years and ensuring universal access to the health system. At the same time, the party passed a series of structural reforms that one would expect from mainstream centre-right or centre-left parties, which were linked to the bailout. Let's try to focus on those two phases in a bit more detail.

Syriza's first term in office was characterised by what one could call *defiant voluntarism*. During the first month in power, the Syriza-led administration tried to swiftly reverse a series of unpopular neoliberal policies, articulating at the same time a defiant discourse against the monitoring institutions of Greece's bailout programme. Even though those first moves (be it at the negotiation tables at Brussels or within parliament procedure) were mostly symbolic and had little impact on the lives of the citizens (the public statements of ministers claiming to annul several 'memorandum' laws eventually did not change anything in practice), the image of a Greek government that was voicing the people's rejection of austerity, making it heard to Brussels and beyond, seemed to symbolically restore the hurt dignity and pride of the Greek people, who up until then were used to their governments accepting rather passively the dictates of the 'troika' (see Stavrakakis 2015: 277-278). This did not just restore the dignity of the people, performing a politics of *symbolic recognition* of the frustrated and impoverished popular sectors. It did something more: it revived, in a performative way, the notion of democratic representation and popular sovereignty, as Syriza officials could publicly claim that they were fighting to implement a programme that was supported by the popular mandate, breaking with a tradition of unresponsive and unreliable political elites. These efforts created a sense of proximity between citizens and the government, as significant segments of the population were feeling that their desires and aspirations were represented at the highest level and expressed through the initiatives and actions of the Syriza-ANEL government.

This seems to be in line with Pierre Ostiguy's (2014) interesting argument that populism in office occupies two seemingly incompatible positions at the same time: that of the expression of a unified chain of popular demands (the *popular pole*) and

that of the expression of institutional power (the *institutional pole*). Syriza could thus claim that as a governing party they still fought for the people's demand to end austerity. But being in office did not mean that they were also *in power*: the ones in power, according to Syriza, were still the representatives of the political, economic and media 'establishment' and the dominant forces within the EU itself. This is something that is often stressed or implied by Syriza officials even today (see also Douzinas 2017). In the words of a prominent Syriza minister, 'we might be in government, but that does not mean that we are in power' (Filis in Breyanni 2015). In this sense, the populist frontier during these first months in office was only modified and re-articulated.

The rates of acceptance for Syriza at this phase were impressively high. This was not only demonstrated in the relevant opinion polls.[vi] It was also evident in the pro-government rallies in mid-February 2015 at Syntagma square outside the Greek parliament, where thousands of protesters demonstrated under the slogan 'Breath of Dignity.' These demonstrations were a quasi-continuation of the 'squares movement' and a link to the demonstrations that supported the 'NO' vote in the referendum of July 2015 that was soon to follow.

However, Syriza was soon forced to accept a 4-month extension to the bailout programme signed by the previous administration, marking a first defeat of the party in its effort to annul the 'memoranda.' The government managed to present this transitory agreement to the public as a temporary strategic retreat that would buy some much-needed time for the intense negotiations to bear fruit. What followed was a period of intense negotiations and economic uncertainty as rumours of a looming bankruptcy appeared in the Greek and international media. As the extension expired and things were moving towards a deadlock, Tsipras made a rather unexpected move. After he was handed an ultimatum on yet another bailout programme in the summer of 2015, he decided to call for a referendum, letting the people decide whether his government should accept the harsh measures contained in this proposal or not (Tsatsanis & Teperoglou 2016). This was an emblematic moment for Syriza's populist strategy, as the referendum crystallised a deep division within the Greek political system and society: that between the populist and anti-populist camp, between the anti-austerity and pro-austerity forces.

The two opposing camps were expressed through demonstrations in the streets, with supporters of the YES campaign rallying outside the parliament under the banner 'We stay in Europe.' These demonstrations were soon followed by those of the NO campaign that were equally massive. Syriza's pamphlet for the referendum read 'NO: for democracy and dignity,' calling the people to take upon a 'historic responsibility' to safeguard democracy against those that undermine it (SYRIZA 2015b), while attacking both the 'conservative circles' within the EU and the Greek political 'establishment.'

The case of the Greek referendum highlights what 'dirty institutionality' might look like in practice. It also gave the chance to SYRIZA to appear as the champion of popular demands against a neoliberal European establishment that wanted to keep Greece and the European periphery under draconian austerity. For SYRIZA, this European establishment (the 'extreme neoliberal circles' or 'team Schäuble,' as SYRIZA depicted them) was in alliance with political and economic elites within Greece, which formed an 'oligarchy' that was used to profiting at the expense of the many (SYRIZA 2016).

The NO camp gathered the support of more than 61% of the voters, marking another major electoral victory for Syriza. Even with the banks closed, under capital controls, and with the mainstream media openly championing the YES campaign (confirming Syriza's populist narrative that their government was fighting against a multifaceted 'establishment'), the majority of voters chose to reject the bailout proposal and has had been presented to them as an 'ultimatum.' However, Greece's EU partners hardened their stance against the Syriza-led government, threatening Greece with a violent exit from the Eurozone and even doubting the country's place within the EU. This resulted in the acceptance of a new bailout agreement by Tsipras, which for many among his party's members and voters meant that the NO vote in the referendum was effectively turned into a YES (Kouvelakis 2015).

The acceptance of a new 'memorandum' led to serious internal strife in Syriza, with 43 MPs of the party not supporting the deal in parliament in August 2015. Under the circumstances, Tsipras soon called for a snap election, held in September 2015. The rationale for the new election was that his government had exhausted its popular mandate and citizens had to decide anew which party was going to implement the new programme. Syriza's campaign leading to the election was significantly different than the one that had brought it to power six months ago. In January 2015, Syriza rallied the people around the promise for a radical break with austerity, the reinvigoration of welfare, the restarting of the economy and the boosting of employment. In September 2015, the party had to campaign after having just signed a new bailout agreement which furthered austerity, going against the popular sentiment.

Declaring that the new bailout agreement was signed under immense pressure and in order to ward off bankruptcy and a disastrous 'Grexit,' Syriza's campaign placed at the forefront a division between the *'old'* (represented by ND) and the *'new'* (represented by Syriza). A campaign in which the figure of Tsipras himself played a central role. The main slogan for the campaign read: 'We are getting rid of the old. We are winning tomorrow.' At stake in the election was mainly to prevent the 'old establishment' from coming back to power:

> [Will you side] 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, whom is standing and will keep standing straight, next to the people, with the people and for the people. (Tsipras in Efsyn 2015)

After winning the snap election, Syriza stressed that despite the limitations of the new memorandum the government would move on to implement a 'parallel programme.' This comprised a series of measures that aimed to protect the most vulnerable segments of the Greek society, while pursuing the expansion of social rights. But the implementation of the parallel programme was again met with hostility by Greece's European partners, leading the Greek government to yet another retreat. After that, Syriza chose to focus more on issues like tackling corruption and fighting tax-evasion (Katsourides 2016: 126), something that was reflected in an increasing moralisation of the party's discourse that now stressed the government's 'war on corruption.' Having seriously retreated on the policy agenda, especially concerning economic and social issues, Syriza needed to stress a field on which it could better pick its battles with its main rival, ND. 'Corruption' provided that field, soon leading to the exchange of allegations for various scandals between government and opposition (Katsambekis 2018).

But this was not the only field were Syriza chose to pick their fights while in office, as the party's ministers moved swiftly to push forward a robust rights agenda that could set it apart from its conservative opponents. To be more specific, Syriza managed to pass a series of relevant reforms through the parliament, the most significant among which were: (1) a law granting citizenship to second generation immigrants; (2) the recognition of civil partnership for same-sex couples; (3) the recognition of the right to change sex identity to citizens over the age of 15; (4) allowing same-sex couples to foster children. These laws were not supported by Syriza's partner in government, ANEL, with MPs of the latter often adopting anti-immigrant and homophobic rhetoric. However, they were voted by MPs of the centre and centre-left (PASOK and Potami), something which further highlights the importance of the 'host ideology' in populist parties' parliamentary behaviour and policy impact (March 2017; Otjes & Lowerse 2015). In the same context, the Syriza-led government made significant steps in terms of foreign policy, reaching a deal with its neighbouring country, Macedonia, and ending a decades-old dispute over the latter's official name (from now on Northern Macedonia); a dispute that had fuelled bitter nationalism at both sides of the border (Paun 2018). Not surprisingly, the deal was vehemently opposed both by Syriza's partner, ANEL, and by the conservative opposition, ND.

Overall, Syriza's discourse retains significant populist characteristics, even though it has become less populist and more pragmatic/managerial than before. References to

'the people,' popular sovereignty and equality are still very often employed, especially when debating major policy issues. The same is true regarding the attacks on the elites, which are nowadays mostly targeted against the main opposition party, ND, but also the 'media oligarchs.' What seems to differentiate Syriza's late populism is *first*, that the key divisions put forth in the party's discourse have become more moralistic, on the one hand, and all the more targeted specifically against the right-wing opposition on the other. Indeed, the party now focuses more on the 'corruption' of the old party establishment, of the mainstream media and of a nexus of interrelated vested interests (in sectors like banking, oil, shipping and construction) that are allegedly profiting in the expense of the Greek society. *Second*, even though in the past Syriza had fashioned an organizational model that embraced different orientations within it and harboured organs that held the leadership accountable, after 2012, and even more vividly after 2015, it has gradually become more leader-centric. It is indicative that the September 2015 campaign of the party was built 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 spot.[vii]

On the other hand, Syriza has emphasised a series of value-based divides, positioning itself as the defender of civil and political rights, the defender of the Enlightenment's legacy, against ND and the conservative camp that are portrayed as backward and wanting to keep significant segments of the population marginalised and silenced. What is more, and especially as Greece was getting closer to the conclusion of the third bailout programme, Syriza brought again to the fore a series of reforms aiming at reinforcing the welfare state, restoring basic labour rights that were abolished in previous years and raising salaries and pensions. In this sense, and despite the increasing significance of moral divisions, a crucial element of continuity in Syriza's discourse is the party's effort to defend a pluralistic version of 'the people,' one that transcends the boundaries of ethnic origin, religion or sexual orientation, but also an effort to highlight the party's left-wing identity and commitment to what is indeed a social-democratic agenda. It is within this context that some of Syriza's key officials (including the government's vice-President) now openly champion the formation of a broad progressive alliance against the right and far right. This strategic approach with the centre-left has been very clear on the European level too. It is no coincidence that Tsipras has participated in the European Socialist Party's summits in several occasions. This trajectory, in terms of ideological and programmatic moderation, is quite similar to the German Left (Die Linke) as well as the Dutch Socialist Party (SP) (see Hough & Keith this volume; Lucardie & Voerman this volume), something that raises the question of the proximity between today's (populist) radical left and social-democratic forces in Europe.

Concluding remarks

To conclude, Syriza's short march to power presents a unique case of electorally successful radical left populism in contemporary Europe. Indeed, Syriza is the only

populist radical left party that has entered government as the main coalition partner in more than three decades.[viii] The party's populism both in opposition and in power has remained inclusionary and egalitarian, while its programme and ideological profile have significantly moderated after assuming office, moving all the more closer to social democracy. At the same time, the party has reluctantly implemented a set of restrictive fiscal policies that are far from the left's toolkit, while trying to push for measures that would protect the most vulnerable sections of society.

In my analysis, I have shown how Syriza's populism was first articulated from a *minoritarian* position, calling upon various social movements in order to pose a challenge to the neoliberal agenda of the two traditional parties of the centre-left and centre-right that were dominating Greece's political system since the mid-1970s. As the crisis deepened, Syriza claimed that its warnings against the excesses of neoliberalism had come true. At the same time, the party embraced the anti-austerity movement against the governments of PASOK and ND that were implementing the first two bailout programmes. Syriza managed to formulate and communicate its own version of the *crisis*, as a 'humanitarian crisis,' for which the two traditional political forces of Greece as well as Europe's 'neoliberal elites' were blamed. But this crisis was also signified in terms of a radical incompatibility between 'the people' and the political system, between popular demands and desires and the policies that were put forth by PASOK and ND, that were depicted as alienated from society, unresponsive and corrupt. This crisis of political representation (Roberts 2015: 147-150) was expressed through the multifaceted anti-austerity movement and nation-wide protests (especially the 'squares movement'), as well as the mass defection of voters from the two parties that had been altering in power for almost four decades, which fuelled Syriza's breakthrough and 'unlocked' its office-seeking strategy.

To draw on Laclau's work, the choreography of events that lead to Syriza's march to power correspond to 'a situation in which a plurality of unsatisfied demands and an increasing inability of the institutional system to absorb them differentially coexist,' resulting in a populist rupture (Laclau 2005: 38). A significant part of the recent literature is pointing at this very condition for the emergence and success of populist actors, namely the unresponsiveness of the established political forces, a 'gap' in representation which creates the room – and the conditions – for a populist actor to claim that they represent 'the people's' grievances and aspirations (apart from Roberts 2015, see also Kaltwasser 2015; van Kessel 2015).

In this context, the study of Syriza and of its populist character can contribute to a better understanding of the particularities of the new radical left in crisis-hit Europe, but also to the empirical and theoretical analysis of populism in general. Indeed, Syriza's populism seems to present a challenge to mainstream theories of populism that understand it as an ideology or worldview that operates primarily on a moralist level and creates a necessarily homogeneous 'people.' Contrary to such assumptions,

the divisions playing out in Syriza's discourse were until recently first and foremost signified in political and socio-economic terms, stressing competing social interests and presenting the various stakes in relation to specific ideologico-political traditions and programmatic agendas (i.e. neoliberalism vs. socialism of the twenty-first century, deregulation vs. social protection, exclusion vs. inclusion, austerity vs. expansionary fiscal policies). Second, 'the people' are portrayed as a plural and heterogeneous collective subject that is unified against an 'establishment' which is threatening its well-being. Indeed, whereas references to 'unity' are constant, it is rather impossible to find a description of 'the people' as homogeneous in Syriza's discourse.

Syriza's populism after assuming office has both transformed and moderated. However, it remains a defining feature of the party, as it is consistently employed, especially in times that there are decisive political issues on the agenda. After a first term of high symbolisms and impasses that were largely due to the lack of personnel with experience in government (see on this Albetrazzi & McDonnell 2015: 9, 171-172), as well as a serious misjudgement of the room that the Greek government had for manoeuvre within the EU, the party moderated its discourse and programme during its second term in office. Interestingly, Syriza quickly adapted to government constraints imposed to Greece by its EU partners and lenders, and managed to successfully conclude an extremely demanding structural adjustment programme, that often brought it in collision with its supporters (with many of them, according to opinion polls, withdrawing their support from the party) as well as some of its political allies in Europe (most notably, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who has recently called for Syriza's dismissal from the Party of the European Left).

It is during this process of programmatic moderation that moral divisions started to gain prominence in Syriza's discourse, especially when the party targets its main opponent, and according to opinion polls 'government-in-waiting,' ND, as well as specific media groups that are considered hostile to the government. My hypothesis is that the recent (and indeed increasing) moralisation of Syriza's discourse has been rather strategic, as it manifested exactly at the moment that the party had to compromise and implement as series of reforms that went against its campaign promises and its ideological core. To put it in other words, the division 'corrupt' versus 'pure' seemed to come to the fore whenever the distinction between left and right was blurred by policy practice. Of course, this is something that will need further research to be substantiated. It would be very interesting to see relevant qualitative and quantitative studies that will comparatively assess the fluctuations and significance of moral framings in the discourse of Syriza, as well as other populist actors in the future. Through such studies, we can take a step from uncritically identifying moralism with populism, to problematizing and understanding the role and significance of moral framings in the politics of populist (and non-populist) actors across different regions and contexts.

As these last lines are written, Syriza is celebrating Greece's exit from the bailout programmes and the severe austerity as well as policy restrictions that they had imposed (Kathimerini 2018). The Syriza-ANEL coalition has proven remarkably resilient in government, despite rising social discontent, and looks even likely to conclude its 4-year term in office. It remains to be seen if Syriza will manage to start implementing some of the promises that brought it to power and which had been put on hold after the party's 'pragmatic shift' in 2015. We will then be in a better position to assess whether Syriza's 'populist promise' has been a 'failure' or not (see Mudde 2017). In any case, the Greek political systems remains one of the most complex and interesting 'laboratories' of populist politics in today's turbulent world.

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[i] Sections of this chapter draw heavily on my article 'Radical Left Populism in Contemporary Greece: Syriza's Trajectory from Minoritarian Opposition to Power,' *Constellations* 23(3), 2016, 391-403.

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[iii] In 2012, Tsipras was asked what he thought about school teachers that were illegally delivering private lessons to generate extra income, without declaring it to the tax authorities. He admitted that

such practices were common among school teachers. But he added that this is only happening because they are not receiving a proper salary by the state, so they are doing whatever is necessary to support themselves and their families (Doxiadis 2012). In this sense, their petty corruption, their 'impurity' was indeed acknowledged, but nevertheless considered justified with reference to their socio-economic marginalisation by the establishment.

[iv] Sofia Vasilopoulou, Daphne Halikiopoulou and Theofanis Exadaktylos' study of party discourses in Greece from December 2009 to December 2011, shows that during that period 'SYRIZA blamed PASOK overwhelmingly and significantly more than the other fringe parties,' while it also 'focused on PASOK and ND combined, blaming the political system that had been dominated by these two parties for over three decades' (Vasilopoulou, et al. 2014: 397).

[v] Even though this is not within the scope of the chapter, it is worth also taking into account here the Marxist background of several among Syriza's top officials, like, for example, the Minister of Finance, Euclid Tsakalotos (see Laskos & Tsakalotos 2013). Despite the party's significant moderation and approach with the centre-left, key themes from the Marxist arsenal still seem to inform the ways that groups and individuals within Syriza understand and frame social divisions.

[vi] In February 2015 around 69% of the electorate regarded the Syriza-ANEL government as the 'best government' for the country compared to a ND government that had the approval of a mere 10% (Public Issue 2015). This, of course, has dramatically changed today, with only 19% of the electorate considering a Syriza-ANEL government best suited to deal with Greece's problems, against a 35% that prefers Syriza's main opponent, ND (Public Issue 2018).

[vii] http://www.syriza.gr/page/video.html [in Greek].

[viii] The last time that a populist left party had risen to power was the PASOK of Andreas Papandreou in Greece in 1981 (see Lyrintzis 1987).