Populism in power
and the
discursive construction of collective identity

A comparative analysis of SYRIZA (2015-2019) and Donald Trump (2016-2020)

Giorgos Venizelos

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Supervisor: Manuela Caiani, Scuola Normale Superiore

Co-supervisor: Yannis Stavrakakis, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

Extended Abstract

The proliferation of populist actors, and their transition from the margins of the political system to power, raises the pressing question of how populism changes once it moves from opposition to government. An overview of the literature renders visible a number of hypotheses that have long guided empirical research in terms of the potential transformations populism undergoes in the process of institutionalisation. The first approach conceptualises populists as challenger actors and focuses on policy implementation in order to determine their *success* or *failure* in government. On the one hand lie those who argue that populist parties are not durable parties of government, and once in power they will fail to materialise their promises and will be eventually integrated into the mainstream (Canovan, 1999; Mény & Surel, 2002). On the other hand lie those who argue that populists are capable of surviving the governmental experience and, like other political actors, populists too can implement policies (Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2015). The second approach focuses on the *effects* of populist actors on democratic institutions. A 'camp' within this approach argues that populism in power turns illiberal and authoritarian, and ultimately constitutes a threat to democracy (Müller, 2016; Pappas, 2019). Another camp claims that populism may have positive effects on democracy and its representative institutions (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012; Mouffe, 2018).

The central argument of this research is that these ascribed trajectories are neither exclusive nor defining features of populism. Populism in power cannot be reduced to particular policy outcomes or consequences to the representative system. In order to study populism *in power* one needs to rethink the very notion of *populism* itself. Although 'populism studies' agree on the centrality of *people-centrism* and *anti-elitism* in populist phenomena, the predominantly anti-populist theorisations that abound conventional wisdom influence the way the phenomenon is thought and talked about. Emanating from a discourse-theoretical (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985; Stavrakakis, 2007) and socio-cultural/performative (Moffitt, 2016; Ostiguy,

2017) perspective, this research shifts from viewing populism as having essential meaning, fate or outcome. It rather focuses on its function to *discursively construct affectively invested collective identifications* in the name of the marginalised social majority, 'the people' against an illegitimate establishment which steals the rights and enjoyments of the former.

Focusing on the cases of Donald Trump and SYRIZA, which have received unprecedented academic, pundit and political attention, this research investigates the ways populist performativity and affect change when populists take office. To do so, this study employs mixed methods. In order to capture the changes in populist performativity it employs discourse, frame and visual analysis on 135 'units' located on the supply side of political communication, including speeches from electoral manifestos, posters, campaign videos. To capture the affective dynamics of populism and give agency to 'the people' to express their voice, the research draws upon 56 interviews with grassroots supporters, leading activists, party members and politicians, as well as ethnographic methods involving direct participation in protests, rallies and assemblies.

This research makes a number of contributions. First, it fills the gap in the evolving but still thin literature of populism in power, by examining populists governing at the *national level*, governing outright or leading coalitions. Second, it develops a rigorous and analytically neat conceptualisation for the analysis of the transitions of populism from opposition to power and brings to the study of populism the much neglected area of emotions and collective identification. Third, focusing on both left-wing and right-wing populisms, this research highlights that ideology plays a critical role in the types of socio-political imaginaries and emotions populists articulate. At the same time, it exemplifies that 'populism' does not suffice to explain an actor's consequences on democracy and its institutions. Taking seriously these contributions, this study urges future research to adopt a reflexive approach to the political

implications populism has on politics, polity and society, insulated from normatively charged

definitions that are uncritically reproduced in the public sphere.

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Introduction

I. Populism: from the streets to the halls of power

The proliferation of populist movements, leaderships and parties, and their transition from the margins to the mainstream of party systems, changed dramatically the global political landscape. The (re-)emergence of left and right populists in the aftermath of the deep 2008 economic crisis combined with a profound distrust towards political and business elites, 'disrupted long-established patterns of party competition in many contemporary Western societies' (Norris and Inglehart 2019:3). 'Traditional' political parties, governing interchangeably in the last thirty years, were perceived as incapable of responding to the accumulated socio-economic demands, leaving the void open for populist parties and movements. The rise of the so-called 'square' and 'occupy' movements in 2011, as well as the rise of movement-parties in the following years, brought neglected demands to the core of political mainstream (Prentoulis and Thomassen 2013; Kioupkiolis and Katsambekis 2016; Gerbaudo 2017; Della Porta et al. 2017).

Populists sought to turn indignation into change by channelling popular frustration and electorally homeless protest claims against what they named 'the political establishment'. Populism's distinct type of antagonism that placed the left/right politics at the backbench by primarily pitting 'the people' at the bottom against 'the elite' at the top, provides a first definition of the populist politics that had re-emerged. Against the trend that homogenises all sorts of distinct phenomena under the 'populist' label, one can indeed mark fundamental differences among them. Left-wing populists champion 'the people' against an elite or an establishment mainly defined in the economic sense of the term. This antagonism is vertical and punching upwards (those at 'the bottom' against those at 'the top') (Casullo, 2020). The

collective subject receives the status of the subaltern in that it is excluded from society (Ostiguy 2017). Thus left-populism is 'dyadic' (Judis, 2016:15). Right-wing populists champion 'the people' against an 'elite' that 'they accuse of coddling a third group, which can consist, for instance, of immigrants'. 'Right-wing populism is triadic: It looks upward, but also down upon an out group' (Judis, 2016: 15).

Populists no longer constitute sporadic instances confined to the opposition. They seized the opportunity to become relevant forces in their respective party systems by progressively achieving power at the sub-national level or winning seats in the parliament.[1] Gradually, populists moved from the opposition to government. *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość in Poland* (PiS – Law and Justice) and *Fidesz* in Hungary are usually perceived as paradigmatic instances of populism in government exhibiting authoritarian, undemocratic and illiberal characteristics (Kim, 2020; 2022).[2] In addition, Philippine's Rodrigo Duterte (Curato 2021) but also Justice and Development Party's (AKP) Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Turkey received tremendous attention over the last years (Özdemir 2015; Gurhanli 2018; Baykan 2021).

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[1] The list of 'populist parties' may vary depending on one's classification of populism. Certain 'lists' for example, include parties such as *Symmachia Politon* in Cyprus, the *Greek Solution* and the *Golden Dawn* in Greece and *Pegida* in Germany (see Zulianello 2019, the PopuList, 2019). It is not only highly contestable whether any of these parties is actually populist but, it is above all else, hazardous to label them as such. Both scientifically, in terms of concept formation, as well as politically, when 'populism' is used euphemistically to mask regressive forms of politics or linked to other concepts such as xenophobic nationalism (Stavrakakis 2013). Getting into the details, *Symmachia Politon* is an amalgam of technocratic post-ideological party of the centre (Venizelos 2021). While recently an evident current in the literature has employed the notion of 'technocratic populism' (see Buštíková and Guasti 2019), more often than not technocratic politics is postulated as the opposite of populism (see Ostiguy 2017). *Greek Solution* in Greece is a nationalist party that employs high degrees of conspiratorial rhetoric. *Pegida*'s populist characteristics are often weaker than its radical right tendencies; *Golden Dawn* is a party that has been prosecuted after being found guilty of criminal activity such as launching pogroms and murdering migrants; thus, the term 'neo-Nazi party' better fits to that party. This work chooses to keep a rather short and controlled list of what is considered a 'populist' actor.

[2] As van Kessel (2015: 121) points out, PiS's 'populism seemingly remain(s) a relatively loose supplement to its national-conservative core ideology' as its conservative-authoritarian components exceed the 'populist' ones. Similarly, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has arguably passed from a *populist* moment to an *authoritarian* era in which the restriction of democratic rights have been restricted to a degree that 'his populist politics transform the state into an admittedly ''illiberal'' regime (Salzborn 2018). Orbán's 'collective community' is strictly ethnically defined and the collective subject has shifted from 'We the People to We the Nation' (Toth 2012). Hence, while populism may not be absent from these cases it is a secondary feature in their identity.

Much ink has also been spilled on Latin America – a natural habitat for populist politics. The 'historical' cases of Juan Perón in Argentina, Getúlio Vargas in Brazil and Hugo Chávez in Venezuela highlight that populism in government is not an exceptional mode of politics, as it is in contemporary Europe (McGuire, 1997; Hawkins, 2010; Groppo, 2010). In recent times, the region experienced the return of populism in government. On the left of the spectrum, Rafael Correa led 'Citizens' Revolution' (2007 – 2017), a progressive left populist movement in Ecuador (Mazzolini 2021). Evo Morales' plurinational and indigenous populism ruled Bolivia from 2016 until its violent interruption in 2019 (see de la Torre, 2010; Brienen, 2016) to return in 2020. The election of authoritarian-rightist populist Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil in 2018 interrupted the continuity of Lula's progressive populism (Zicman de Barros, 2018; Mendonça & Caetano, 2021); Andrés Manuel López Obrador's (AMLO) return to capture the presidency of Mexico in 2018 (Macip 2018); and the return of Kirchnerist Peronism in 2019, after four years of neoliberalism in Argentina (Do Rosario and Gillespie 2019) signals a reactivated wave of Latin American populism.

The formation of the Italian and Greek governments in 2018 and 2015 respectively present two paradigmatic cases of populist coalition-governments in the Western liberal party systems. The marginal experience of European populist parties in governments, which was primarily manifested in the form of minor coalition partners, is no longer valid. This may point to a paradigm shift of sorts. In Italy, the idiosyncratic populist *Movimento Cinque Stelle* and the nativist-right *Lega* formed an ideologically contradictory, and short-lived, coalition based on an allegedly anti-establishment populism (Caiani and Padoan 2020; Giannetti, Pedrazzani, and Pinto 2021). In Greece, the contemporary populist experience managed to exhaust its term in office. In 2015 the Coalition of the Radical Left (Συνασπισμός Ριζοσπαστικής Αριστεράς), known by its acronym as SYRIZA (ΣΥΡΙΖΑ), took power and led a coalition government with the nativist populist right party of ANEL (Ανεξάρτητοι Έλληνες – Independent Greeks) which

served as a minor partner (Aslanidis and Rovira Kaltwasser 2016; Hawkins, Rovira Kaltwasser, and Andreadis 2018; Pappas and Aslanidis 2015; Stavrakakis, Andreadis, and Katsambekis 2017).

On the other side of the Atlantic one is confronted with a very similar picture. The victory of Donald Trump in 2016 was itself a political scandal. His triumph against pollsters and analysts' expectations caught the public by surprise. It shocked cosmopolitanists, urban classes and educated elites whose values were provoked. As Paul Krugman (2016) wrote: 'What we do know is that people like me, and probably like most readers of The New York Times, truly didn't understand the country we live in. We thought that our fellow citizens would not, in the end, vote for a candidate so manifestly unqualified for high office, so temperamentally unsound, so scary yet ludicrous'. Trump rejected *progressive* neoliberalism: 'an alliance of mainstream currents of new social movements (feminism, anti-racism, multiculturalism and LGBTQ rights) on the one side, and high-end 'symbolic' and service-based sectors of business (Wall Street, Silicon Valley and Hollywood) on the other, ideals such as empowerment, multiculturalism and diversity' (Fraser 2017).

These developments challenge conventional wisdom, which view the relationship between populism and the institutions as odd or contradictory. The fact that populists no longer constitute occasional minor partners in coalitions but now also lead governments, raises a critical question: *what happens when populists achieve power?*

II. Conceptual challenges

Populism in government is often thought as the very name of contradiction. Its relationship with institutions can be uneasy. Does populism last in power? Does it maintain its anti-establishment outlook? Existing literature has produced several 'hypotheses' as to what happens when populism goes in power that have long guided empirical research. Commonly

analysed as an 'outsider force' or a feature of the opposition (see Kitschelt, 2006; Akkerman & de Lange, 2012), populism is rarely thought of as a durable force of government (see Mény & Surel, 2002). Populism in power is thus thought as an impossibility: it either fails to materialise its promises or it turns mainstream (see Canovan, 1999; Mudde, 2017). The multiplicity of instances of populism in power in Latin America interwoven with the electoral success of contemporary populists in the western liberal democratic framework challenges this position.

There are of course those who argue the opposite. Focusing on their capabilities to implement policies close to their core ideological positions Albertazzi & McDonnell (2015) argue that populists can survive the experience of power.[3] Indeed, populists may succeed to implement policy in government; however, aspects of policy, literature argues, do not define populism but rather the ideology that accompanies it. A focus on policy may indicate whether a populist actor in government successfully implements policy but it does not indicate whether it remains populist. Arguably, if the analysis of populists in government is determined by their ability to pass and implement policy, the dichotomy between 'responsible' and 'irresponsible', 'capable' and 'incapable' 'normal' and 'exceptional' can be reproduced, together with an inclination to place populist actors on the latter side. Yet, like the populists, non-populists and established politicians may also fail to implement policy.

Focusing on populism's 'outcomes' – that is, the impact it may have on the institutions of representation – Müller (2016) and Pappas (2019), assert that the nature of populism in government is to turn illiberal and authoritarian. Populists in government may indeed operate through corruption, intimidation of political adversaries and the media and they may as well

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[3] Depending on their position on the left or the right of the political spectrum, populists may implement fiscally, socially and politically liberal or conservative policy. This is what defines a populist actor as being on the left or the right. Focusing on the level of ideology thus tells us whether a political actor remains left or right, but not whether it remains populist.

turn authoritarian, but does this hold true for *all* populist phenomena in government? A brief comparative survey would quickly indicate the existence of democratic, egalitarian and liberally oriented populisms (Katsambekis 2020). Overall, attempting to study populism in government focusing on qualities that are neither exclusive to nor constitutive of the phenomenon risks distracting one from the core of the populist phenomenon and its rigorous assessment.

The present thesis advocates that if there is a populist style of governing it is probably far from what is conceptualised above. In order to answer the question of how populism is transformed once it moves from the opposition to power it is necessary to rethink the very notion of populism itself (cf. Moffitt, 2016). Being an ambiguous and multifaceted phenomenon, populism is normatively charged as a concept. The wide and uncritical use of the term in the public sphere results in its *a priori* association with irresponsibility, ignorance, backwardness, demagogic agitation of the masses, reactionary backlash and its conflation with other concepts like nationalism or even fascism (Stavrakakis and Jäger 2017; de Cleen, Glynos, and Mondon 2018; Galanopoulos and Venizelos 2021). Such an axiomatically pejorative way of understanding populism may only generate negative expectations as to what happens when it moves from the opposition to power.

As Conniff (2012) argued, populism in power is a question of who gains public office and *how* they govern. Redirecting the discussion back to populism's operational definition, this thesis argues that the analysis of populism in power, must emanate from the very analytical locus which classifies a phenomenon as populist (cf. Laclau, 1977; Canovan, 2005; Stavrakakis, 2004; Mudde, 2004; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012; Panizza, 2005; Hawkins, 2009). In examining whether populists remain populists in power, this thesis thus studies how and if populists continue to present antagonistically *'the people'* against *'the elite'*.

This study builds upon the theoretical tradition of the Essex school of discourse analysis (Laclau and Mouffe 2000 [1985]; Torfing 1999; Howarth, Norval, and Stavrakakis 2000; Glynos and Howarth 2007; Stavrakakis 2007) as well as on the socio-cultural/performative perspective (Casullo, 2020; Moffitt, 2016; Ostiguy, 2009; Ostiguy et al., 2021), whose innovative contributions helped decolonise populism from its essentialist connotations ascribed to it from the Eurocentric punditry and vintage modernisation theory (Stavrakakis 2019; Aslanidis 2020). In line with Moffitt (2016), this project moves beyond the attempts to define populism 'as a particular thing', a type of policy or a regime intrinsic to any particular ideology, and shifts the focus on populism's own *function* (Laclau 2005b).

This study conceptualises populism as a performative mode of political identification which, through affective investment, constructs a collective identity defined as a politically subaltern social majority that operates against a political class that is framed as illegitimate (Laclau, 2005; Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2014; Panizza, 2017; Venizelos, 2021). Like other studies, this one focuses on the centrality of people-centrism and anti-elitism in populist discourse. In discursive and performative approaches, however, 'the people' do not pre-exist but they are rather constituted as a popular political identity through articulation, which is understood as a series of discursive linkages. Importantly, articulation is not merely a rhetorical category but also a performative praxis which comprises operations ranging from political speeches, to transgressive 'low culture' bodily choreographies defined by social markers and traits, symbols, music and messages (Laclau, 2005a; Casullo, 2020; Ostiguy et al., 2021a). The function of interpellation by the populist actor is pivotal in constituting what it purports to represent – 'the people' (Thomassen 2019b).

But this is not to say that populism is a top-down phenomenon. Viewing populism as a dynamically relational category, presupposes that 'the people' – and the collectivities on the basis of which it emerges – too play an active role in constructing and conditioning an affective

community through an interplay between their respective demands, visions and desires. The relationship of the populist leader[4] and the people is thus 'co-constitutive' (Ostiguy et al., 2021a:2) and for this reason, Dean & Maiguashca (2020:10) refer to it as *collective enactments* that are 'not seen as ephemeral performances by leaders, but rather as embedded, relatively durable and purposeful ''repertoires of action'' that reflect a substantive view of the world and a desire to transform it'. Collective identities are sustained by shared experiences and bonds, emotions and other corporeal energies, often referred to as *affects* that lie at the core of this analysis.

Emanating from such an anti-essentialist perspective, this research invites one to examine the transformations populism undergoes once in government in terms of its own discursive and performative dynamics to articulate the antagonism between 'the people' and 'the elite', while at the same time sustaining an affectively invested collective identity revealed in the bond maintained between 'the people and 'the populist'.

III. Research Objectives, Questions and Contributions

On the basis of the above-mentioned premises, this study enquires into how populism changes in its transition from the opposition to power through the discursive and performative lens and asks the following questions. *First*, how does people-centrism and anti-elitism change from the opposition to government? In other words, does the framing of 'the people' and 'the

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[4] 'The leader' receives a central position in populism research. His or her function is considered as pivotal in articulating, interpellating, constructing and mobilising 'the people'. The overemphasis on the leader has been a subject to serious criticism (Weyland 1996; Laclau 2005a). On the academic-comparative level, scholars have stressed that not all populist projects rest on a highly hierarchical, top-down, relationship between leader and masses(Aslanidis 2016; Gerbaudo 2017; Kioupkiolis and Katsambekis 2016; Stavrakakis et al. 2016). On the political level, left-wing thinkers have problematised the excessive focus on the function of the leader as it is perceived to impede the potential for a truly horizontal and democratic left (populist) vision (Mazzolini and Borriello 2021). Advancing a truly critical account inspired by Lacan's work, one may argue that the object of desire with which 'masses' identify, fall in love with, in the process of forming a community, may not be restricted to 'the figure of the leader'. A commodity, an idea or ideology, a symbol may also take the name of 'the leader' (Thomás Zicman de Barros, 2020:5).

establishment' change? Do populist actors still perform on the socio-political low? Second, how does 'the people's' identification towards their populist leaders change once the latter move from the opposition to government? In other words, what emotions are embedded in the narratives of 'the people' before and during the government phase?

This thesis considers the cases of SYRIZA in Greece and Donald Trump in the USA. The two cases are considered paradigmatic instances of populism that have emerged out of the social discontent in contemporary consolidated democracies, not only because they have managed to achieve power against experts' expectations but because they have also managed maintain power for a term in office (Stavrakakis and Katsambekis 2014a; Aslanidis and Rovira Kaltwasser 2016; Katsambekis 2016, 2019; Venizelos 2020; Bitecofer 2018; Alexander and Mast 2019; Ott and Dickinson 2019; Oliva and Shanahan 2019). Indeed, SYRIZA and Donald Trump present highly dissimilar characteristics. First and foremost, Donald Trump is situated on the right of the political spectrum while SYRIZA on the left. The latter, SYRIZA, is a party and the former, Trump a leader. SYRIZA emerged within the context of severe economic austerity and under strict political monitoring in a small semi-peripheral country of the European Union – Greece; Trump emerged in the economically and politically powerful United States. Beyond the causal factors for the success of populist parties in the two countries, SYRIZA and Trump belong to two long and distinct traditions of populism. At the same time, they arose within two equally different political and cultural traditions, which pose distinct opportunities and constraints for the rise of populism. Greece has a parliamentary system while the U.S. a presidential system.

Do these differences between SYRIZA and Donald Trump prohibit one from pursuing a comparison? Or is it, perhaps, due to these very 'differences' that one should, provocatively indeed, study together antithetical phenomena emerging in heterogeneous contexts? If these two actors are as different as we would expect them, is there still some core that would vindicate

their grouping together as 'populist'? Or does the common classification exist just in the eye of the beholder? Such a research move can arguably provide answers to pressing questions as far as the distinct character of distinct populist typologies is concerned.

The first contribution that this research makes is that it addresses the research gap in the literature of populism in power. A remarkably rich and still proliferating literature has approached the topic of populism from a variety of angles. The ascendance of contemporary populism to government, especially in the so-called consolidated democracies of the 'West', is still 'a new phenomenon', hence scholarly accounts are relatively scant. This is especially true when by 'power' one considers not holding positions at the regional level or serving as the opposition in the national parliament but rather governing at the national level as a single-party government or at least leading partner in a coalition for a considerable timeframe. Such conditions provide strength and autonomy to populist governments and allow researchers to study them not as 'exceptional moments' (see Pedersen 1982).

Secondly, it pursues a cross-regional perspective. With some exceptions (see Mouzelis, 1986; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012; de la Torre, 2015; Savage, 2018; Ostiguy et al., 2021; Padoan, 2021), the state of the field is predominantly constrained within geographically narrow boundaries and isolated case-studies (Self and Hicken 2016).

Thirdly, this research pursues a cross ideological comparison comprising both left and right phenomena within the same study. Until most recently, research on populism has predominantly focused on the right of the political spectrum (see Akkerman et al., 2016; Betz, 1994; McDonnell & Werner, 2019; Mudde, 2004, 2007; Pirro, 2015). The emergence of prominent left-wing populisms has changed the research landscape of populist politics. This research goes beyond the standard inclusion of nativist right-wing phenomena. Obviously, this research is not the first one to consider a left populist as a case study (see Stavrakakis and

Katsambekis 2014; Katsambekis 2016; Kioupkiolis 2016; Katsambekis and Kioupkiolis 2019). However, it is one of the few that includes *both* a left and a right populist in the same project in order to ultimately compare them together (see also March 2017; Ivaldi, Lanzone, and Woods 2017; Rooduijn and Akkerman 2017; Roberts 2019b; Caiani and Graziano 2019). Studying left and right populisms comparatively is of increasing importance. A multiplicity of contemporary phenomena are discussed in the context of populism; and, due to the negative connotation that the phenomenon carries in public discussion, distinct populists, comprising both egalitarian and pluralistic as well as xenophobic and regressive typologies, collapse under the rubric of populism (Stavrakakis 2017).

Only recently, the literature highlights that despite their commonly shared tag, left, right and valence populisms pursue distinct political ideas and have a distinct impact on democracy (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2012; Ivaldi et al., 2017; Huber & Schimpf, 2017; Font et al., 2019; Norris, 2019). This study transfers this rationale to the analysis of populism in power and highlights that not all populisms in power have the same implications, for instance, on democratic institutions and society. Not all populisms in government act illiberally or assault institutions of representation and justice. Rather, the analysis of their discursive practices highlights that they reproduce distinct socio-political imaginaries as they pursue distinct political ideas, which generate distinct emotions and construct distinct types of collective identities.

Finally, by conceptualising populism through the discursive/performative lens, it provides one with a 'flexible yet rigorous' method to study the phenomenon (Stavrakakis 2013), especially in its transitory moments from the opposition to power. Moving beyond restrictive frameworks that tend to view populism's transformation ranging from 'mainstreamisation' to 'authoritarianism', 'success' or 'failure', this research enables one to

study the fluctuations of populist performativity in terms of degrees (Aslanidis 2015; Caiani and Graziano 2019).

Additionally, by investigating populism as an emotionally invested collective identity, this thesis brings into the study of populism the area of affect which has been much neglected from conventional social science, highlighting the psycho-social dynamics in constructing political identities (Lacan 1961; Mouffe 2002; Laclau 2005a; Stavrakakis 2007; Glynos and Stavrakakis 2008; Cossarini and Vallespín 2019; Eklundh 2019; Demertzis 2020; Venizelos 2021). Above all, although emotions are generally discredited as inferior, thus excluded from socio-political analyses, this study is able to show how distinct typologies of populism, e.g. left/right, progressive/regressive, generate a variety of emotions ranging from hate to love and nostalgia to hope (see Salmela & von Scheve, 2018).

VI. Structure of the thesis

Chapter 1, *Populism(s) in Power*, offers a critical review of the contemporary literature on populism in power and identifies two main overarching approaches that determine populism's 'success' or 'failure' in government. According to these approaches, populism's trajectory is determined by (a) the types of transformations populism itself undergoes once in government (it vanishes into the mainstream and stops being antagonistic or turns authoritarian) and (b) policy implementation (its capability to draft and pass policy or its failure to materialise its promises). The chapter argues that such expectations are deeply rooted in the anti-populist framing of populism as a point of departure in public discourse. By rethinking the notion of populism as an affectively invested collective identity constructed in the name of the people and against 'the elite', this chapter argues that the way to study the transformations populism undergoes in its transition from the opposition to government is by focusing on the populists'

very own discursive performances and the types of emotional identifications they sustain with 'the people'

Chapter 2, *Research Design*, illustrates the research strategy followed in order to materialise this study. The first part of the Chapter unfolds the comparative logic that structures this most-different research design. It goes in depth into the description of each case, SYRIZA in Greece (2012-2015/2015-2019) and Donald Trump in the United States (2015-2017/2017-2020). The Chapter addresses the fundamentally sharp differences among the two cases, including the distinct institutional, political and historical context, while it also highlights unexpected commonalities between them. The second part of Chapter 2 overviews in detail the mixed research methods used to conduct empirical research: these include discourse analysis, visual analysis, semi-structured interviews, and participant observation on both the demand and supply side of discourse. The data collection is comprised of a total of 66 primary speeches, 69 visual data units including posters, videos, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram posts communicated by the very party leaders and/or their parties; additionally, it includes a total of 56 interviews with activists and politicians and 11 elements of ethnographic data, all collected through physical participation in events such as rallies, party meetings and demonstrations in both Greece and the USA.

Chapter 3, *SYRIZA in opposition*, constitutes the first empirical chapter of this study and deals with the years between 2012 and 2015. Focusing on SYRIZA's communicative strategy, studied through the examination of political rhetoric, campaigning material such as videos and posters, this chapter highlights the progressive and democratic character of SYRIZA's populism. 'Beyond' populist performativity, the chapter shifts attention to the very affectual narrative of 'the people' and sheds light on the way the collective identity of 'the people' was constructed through equivalential relations established between social movements,

party militants, radicalised citizens and voters in general, against a commonly identified 'enemy'.

Chapter 4, SYRIZA in Power, transfers the focus of the analysis to the period 2015-2019. Focusing on the same key dimensions that define populist performativity, namely people-centrism and anti-elitism, the chapter shows that not only SYRIZA's populism in government did not fade but it reinvented itself in multiple ways by bridging its main populist master frame with other non-populist and even contradictory, technocratic, articulations. Importantly, however, while populist communication from the government continued to be articulated to different degrees, 'the people's' narratives highlight disillusionment and alienation. SYRIZA's retreat from its key economic promise functioned as a catalyst in the downward trajectory the affective bond it once maintained with 'the people' which has followed. This important finding underscores that populist performativity is not omnipotent – as contingent factors, material policies and so forth, do play an important role in identification processes.

Chapter 5, '*Make America Great Again!'*, focuses on the emergence of Donald Trump as a political outsider competing for the Republican Party's nomination and as a key political 'antagoniser' in U.S. politics in the period 2015-2016. Focusing on speeches, campaigning material and tweets, Facebook and Instagram posts the chapter studies the ways Donald Trump performed his populism pitting 'the American people' against 'the political establishment' and 'the foreign other' promising to 'Make America Great Again'. The groups included in Trump's collective identity as well as the master narratives around which his discourse revolved, point to a peculiar discourse that comprises profound nationalism, most often *nativism*, combined with interventionist economics, traditional and even reactionary values communicated through rhetorical tropes and performed in a provocative and transgressive style. Transferring the analysis on the peoples' affective narratives, the Chapter highlights this style was important in

mobilising grassroots affects and constructing an anti-establishment identity comprising those who all these years felt neglected and forgotten by political elites.

Chapter 6, *'Keep America Great!'*, moves the empirical analysis to the period that Donald Trump governed in the White House as the 45th President of the United States. It examines the supply of political discourse through the consideration of speeches and web-content, such as memes, tweets, Facebook and Instagram posts communicated by Donald Trump between his inauguration in January 2017 until the national elections in November 2020. This chapter shows that Trump's populist performativity in power remained stably high. On many occasions it reinvented its meaning by attempting to expand or shorten the equivalential chain that constructed 'the people' or by constructing new political enemies, amplifying its master discourse and bridging it with older master frames, binding incoherent elements into a palatable narrative. Not only Trump's inconsistency was not seen as a problem by his base but, as the chapter shows, his narrative resonated well with them. The fact that 'their populist' was now in government not only did not disillusion them, but they were somehow persuaded that he continued to perform in an anti-establishment manner.

Chapter 7, Populists in Government, brings into discussion the findings of the two standalone cases and seeks to understand the transformations of populism once in government through the lens of the discursive/performative approaches. In neither Greece nor the U.S.A. did populist performativity cease once in government. Depending on the arena in which they were performing, variegated degrees of populist discourse were evident. This finding contradicts fundamental claims in the literature on populism in power, highlighting its normative character. Both populists were proved durable in government and lasted one term in office, despite theoretical expectations; and both have managed to pass policy through institutional procedures. Despite his authoritarian tendencies, the institutional checks and balances have protected American democracy within (but not outside) the institutions.

SYRIZA's case though urges populism scholars to rethink its general anti-populist attitude: not only was SYRIZA in government proven not to be illiberal or a threat to democracy, but it even sought to expand social rights for 'the many'.

Affectively speaking, identification with the populist leader proved stronger in the case of Donald Trump than in the case of SYRIZA. Paradoxically, while SYRIZA has managed to pass policy aiming to protect the marginalised, the poor, minorities, its 'backflip' and gradual abandonment from its anti-austerity and anti-neoliberal agenda alienated the most radical components of 'the people'. It has to be noted that more mainstream parts of the electorate still identified to some degree with SYRIZA, as proven by the relatively high electoral percentage the party received in its unsuccessful bid for re-election in 2019. Nonetheless, enthusiasm founded on affective ties with the radical left project lost momentum. On the contrary, despite the fact that Trump has failed to materialise key promises, such as to 'build the wall', or pass any substantial policy in his first period in office, the most radical components of its grassroots followers showed euphoric degrees of affective identification, which have even led to the Capitol invasion in January 2021. Despite conservative and pro-establishment Republicans' disillusionment with Trump's transgressive style and fraud narratives towards the end of his administration, he even substantially increased his number of votes, despite losing the 2020 election. The exploration of 'populist emotionalities' in the two cases challenges the 'rationalist' paradigm insisting to downgrade populism for its supposed overly emotional style. It shows how distinct types of populist discourses, e.g. progressive and democratic or regressive and authoritarian, tapped into and generated distinct types of emotions, ranging from love and home to rage and hatred.

Building on the theoretical considerations put forward and the empirical findings that emerged, the conclusion restates that the way one studies populism's transition from the position of the antagonist to that of the protagonist should be rethought beyond Eurocentric

and anti-populist biases. While indeed, populists may take an authoritarian turn while in government, turn into mainstream parties, or even prove incapable of implementing policies, they may also present the exact opposite features: exemplify democratic characteristics, sustain their populist performativity and even passing legislation and implementing policy. This 'paradox' is only normative in its nature. Populism, and its 'fade' in government, can be determined neither from the policy it pursues nor from the outcomes it renders visible. In such case, the field distracts itself from the very operational consensus and risks conflating populism with other phenomena that resemble it but are by no means identical. As this research shows, these characteristics are not exclusive and therefore not constitutive to populism.

By redirecting the discussion to the very formal criteria of people-centrism and anti-elitism, and building on the discursive and performative approach, conceptualising populism as a collective identity that rests on discursive/affective interpellation and identification processes, this research aims to detach the analysis from any essentialist connotations. It concludes that right-wing regressive forces may pose a real threat to democracy while left-egalitarian ones may seek to promote progressive social change. This is because *populism* is not a category that suffices to explain *everything*. Its trajectory in power, its impact on the institutions and society, do not only depend on its 'populist dimension' but also on other factors external to it, such as its ideology.

Chapter 1

Populism(s) in Power

1.1. Introduction

This theoretical chapter maps-out and critically reviews the main perspectives on populism in power in the contemporary field of 'populism studies', highlighting certain analytical inconsistencies in the study of the transitions of populism from the opposition to government. Insisting on its position that, in order to rethink populism in power, one needs to rethink the very notion of populism itself, this chapter situates current debates within the axiomatically anti-populist way that academics and pundits *talk about* populism and seeks to redirect the discussion back to the notions of *people-centrism and anti-elitism* (Section.2.1.). Building on the discursive and performative canon, the second part of this Chapter places the notions of emotions, discursive performativity, and collective identity at the core of the discussion about populism in government (Section 2.2.). It concludes that populism in power should be studied through the ways discursive articulations and affective identities change once the phenomenon moves from the opposition to power. Thus, what should move to the core of the analysis is first, *whether the framing of the people and the elite has changed when the populist actor achieved power* and second, *whether the collective identity of 'the people' is maintained as a salient point of identification*; that is, whether the 'the people', identify emotionally with the populist actor.

1.2. Dominant perspectives on populism in power

Conventional wisdom maintains that *populism* and *power* are strange bedfellows. This argument becomes evident after a brief literature review of the key-texts written by key scholars of populism and adjutant themes. This section provides a taxonomy of academic literature on populism in power, dividing it in two overarching tendencies. First, the outcome-oriented approach which is divided in two camps: those who argue that populists in government become mainstream and disappear and those who argue that populists in government turn authoritarian (Subsection 2.1.1). Second, the policy-oriented approach, which is divided in two camps: those who maintain that populists fail to achieve policy and those who argue that populists are capable of implementing policy (Section 2.1.2). Subsection 2.1.3 situates the analytical disunities among the reviewed approaches among a general 'anti-populist' climate in populism research, recalibrating conceptual attention to the core of the populist phenomenon: its people-centrism and anti-elitism as the locus of analytical explorations of populism in power.

1.2.1. Outcome-driven approaches

The first tendency within the outcome-driven approach maintains that the notions of 'populism' and 'power' are incompatible; that the survival of the former rests only upon its antagonistic character. In other words, the antagonistic dimension in populism is understood to be cancelled out once the latter enter the institutions as populists are understood to lose their anti-systemic and anti-establishment character. This tendency is grounded on the supposed 'nature' of populism as a (*solely*) oppositional political force.

Even Laclau, the prominent advocate of progressive and democratic populism, situates populism in opposition to institutions. The latter, the institutions, are grounded on the logic of difference (prioritising administrative understanding of politics, tackling particular demands in

their particularity in order to block alliance building with other unsatisfied demands. The former, populism, is grounded on the logic of equivalence, creating paratactical antagonisms between groups, demands and values and channelling popular frustration vertically from the bottom to the top. According to Laclau, when previously unmet demands are addressed and absorbed by the institutions of governance, populism's dynamism is neutralised (2005: 77,81).

Mény and Surel (2002: 18), famously argued that '[p]opulist parties are by nature neither durable nor sustainable parties of government. Their fate is to be integrated into the mainstream, to disappear, or to remain permanently in opposition'. Grounding their argumentation on a quasi-theological foundation, they even employ the case of the United States as an example to back their argument. In a similar manner, Heinisch argued that populist parties 'succeed in opposition and to do well at the game of elections. Once in government, their unique strengths turn into disadvantages. Significant structural weaknesses inherent in populist parties pose nearly insurmountable problems that make their long-term success in government questionable' (2003:92). Similarly, Mudde (2017) 'predicts' (*sic*) that populism is expected to consolidate with the institutions of power; populist politicians will turn conventional and populist parties will become just like the traditional ones.

Such perspectives can be summarised in the term that Paul Taggart assigned to populism: *episodic* (2002: 62). Especially in Europe, Taggart notes, the phenomenon appears to be 'short-term' and with 'limited potential' (2004: 285). In Taggart's words, 'populist politicians, movements and parties emerge and grow quickly and gain attention but find it difficult to sustain that momentum and therefore usually fade away (2002:270). Overall, populism is perceived to appear in irregular intervals, and have limited scope and duration.

However, conceiving populism solely as a counter-hegemonic force is not inconsequential. First, it suggests that all oppositional forces are potentially populism just

because they are in opposition and second, if populism is necessarily and solely an oppositional force, it cannot, by definition, exist in in government. Critically, this approach is empirically unsubstantiated. In the same way that the above-mentioned frameworks do not account for an avalanche of populists in government in Latin American, they also could not account the rise to prominence – and ultimately victory – of Donald Trump in 2016.

Against the tendency that suggests the dissolution of populists in their transition from opposition to power stands Müller, who argues that '[p]opulists can govern as populists' (2016:4). According to Müller 'populist governance exhibits three features: attempts to hijack the state apparatus, corruption and "mass clientelism" (trading material benefits or bureaucratic favours for political support by citizens who become the populists' "clients"), and efforts systematically to suppress civil society' (ibid.). For Müller, the nature of populist governance is the occupation of the state and the intimidation of political enemies (2016:45). In a similar vein, Pappas suggests that 'without exception, populists in office have tried to enlarge the state and fill government jobs with political supporters in order to expand the populist leader and party's control over crucial institutions' (2019: 73). For Pappas too, 'populists in power '1) colonise the state by appointing party loyalists at all levels of the state bureaucracy; 2) launch a massive assault on the liberal institutions; and 3) set up a new constitutional order that replaces institutions of horizontal accountability with other more vertical in nature' (ibid.). 'In the end', Pappas argues, 'populism may turn into outright autocracy' (2019: 74). Political theorist Nadia Urbinati's position is similar: 'Populism in power is an ideological construct that depicts only one part of the people as legitimate. Thus, once elected, the leader feels authorised to act unilaterally and make decisions without meaningful institutional consultation or mediations, while in permanent communication with the people outside the government, in order to reassure them that they are the master of the game while he is their knight' (Urbinati 2019).

The tendency to desire absolute power may indeed be a characteristic of some populists. But such a desire is not *necessarily* a desire of populists *alone*.[5] Similarly, while populist actors are usually presented as those who intimidate political adversaries such as the media, anti-populist actors seem also to fight their opponents through accusations, character assassination tactics, and so on.[6]

Historian Federico Finchelstein (2017:247) places populism 'somewhere between liberalism and fascism'. Finchelstein argues that 'populism is both historically and *genetically* linked to fascism' (2017: 251, italics added).[7] Žižek (2018) sides with liberal anti-populists, claiming that populism is today's opium for 'the people' and equates it with fascism (see Venizelos et al., 2019). Without neglecting the populist instances in fascist politics, it is critical to acknowledge the crucial differences among populism and fascism. As Ostiguy (2017:83) notes: 'First, 'populism displays its legitimacy through the repeated counting of votes, empirically "proving" that the populist leader is "what the people want." Fascism (a regime type) ends elections once it wins them; populism appears to multiply them and often supplement them with referendums. Second, fascism tended to govern in a disciplined manner, from the state down. Populism is much more ambivalent: though it often uses the state

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[5] Vladimir Putin in Russia, Xi Jinping in China and Paul Biya in Cameroon are absolute governors but are not populists. In fact, they are better classified under the concept of competitive authoritarianism (cf. Levitsky and Way 2002).

[6] A report on the journalistic representations of Jeremy Corbyn who is often categorised as 'a progressive left populist' found that the ex-Labour party's leader 'was thoroughly delegitimised as a political actor from the moment he became a prominent candidate and even more so after he was elected as party leader, with a strong mandate. This process of delegitimisation occurred in several ways: 1) through lack of or distortion of voice; 2) through ridicule, scorn and personal attacks; and 3) through association, mainly with terrorism'(Cammaerts et al. 2016).

[7] This argument reminds the move deployed by the influential Russo-American thinker Ayn Rand who linked Franklin Roosevelt to Mussolini and Hitler due to their common collectivist policies. Rand, an influential persona in the arts, theatre and cinema, belonged to a philosophical current called *objectivism* celebrated by the libertarians, neoliberals and free-marketeers. Her influence, indicates how certain historical instances of articulation may help forging or in fact changing the meaning of things, often under the banner of 'objectivism'.

apparatus with little *délicatesse*, it also fosters a myriad of not overly coordinated movements, organizations, circles, with a grassroots component'.

The potential dangers of populism in power must not be underestimated. Researchers of *(populist) radical right parties* showed empirically that there is little evidence that the respective family produces positive impact on liberal democracies, human rights and basic freedoms (Akkerman 2017). Critically however, a number of questions arise at this point. Firstly, does the analysis concern actual *populist* phenomena, as those are formally classified by the literature, or does or are these actors framed as 'populist' due to the negative outcomes they have on institutions? Secondly, is the negative impact that populist radical right parties have on liberal democracy specifically related to their *populism*, or their nativism or authoritarianism? Thirdly, are the effects of *all* populist phenomena equally negative to the institutions and society or are there other variants of populism that may have different impact on democracy?

Analytically at least, one must distinguish *populism* from *authoritarianism*, *nativism* and so forth as well as *progressive* from *reactionary* populist phenomena. Additionally, the fact that most of the authors who warn us against 'the danger of populism' to democracy are situated in the liberal ideological paradigm must not be neglected either, as it is their vision of democracy that is under threat not democracy *tout court*. As put by Urbinati's 'the debate over the meaning of populism turns out to be a debate about the interpretation of democracy' (1998: 116).

The last line of argumentation, which – in defining the phenomenon – rests on the observation of the *outcomes* and *consequences* of 'populism', risks becoming teleological. Should the outcomes and consequences be the starting point to approach populism in government? To answer this question, it is necessary to think *first*, whether assaulting

institutions and intimidating opponents is a feature that is exclusive to populism and *second*, whether – in a Sartorian manner – the *outcomes* of 'populism' in power are necessary and sufficient conditions to classify a phenomenon as such. In Lyrintzis' (1990) view, there may be evident consequences of populist politics in government which relate to the abovementioned concerns, however, they are by no means constitutive characteristics of the phenomenon; neither in opposition and consequently nor in power. Similarly, as Aslanidis observes (2020:68-69), 'the sociopolitical output of populist mobilization is open-ended; it refuses to adhere to strict policy norms or to produce patterned outcomes as with an ideologically conscious program of action. Therefore, the continuities that other schools of thought indicate with regards to party organization, institutional break-down, and so on, are circumstantial artefacts that cannot be allowed definitional status'.

Paradoxically, while the phenomenon seems to be intrinsic to democratic politics (Canovan 2005; Panizza 2005; Laclau 2005a), it is often framed as something that is both 'anti-political' (Taggart 2000:5; Pasquino 2008:21) and 'blatantly anti-democratic' (Müller 2016:6). In cases in which the notion of 'populism in government' is negatively connoted due to its association with authoritarian practices, negative consequences on the party system and so on, one risks conflating populism with other concepts such as authoritarianism, authoritarian nationalism (see Fidesz/Orbán and PiS as in the introduction). As Mudde and Kaltwasser point out, 'only a minority of strongmen are populists and only a minority of populists are strongmen' (2017: 63). In this sense, it is critical to rethink whether the very ontology of the political actor producing these changes is actually populist.

1.2.2. Policy-driven approaches

The second prominent perception regarding the relationship between populism and power revolves around a widely endorsed idea that the ideas, visions and politics populists advocate

for are illusory and unrealisable. A collection of essays written by Cas Mudde (2017) entitled 'SYRIZA' carries the subtitle 'The Failure of the Populist Promise'. Late political theorist and pioneer in the field Margaret Canovan (1999) suggested that when a populist actor 'actually gets into power, its own inability to live up to its promises will be revealed'. In line with Canovan, Mény and Surel (2002: 18) argued that populists' 'weakness lies in the dream of an alternative form of democratic regime that they have been unable to articulate clearly, let alone establish'.

The success or failure, continuity and discontinuity of populism in its transition from the position of 'the challenger' to that of 'the governor' is often thought in terms of policy implementation, and is specifically determined through its ability or incapacity to realise its pre-electoral promises (see Sachs, 1989; Loew & Faas, 2019). Such a stance offers little in the understanding of populism, in that it downplays contingent factors, such as institutional restrictions, external pressure, world economic developments, international affairs, that are external to 'populism' but may, nonetheless, create obstacles to the implementation of policies. The overemphasis put on 'populism' as a dimension that can explain nearly everything blurs the picture.

Above all, it must be admitted that it is not only populist politicians who fail to deliver on their promises, but also non-populist politicians. The forceful framing of populism as an 'unrealistic campaigning promise', leads to significant definitional issues. Populism is thus conflated with 'lies', 'manipulation', 'demagogy', 'fake news' and 'post-truth' (see Mercieca 2019). Even Canovan (1999:9) who appears much more sober in her analysis associates populism with 'redemptive democracy' – a type of democracy that is hospitable to romanticism while it is juxtaposed to 'pragmatic democracy'.[8] Despite the fact that scholarship agrees on

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[8] Obviously, Margaret Canovan's argument is far more complex. And my presentation above may be reductive. But what is important to stress is that the choice of words leave some connotative marks on 'populism'.

the definitional criteria (people-centrism/anti-elitism), connotations embedded in the language about populism do shape the phenomenon's 'meaning' in public sphere. In the dichotomy between realistic and unrealistic, rational and non-rational politics, populism is of course placed on the side of the latter.

In stark contrast to the suggested 'unavoidable failure' of populists in power, existing literature provides us with some exceptions. In their empirically-oriented account, Albertazzi and McDonnell (2015) show that although short-lived experiences of populism in government are not absent, they are neither inevitably episodic nor are necessarily destined to fail. On the contrary, many of these parties 'have established structures and grassroots organisations that have remained in place for decades and are built to last beyond the current leadership' (:3). Albertazzi and McDonnell (2015) show that populists in government are capable of drafting policy and implementing legislation that is in close proximity to their core ideological values. The experience of government need not strictly translate into electoral losses for the populists, but also *gains*. Dismissing those who declare that populism necessarily fails once in government, the authors show that populists are also often able to be re-elected. Their answer to the question of populists' viability in government is affirmative. However, the focus of their study of populists lie on political actors' programmatic promises rather than the people-centrism and anti-elitism that classifies them as populists.

A contradiction rises here. The basis of Albertazzi and McDonnell's argument lies on the extent to which the government experience 'corrupts' the *ideological* core of the populists. Is it, however, the ideological-programmatic core that defines a phenomenon as populist? As Mudde has repeatedly argued, populism does not constitute a fully-fledged ideology but rather something that is 'easily combined with very different (thin and full) other ideologies' (e.g. socialism) (2004:544). Similarly, in 'Essex School's terms populism is articulated *with* non-populist elements and political programmes (de Cleen et al., 2018; Panizza, 2008).

In this sense, focusing on the 'thick core' *to which populism is attached*, the focus of the analysis lies not in the transformations of *populism itself* but the transformations of *the 'host' ideology* that accompanies the former. Without downgrading the importance of analysing how populists in government engage with policy processes and with what results, what Albertazzi and McDonnell (2015) essentially investigate is not *what* defines a party as *populist*. Rather, they investigate *what* makes a party *Right* or *Left*, *conservative* or *socialist*, *inclusionary* or *exclusionary*, *egalitarian* or *xenophobic*. Essentially, a policy-driven take on moderation/radicalisation (see Tepe, 2019), focuses on the *material*, *symbolic* and *political* dimensions of politics which define the programmatic core of an ideology (see Bobbio 1996; Filc 2010). What a policy-driven approach studies in other words is the politics of the *Left – Right* axis rather than the politics of the 'populist axis' that juxtaposes 'the people' versus 'the elite'. As a consequence, this approach shifts from the very defining locus ('the form') of populism.

The effects of this shift from the *form* of populism to its *contents* can be reflected in the paradigm of the so-called 'economic populism'. The term appeared in academic, political and pundit discourse in different cycles; initially, to counter waves of Latin American populisms (see Dornbusch and Edwards 1991) resulting to the association of populism with clientelism (Mouzelis 1985); it re-emerged in the post-2008 framework in Western politics (see Eichengreen 2018) to associate populism with reckless economics, and juxtapose it to 'pragmatism' and 'stability' as politics represented by the 'calm' forces of the establishment (Acemoglu, Egorov, and Sonin 2013; Adilinis and Telaveris 2016; Eichengreen 2018; Guiso et al. 2017; Schrager and Bayrasli 2019). Yet, as Aslanidis observes, already from the mid-1990s 'influential scholars of Latin American populism such as Roberts (1995) and Weyland (1996) decided to break ranks with economists to dismiss profligate economic policy as a defining characteristic of populism' (2017: 276-277).

Bartha et al. (2020), focus on the 'features of populist policy making', thereby constructing a typology of populist decision-making in government. Unlike other researchers, who focus on the substantive content of populists' policy, Bartha et al. (2020) draw on the very discursive components of 'populism' (people/elite). Theoretically, this secures the coherence of the concept (which is often not even the aim in other approaches). If there is indeed a populist type of policy, this is not to be found in its substantive content but rather in some formal underlying structure which pits the underdog against the establishment. But this logic can easily resemble that of socialism; and if this is the case, if populism resembles another political logic, then it loses its specificity and usefulness. Furthermore, the ideal-type of populist policy Bartha et.al (2020) come up with, suggests that populists adopt 'paradigmatic reforms' and show 'excessive responsiveness'. Not only this does not escape populism's conventional association with clientelism and demagogy but, their assumption that populists pursue 'heterodox policies' frames populists as 'exceptional actors', which itself boosts the hype around their extraordinariness and dangerousness. Arguably, what could be populist about a specific set of policies is the way performative actions and narratives accompany them while attempting to politicize the electorate regarding a (potentially non-populist) policy by antagonistically divide society between those at 'the bottom' versus those at 'the top'.

Overall, the policy-oriented approach to populism is generally concerned with the capacity of a political actor to implement its promises and how it diverges from them, rather than whether and to what degree the effect of power has corrupted its *populist* identity. Evaluating populism in terms of its policy outputs may lead to several conceptual ramifications. As was shown, the concept may be reduced to manipulation and demagogy while it also sustains the dichotomy between populism and pragmatism/rationality, as if non-populist actors never proceed to risky governance. Following Laclau (1977; 2005b) and Canovan (1999), the

study of populism requires a shift of attention from policy and ideology (content) to form: the very people-centric/anti-elitist structure that defines the phenomenon (se also Mudde, 2004).

Crucially, the above-scrutinised approaches present certain limitations that have important implications for the study of populism in power. Comparing these positions, one notices that attributes ascribed to populism are neither exclusive nor constitutive to the phenomenon itself. It becomes clear that the above approaches render visible certain analytical inconsistencies, engaging with other concepts which are distinct to populism. The inconsistency takes place due to a shift from the *form* of populism to 'its' *contents* or *outcomes*.

1.2.3. Definitional issues: between populism and anti-populism

The analytical disunity identified above, is arguably rooted in the normatively loaded theorisations of populism and the profoundly anti-populist point of departure in academic, expert, political and public discussion (Stavrakakis 2014; Moffitt 2018; Galanopoulos and Venizelos 2021). Although the field has nominally reached an increased level of consensus on the operational definition of populism revolving around 'the people' and 'the elite' (Weyland 2001; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017; Caiani and Graziano 2019), little else is agreed.

The *genus et differentia* ascribed to populism (ideology, strategy, discourse) and its embedded epistemological assumptions influence the way the phenomenon is studied – and ultimately talked about. Although differences among the different approaches το populism may seem minor or technical to readers unfamiliar with the literature, they carry crucial implications in all theoretical, normative, methodological and empirical levels of analysis (Katsambekis and Kioupkiolis 2019).

Advocates of the ideational approach frame populism as the *opposite* of pluralism (Mudde, 2004: 543; Müller, 2016:81), while Pappas (2019) frames it as fundamentally 'illiberal'. Indeed, the view that 'the people' are always framed as 'homogenous' and 'pure'

(Mudde, 2004), is rooted to the fact that scholarship on populism has predominantly focused on its right-wing variant, now thriving in the European context (see Ignazi, 1992; Betz, 1994; Ivarsflaten, 2005; Caiani & della Porta, 2012). As a consequence, 'region-specific manifestations of populism are erroneously promoted to defining properties of supposedly general applicability' (Aslanidis 2017:268). By neglecting a multiplicity of pluralistic, inclusionary, democratic and progressive populist phenomena located on the left of the political spectrum the geographically-confined understanding of populism results in its nearly-exclusive association with nationalism, authoritarianism, the extreme right, racism and so on (Stjin van Kessel 2015).[9]

Properties such as 'moralism', 'purity' are critically viewed as 'misleading positives' (Ostiguy, 2017:91) that not only stretch the definition of populism (Aslanidis, 2015), but they also influence the way it is talked and thought about. Most crucially, such point of departure produces negative expectations with respect to the future of 'populism in power'. As the overview of the outcome-oriented approach provided in the previous subsection showed, mainstream accounts expect populists to expose hostility towards minorities and political institutions (Abts and Rummens 2007; Havlik 2017; Rummens 2017; Galston, Hunter, and Owen 2018).

1.3. A renewed approach: populism as a collective identity

This section of the chapter is dedicated to advancing an alternative strategy for the study of populism and its transitory moments from the opposition to government. As argued in the introduction, in order to rethink the notion of populism in power and study its shifts from the

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[9] Or, as Ostiguy (2017:91) argues, 'the Manichean definition of populism comes ambiguously close to include militant Marxism and (discursively) the revolutionary rhetoric in Latin America, which considers "society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups," the working people versus the parasitic owners, and "which argues that [decision making should be the expression of the *volonté générale* of the [working] people".

opposition to government, it is required to rethink the very *notion* of populism first. Ernesto Laclau, argued that 'political practices do not *express* the nature of social agents but instead, *constitute* the latter' (2005:33). Laclau gives an ontological priority to the *practices* over the *agent*. This move is critical as it (first) enables one to distinguish populist from non-populist elements (i.e. the people-centric and anti-elitist logic from ideology, policy and outcomes) and (second) it directs the analysis of populist actors in power back to the definitional locus of populism. Let me be a bit more clear. When it comes to the classification of populism, and therefore populism in power, it is the very (discursive) actions, strategies and tactics of the actors that classify the latter as populist and not *vice-versa*. That is, it is not the actor that classifies a practice as populist. For if an actor has been casually labelled a 'populist', this does not guarantee that her practices *continue* to be populist when in power. Let us not forget that the label 'populist' very often functions as a political trope of anti-populist discourse aiming at differentiating themselves by delegitimising their enemies (Panizza & Stavrakakis, 2021). Conversely, if certain practices (policy failure or authoritarianism and corruption) are framed as populist this does not make the actor a populist.

As such, in order to study how populism changes in its transitory moments from the opposition to power (as well as other *loci*) one must *begin from the beginning* – that is, the very definitional locus of populism which prioritises the juxtaposition of 'the people' against 'the elite'. Thus, the changes of populism in power are to be found in the continuities and discontinuities, fluctuations, changes, or even perhaps the cessation of such political performance when the 'populist actor' is in government. Having defined populism through the discursive/performative perspective, the changes of populism *itself* are better be observed through the discourse that produces collective identities. The study of populism in government presupposes knowledge of what populism *before power* looks like.

Emanating from a discursive and performative point of view (Laclau 1977; Stavrakakis 2017; Ostiguy et al. 2021b), this research conceptualises populism as a mode of political identification which constructs a collective identity, in the name of 'the people' and against an 'Other', though discursive interpellation and affective investment. Such a perspective does not reduce populist discourse to words and rhetoric. It rather revolves around an ontological understanding of populism which highlights the performative function of political discourse in mobilising affects, establishing 'unexpected alliances' and constructing antagonistic popular subjectivities (Howarth 2000; Venizelos 2021).

According to Moffitt, employing the 'stylistic' approach 'moves from seeing populism as a particular ''thing'' or entity towards viewing it as a political style that is performed, embodied and enacted across a variety of political contexts' (2017:3). Thus, populism is not something that it *is* but something that is *done*. This anti-essentialist move is highly compatible with the approach of the Essex School. This touches upon the core of the Essex School's argument that discourse comprises non-linguistic elements too (see Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000) while on the other hand, Ernesto Laclau's argument that populism 'is a performative act endowed within a rationality of its own' (2005:18) further highlights the affinities among the two approaches. It can be said that the performative take is able to *demonstrate* 'practically' the allegedly abstracted theorisations of the Essex School, thereby expanding the net of what 'discursive practices' may mean. In what follows, I zoom into the fundamental concepts of populist theory, offering a reading through the discursive-performative approaches.

1.3.1. The performative function of populism

For Laclauians and allies, populism constitutes a particular logic of the political.[10] This move helps one to distinguish populism from other phenomena, such as nationalism, with which the

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[10] This is in a way similar to other approaches tendency to analytically distinguish between populist phenomena and non-populist phenomena.

former is often conflated. Indeed, due to the prevalence of the nation-state, 'the people' and 'the nation' have been closely articulated throughout history, and cases of nationalist populism are not rare. Admittedly, 'the people' is a central signifier in both populism and nationalism (Anastasiou 2020). However, it is important to note that all 'political discourses emanate from a terrain of cultural sediments that mobilise resources such as memory and historical legacies embedded in the *nation*-state' (Venizelos, 2021:3). Despite this closeness between populism and nationalism, the logic that interpellates the subjects of each discourse exhibits significant differences. At least at the conceptual level, the two phenomena must be distinguished in order to avoid empirical, normative and analytical pitfalls, such as those reviewed in the previous sections.

From a discursive point of view, 'the people' functions as the 'organising principle' in populist discourse, while 'the nation' as the 'organising principle' in nationalist discourse. As de Cleen and Stavrakakis put it, nationalism 'envisaged as a limited and sovereign community that exists through time and is tied to a certain space, and that is constructed through an in/out opposition between the nation and its out-groups' (2017:8). This implies a *membership*-based on race and blood or at least a physical territory. Populism, on the other hand, is structured 'along the lines of a down/up antagonism in which "the people" is discursively constructed as a large powerless group through opposition to "the elite" conceived as a small and illegitimately powerful group. In the case of populism then, 'the people' is takes the status of *politically subaltern*, *marginalised* or *excluded subject* – an *underdog* so to speak – and not an *ethnos* (that is, a pure or homogenous entity). The enemy is not defined in ethnic terms, like in nationalism, and it is not excluded *from within* 'the people'. In a way, 'the people' of populism has something republican in it and assumes the role of a *demos*.

Reinstating his thesis put forward in *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory* (1977) Laclau (2005a: 74) maintains that populism is grounded on 'the formation of an internal

antagonistic frontier separating ''people'' from power'. People-centrism refers to the primacy of 'the people' as the collective identity which serves as the political agent for social change.[11] 'The people' functions as a *nodal point* – 'a point of reference around which other peripheral and often politically antithetical signifiers and ideas can be articulated' (Panizza & Stavrakakis, 2021:25) – and from which a particular political discourse is organised, thereby obtaining its meaning. From a discourse-theoretical perspective, 'the people' functions necessarily as an *empty signifier* (Laclau 1996): at the level of theory, the subject of populism is emptied of any essences, positive/negative, as these are context-dependent (e.g. history, culture, legacy, memory) and actor-dependent (Left/Right). At the level of politics: the collective subject becomes a terrain for re-articulation and redefinition by various socio-political imaginaries that attempt to establish their hegemony.

Anti-elitism refers the construction of an *antagonistic frontier* which dichotomises the socio-political field, and therefore structures political conflict in two antagonistic camps, 'the people and 'the elite'. These two signifiers obtain their content depending on the referent actor who articulates the type of inclusion and exclusion that is to take place, and so forth. For example, while on the one hand lies 'the majority', 'the unrepresented', 'the 99%' on the other hand an 'illegitimate' or a 'nefarious minority' which takes the name of 'the political establishment', 'the elite', 'the 1%', 'la casta'. In left-wing populisms, 'the banks', 'the financial sector', 'the oligarchy, 'the eurocrats' are typically included in leftist definitions of 'the other'; in Latin American and Southern European (left) 'patriotic populisms' or inclusionary nationalist populisms, the enemy takes the name of 'American imperialism', 'the IMF', 'Germany'.

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[11] While 'the people' is not exclusive to populist discourse, but is rather a signifier that is central throughout all political modernity (Panizza 2005), not all discourses that address to 'the people' can be classified as populist.

In right-wing populisms, a triadic structure prevails since 'the establishment' is blamed for allowing 'ethnic others' such as immigrants and refugees suppress the rights and joys of 'the true people' (Judis 2016).[12] Using a similar logic one could distinguish left from right populist phenomena by threading a knot between Bobbio's (1996) classificatory criterion of 'equality', Alessandro Pizzorno's (1993) inclusion/exclusion criterion and Dani Filc's (2010) the material, political and symbolic dimensions. Evidently, subjects are included or excluded from the collective 'we' on the basis of the ethico-political visions articulated by political actors advocating how society should look like. Importantly though, in populist representations, 'the people' takes the status of '*excluded and underprivileged plebs*, which claim to be a legitimate community of 'the people' and the *democratic sovereign* (Laclau 2005a: 81, 94, 98 in Katsambekis and Kioupkiolis 2019:8).

The differences among types of populisms resonates well with Casullo's (2020) distinction between upward-punching and downward-punching populisms: 'When punching upward, the elite is mainly defined in economic and financial terms: they are the wealthy, the capitalist, the rich and powerful of the country. 'When punching downward, the elite is described as an alliance between 'high' 'leftist', 'cosmopolitan' or 'intellectual' groups (such as college professors or journalists) with 'low' religious or ethnic 'foreigners' that come from outside to threaten the unity and purity of the people' (Casullo, 2020:31). All these distinctions echo Laclau's argument that the logic of populism 'is not to be found in any political or ideological content entering into the description of the practices of any particular group but in a *particular mode of articulation* of whatever social, political or ideological contents (Laclau 2005:34).

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[12] For all the different names that the 'collective subject' and its 'other' can take as these were talked about in the different research accounts – see: Stavrakakis and Katsambekis (2014); Ostiguy (2017); Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2017).

The existence of multiple socio-political antagonisms which result to a heterogeneous social terrain, led Laclau to argue that the ultimate closure (qua homogeneity) of 'the social' is impossible (Laclau, 1990; see also Rancière, 1999a).[13] It is actually because of this incomplete and open character in the social structure that counter-hegemonic articulations intervene competing for hegemony (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). Obviously, populism does not appear in vacuum. Scholars agree about the intimate relationship the phenomenon maintains with 'crisis' (Kriesi 2015; Knight 1998; Roberts 2015; Caiani and Padoan 2020). As Panizza (2005: 9) asserts, political mobilisation may 'emerge out of the failure of existing social and political institutions to confine and regulate subjects into a relatively stable social order'. Similarly, for Laclau, 'crisis' lies 'at the root of any populist, anti-institutional outburst' (Laclau, 2005b: 137). Surely, the relationship among the two is not causal but performative (Stavrakakis, Katsambekis, et al. 2017).

In this respect, 'an equivalential articulation of demands making the emergence of the ''people'' possible' (Laclau 2005a: 74). The equivalential process pursues 'the establishment of linkages between a series of initially heterogeneous unsatisfied demands, which enter into relations of equivalence thus forming a collective identity […] through opposition towards a common enemy (the power bloc, the establishment)' (Stavrakakis and Katsambekis 2014:123).[14]

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[13] Placing the notion of social heterogeneity in the accelerationist and consumerist models of neoliberalism (which are principally found in the Western Hemisphere), the so-called proliferation of identities, which ultimately results in proliferation and most importantly decentralisation of demands, is more evident. Identities and demands do not emanate from a single constituency or socio-economic groups that were often studied as voting blocs. While this moment crystallises the differential nature of the social field, the old 'system' in transition could not absorb these unsatisfied demands that turned into grievances which render visible the differential-heterogeneous nature of society and raised the feeling of disincorporation.

[14] Aren't equivalential chains at the core of every political project? Yes. The question that is at stake however is to what degree this chain connects disparate identities through a sharp demarcation in society between 'us' and 'them' or it connects the usual suspects.

The *antagonism* between *a* 'people' and *an* 'elite' is not real but *symbolic*. In Moffitt's 'stylistic' approach, populist performances are defined as 'repertoires of embodied, symbolically mediated performance made to audiences that are used to create and navigate the fields of power that comprise the political, stretching from the domain of government to everyday life' (2016:153). Acts, symbols and 'bad manners' are 'by-products' of discourse. In highlighting the material function of discourse, Laclau (2005a:12) maintained that 'if through rhetorical operations they managed to constitute broad popular identities which cut across many sectors of the population, *they actually constituted populist subjects*, and there is no point in dismissing this as mere rhetoric'. Ostiguy et al. (2021:6) agree that 'performative presence and operations contribute to the actual creation of the equivalential chain, creating popular political identification in the process'.

Obviously, if 'words' and 'gestures' have the institutive power to articulate and construct political identity, this highlights once again that one should shift attention from the content of discourse to its very *function*. Symbols, music, manners, and so forth receive their meaning through historically and politically conditioned norms that are already shared in the community. As Grattan puts it, 'social imaginaries are not simply ideas. They are produced by and inhabit an array of technologies, institutions and everyday practices; broad discourse and local idioms' (2016: 12).

From sender (the populist) to received (the people), discourse is the mediating bridge that transmits political messages, often reversing the roles in this relationship, signalling the pulse of political emotions and altering political master frames as a result of popular demand. Performativity, defined either as a style or 'rhetoric', has a constitutive role in collective identities. 'This is a praxis marked not by "properness" and formality, but rather by informality and transgression. The informal stands in many ways as substantive content for both proximity and antagonism to a certain kind of establishment. Indeed, populism's transgressive nature sets

itself up in a clearly antagonistic relationship towards more "proper" ways of doing politics, as well as proving it is bona fide in terms of proximity to the "real" people (Ostiguy et al., 2021:5).

Ostiguy (2017) conceptualises this performative antagonism in a spatio-dimensionally relational manner. He conceptualises political space in an orthogonal way where the *High/Low* axis cuts across the Left/Right axis. The two axes create four quadrants: high-left and high-right, low-left and low-right. These quadrats are connected with two diagonal axes which Ostiguy (2017:77) names 'the political-cultural' (top-left corner towards right-bottom corner) and 'the social-cultural components' (top-right corner towards bottom-left corner).[15] The high-low axis 'has to do with ways of *being* and *acting* in politics – relating to people: they include issues of accent, levels of language, gestures and ways of dressing. 'In that sense, is ''cultural'' and very concrete - perhaps more concrete in fact than left and right'(ibid.).

The *socio-cultural component* which cuts diagonally from top-right to bottom-left 'encompasses manners, demeanours, ways of speaking and dressing, vocabulary and tastes displayed in the public' (Ostiguy, 2017: 79). These are 'public manifestations of recognisably social aspects of the self in society (as well as of its desires) that contribute to creating a social sense of trust based on an assumption of sameness, or coded understanding' (2017: 81). *On the high*, politicians are 'well behaved, proper, composed, and perhaps even bookish. Moreover, politicians on the high are often ''well-mannered'', perhaps even polished, in public self-presentation, and tend to use either a rationalist (at times replete with jargon) or ethically oriented discourse. Negatively, they can appear as stiff, rigid, serious, colorless, somewhat distant, and boring'. *On the low*, 'people frequently use a language that includes slang or folksy

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[15] There are a few other components developed by Ostiguy – such as the constitutive dimensions of the Left-Right appeals in politics and what he calls 'the wheel of polarisation' - which are not integrated in the schema below. This is not because they are irrelevant to my analysis of populism. But rather because all the components together can offer a full analysis of the socio-political space even outside the realm of populist politics while I am only using certain parts of Ostiguy's theory which are most relevant to *supplement* my analysis of populism.

expressions and metaphors, are more demonstrative in their bodily or facial expressions as well as in their demeanor, and display more raw, culturally popular tastes. They appear – to the observer on the high – as more ''colourful'' and, in the more extreme cases, somewhat grotesque', more direct, improvisational and politically incorrect' (2017: 79). No doubt this resonates well with Moffitt's (2016) notion of 'bad manners'.

The *politico-cultural component* which cuts diagonally from top-left to bottom right 'is about forms of political leadership and advocated models of decision-making in the polity'. *On the high*, 'political appeals consist of claims to favour formal, impersonal, legalistic, institutionally mediated models of authority' (Ostiguy, 2017: 81). It favours institutionally mediated authority, rules and procedures (Roberts and Ostiguy 2016: 31). 'The high' then, claims to represent and pursue normality and continuity. *On the low*, 'political appeals emphasise very personalistic, strong (often male) leadership. This pole claims to be closer to 'the people' (2017:82); the actor claims to be 'one of ours' (2017:77).[16] In Moffit's (2016:57) terms populist politicians disregard 'appropriate ways' of acting on a political stage.

Notwithstanding the usefulness of the stylistic approaches in distinguishing between 'a style like that of the elites' and 'a style like that of the people', one should not neglect their potential ramifications. First, the high/low relation implies a hierarchy founded on certain qualities – 'ordinary and extraordinary', 'conventional and exceptional' – which may reduce populism to something 'alien'. This may further mystify populism and reinvigorate the conventional anti-populist framing of populism. Second, if thought as 'the low of politics', 'bad manners' 'masculinist' and 'improper', populism may be conceptualised as

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[16] A critique to Ostiguy: Although, Ostiguy himself convincingly illustrates how the low is *not* synonymous with the poor people or lower social strata, his theorisation carries the danger of framing 'the low' as *folkloric*. Additionally, although he convincingly notes that the populist is defined by a sort of 'sameness' with the people, or a sense of being 'from here', 'being native' (see 2017:81), his definition may skate on a thin ice in that it potentially entails the problems that the ideational approach carries.

'unsophisticated' or 'inferior'. Third, thought of as 'low', populism may be equated with the similar but distinct styles of demotic and popular (but not populist) politics (see Venizelos, 2021).[17] Third, taking literally 'bad manners' and 'transgression' may reinvigorate the anti-populist narrative that populists are *necessarily* a threat to democracy. Importantly, high and low are only an ally to populist theory when they relate to the central notions of people-centrism/anti-elitism and not adjutant ones.

1.3.2. Affect

Politics are not driven only by speech and reason but also by *affect*. This is not to distinguish[18] reason from emotion but rather to highlight that in the 'semantic act' of *naming,* presupposes an affective investment (Glynos and Stavrakakis 2008). The fact that even until today 'emotions' are predominantly disregarded by the dominant paradigm in social sciences (Cossarini and Vallespín 2019), [19] downplays the an inextricable link between representation,

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[17] For example McDonnell & Ondelli, (2020:7) illustrate empirically that certain populist leaders are more complex, in terms of 'readability', 'lexical' richness', lexical density and 'difficult words', than others. Or in other terms, populists are not necessarily as 'rough' and 'coarse' as one would expect (after reading certain theories).

[18] 'Passions' are casually juxtaposed to 'rationality' thus rendered unworthy of consideration. This salient divide between 'emotions' and 'reason' constitutes the main point of departure in discourses *about* populism (Eklundh 2019). Populists are placed on the 'emotional side' and anti-populists, framed as pragmatist, on the 'rational side' (Galanopoulos and Venizelos 2021). It is often argued that populist politicians us emotional language, are more emotional than 'normal' politicians while some scholars have even tried to measure populist emotions (Breeze 2019). While this reinforces the 'exceptionality' of populism and contributes further to the mystification of the phenomenon, it also downplays anti-populist, post-democratic and elitist affects (Gebhardt 2019). Interestingly, feminist approaches show how the (artificial) division between 'rationality and emotion' is gendered. Supposedly, 'politics', which belongs to the public sphere, is 'masculine' and subsequently 'rational', strong', 'pragmatic', 'emotion-free' and therefore 'good' in that it maintains order. It is the private sphere, the legitimate space in which emotions are allowed to exist. Thus, the private sphere is seen as feminized and therefore irrational-qua-affective, a state of disorder (Ahmed 2004; Gebhardt 2019; Eklundh 2020).

[19] The reason behind this is perhaps rooted to the crowd theories of the 19th Century (see Le Bon 2014 [1896]) as well as later works in the 20th (see Schumpeter 1976) which perceived mass political participation and mobilisation as something irrational, or even primitive. As Laclau (2005) argued, these approaches consisted of an epitome in the study of study social agency and social action. They structured a (salient) dichotomy between *reason* and *emotions*, *normal* and *pathological* – while they drew on medical discourse and most interestingly on its psychiatric variant, to assign to the later a pejorative connotation (2005: 34-35). These perspectives framed the crowd as a hypnotised mob; they perceived it as 'susceptible to manipulation' while 'collective action was almost equated with collective madness' (Eklundh 2019: 21).

affect and populism. This in turn, disregards the agency of 'the people' in this affective relationship.

This research studies populism in a relational way – 'as a two-way street in which leaders of political parties and social movements as well as grassroots activists all participate in the construction of, and mobilize around, a shared political project' (Dean and Maiguashca 2020). Taking relationality seriously has important implications for the study of populism in that it takes seriously those who are supposedly at the central stage of the analysis of populism – 'the people'. Dean & Maiguashca, (2020) argue, 'Mudde even goes so far as to say that what separates latent populist followers from other ''protest prone'' groups is 'their reactiveness: they generally have to be mobilized by a populist actor, rather than taking the initiative themselves' (Mudde, 2004: 548). Such an assumption downplays the role agency and desire in peoples' mobilisation. In so doing, populism is reduced to a top-down phenomenon and this paves the way to an underlying normative association between populism demagoguery and manipulation. As Ostiguy, Moffit and Panizza (2021:3-4) put it, '[s]cholars in our tradition have always been puzzled by the lack of attention, if not straight disinterest ... [as to] ...what makes those followers actually follow [populist leaders], and often over a very long period of time and with a strong sense of loyalty'.

Discourse, be it words, gestures or symbols, plays an important role in structuring socio-political reality (Stavrakakis 1999). It activates sentiments such as *ressentiment* and nostalgia, but also euphoria and hope (Demertzis 2013), and leads individuals towards identification with slogans, flags, bodily performances and, of course, political actors (Casullo 2020). In psychology, sociology, anthropology, philosophy and political science, as well as pundit repertoires, plenty of terms that belong to the general category of 'emotions' are used in a metonymic way to signify that 'internal force' that drives individuals or collectives towards social mobilisation. Especially in the aftermath of the 2008 breakdown, terms such as (popular)

'discontent', (political) 'alienation', 'indignation', 'frustration', 'antipathy' or even 'hatred' towards the political elites abound. According to Demertzis (2013:15) though, 'these terms are generic affective categories which may capture a variety of specific emotions', rather than producing a general theory of affective mobilisation suitable for political analysis in that it is restricted in the micro-level.

Sociology of emotions and psychoanalytically-driven theory point to the notion of *ressentiment* as an important category in political identification (Demertzis and Lipowatz 2008; Cramer 2016; Salmela and von Scheve 2018). Demertzis (2013:41), defines ressentiment as 'an unpleasant moral sentiment that includes chronic reliving of repressed and endless vindictiveness, hostility, envy, and indignation due to the self-perceived powerlessness of the subject expressing them'. It is onto such a terrain that populist mobilisation steps, tapping into repressed affects and emancipating them. But how does social frustration transform into political mobilisation and, finally, partisan or personalistic identification?

Although much has been written about the types of emotions that are commonly mobilised in processes of political identification, little has been said about the processes themselves. Lacanian psychoanalytic theory may enlighten us in this respect.[20] If Lacan had been a thinker of populism, he would likely have declared that 'the people do not exist!'. For him, the subject is never full or complete: it is, rather, the subject of lack. 'The lack' can never

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[20] As expected, one would wonder what psychoanalysis as a clinical practice on one's own psyche has to offer to the analysis of social and political phenomena. Freud questioned the sharpness of the dichotomy between individual and social psychology. He argued that the individual, from the beginning of her or his life, is linked to somebody else as 'a model, as an object, as a helper s an opponent' (1921:69). Individuals participate in society – they are not distinct objects from it. 'Language is a collective phenomenon, a key element of socialisation. Language is ruled by a symbolic order that is collective. It influences one's norms and ideals. Through language, the collective realm is at the roots of one's crisis of subjectivity, and it is also often in the collective that promises to solve this that crisis will emerge' (Zicman de Barros, 2020:4). In this sense individual psychology is at the same time *social* psychology. Complementarily, as Biglieri and Perelló put it '[t]he influence of the psychoanalytic intervention should not be exclusively considered as the emergence of a new field for psychological or medical work, or as a new stream for philosophical reflection or for political theory, but rather, as a very modification at the ontological level which enables one to rethink the entire field of social objectivity' (2019).

be filled, thus identity is always impossible, incomplete and unstable (Lacan, 2015 [1960-1961]). This impossibility of fullness is often experienced as *loss* of the object that fixes identity. However, constitutive failure (a marker of difference) is *psycho-socially productive* (Stavrakakis 2007) as 'the subject consists in the coherence of a force lack' (Bosteels, 2002:185). The lack coexists with the attempts to fill it, thus functioning as a locus for (temporal, partial and always unstable) identi*fications* (Laclau, 1990:60); among which is 'the people'.

In *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, Freud (1921) suggests that collective identifications are grounded in a libidinal, erotic, bond organised around the mobilisation of affects. This is what Lacanians would later refer to as 'politics of enjoyment' placing desire at the centre of subject formation (Zicman de Barros 2020). Žižek, among others, argues that 'the subject when in the thrall of a certain ideology, derives 'surplus-enjoyment' from its symbolic and imaginary identifications' (Žižek, 1989:125); because, in a way, democracy (however defined) 'is nothing else than the – impossible, but necessary – attempt to institutionalize lack (Marchart, 2005:24).

Collective identity formation is achieved though acts of performative repetition around which communities organise their enjoyments (Butler 1988). In Laclau's (2005a:27) words, 'repetition plays a multiplicity of roles in shaping social relations...it makes possible a community's adjustment to its milieu; [a social group] acquires a sense of its own identity; through the presence of a set of rituals institutional arrangements, broad images and symbols, community acquires a sense of its temporal continuity'. Butler maintained that bodies-in-protest play an important performative role in the process subjectivity creation. In Rancière's (1999) thought, protesting subjects are seen as the 'unrepresented part', laying claim to be represented. Staging a claim is an act that renders the non-part visible (a political subject so to speak). Through such affective acts, a sense of belonging ('we-ness') is constructed and the

gap of impossibility in the structure of the subject is filled with the assistance of fantasmatic and symbolic resources that mobilise enjoyment (*jouissance*). Filling the gap at the collective level, speaks to the idea of creating an ego-ideal in relation to which members of the collective community identify (Freud 1991[1921]). This is what Žižek (1995:192) refers to as the 'beatific' side of fantasy 'a stabilising dimension, which is governed by the dream of a state without disturbances'. Attention! The fantasy of fullness cannot be reduced to an 'illusion': it is a necessary precondition of socialisation, a structure for socio-political reality (Stavrakakis 1999).

Directing the discussion of affect towards populism, processes of political identification with 'the self' and against 'the other' point to what Žižek (1995:192) refers to as fantasy's second, 'destabilising dimension, whose elementary form is envy. It encompasses all that 'irritates' me about the Other''. This resonates with Lacan's (2014[1963]) idea that enjoyment/desire is rooted in the desire to desire the other's enjoyment. 'The other' – 'the political establishment', 'the political adversary, 'political class', 'the elite' in populist ressentiment, or 'the foreigner', 'the immigrant', 'the intruder' in nationalist ressentiment – is perceived to be stealing 'the people's' or 'the nation's' rightful enjoyment (cf. Miller, 1994; Žižek, 1993). Through politics and policies implemented by centres of power and institutions (e.g. austerity measures or loose immigration policies), the political caste is seen as taking away an 'original state' (a glorious past or a promised destiny) which is closely related to the fantasmatic idealisation of 'the self' and, by extension, society and community (Stavrakakis, 2007; Žižek, 1989).

Collective communities rest on horizontal bonds held among members and vertical bonds held among members and leadership. These, in turn, rest on collective narcissism (Lacan 2006): an idealisation of the self that maintains bonds among subjects (Volkan 2004). 'Prohibition', the theft of enjoyment (i.e. the inability to fully enjoy the supposed identity), is

critical for political identification, as it releases affective force potent enough to mobilise political desire towards the construction of collective affectivities (Glynos and Stavrakakis, 2008). As long as challenger actors, in this case populists, can 'convince' 'the people' that they are 'one with them' and against 'the elites' – that they can restore 'the original promise' – negative identification against 'the elites' (ressentiment) can be turned into positive identification towards the populist leader/ideal (Venizelos et al., 2019). Paraphrasing Freud's (1985) notion of the 'return of the repressed' for the purposes of political analysis, Mouffe (2005) highlighted that the suppression of political conflict, demands by post-political and technocratic governments was followed by the 'return of the political' – that is the revival of political antagonism as collective demand of representation. Such appropriation cannot be absent in the context of populism. Stavrakakis (2014) for example spoke about the 'return of the people': the underdog that demands the restoration of democracy – however defined.

Although 'populism' is commonly treated as a single category – and as a result its various manifestations are disregarded – socio-political fantasi*es* and desire*s* (the supposed original state to be restored) vary typologically.[21] They range from 'national purity', in nationalist narratives, and 'popular sovereignty' in populist ones – among others. 'In the case of populism, 'the elites' are understood to be taking away satisfaction from 'the people' and depriving them of their enjoyment of an original state (qua fantasy) closely attached to, and constitutive of, their identity' (Venizelos, 2021:6). Needless to say, there is no clear-cut

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[21] Embracing a typological perspective on populism would perhaps upset allies such as Laclau (2005a), Mouffe (2018) and Biglieri and Cadahia (2021). But such move is politically motivated. Being able to distinguish regressive from emancipatory desires (which for Laclauians would mean to focus on the ontic rather than the ontological level) opens up the space to disassociate populism from its exclusive association with the violent and extremist imaginaries of closure.

categorisation or translation of this notion in the Left/Right axis. Nationalism or populism are not properties of the right or left; similarly, closure can be observed in both.

'The distinction between idealization and sublimation—that is, the distinction between the dynamics of desire and the drive, respectively—marks the distinction between anti-democratic and democratic modes of political mobilization' (Zicman de Barros, 2020:8). Idealisation, refers to a state in which 'one is trapped in the metonymy of desire, passing from one idealized semblant of [the object of desire] that promises an impossible full enjoyment to another in an endless cycle' (Zicman de Barros, 2020:8). On the contrary, in sublimation, 'the object is just a support and not the aim of the subject. What is at stake in sublimation is the satisfaction produced by repeatedly contouring the object, without actually grasping it. As a result, in sublimation one is dealing with a kind of satisfaction from what is destined to dissatisfaction' (ibid). In the latter case then, collective subjectivities are not only in position to recognise but also to embrace impossibility.

Table 1.1.   Sublimation and idealisation

Sublimation:	Accepts impossibility of closure	Democratic affects
Idealisation:	Does not accept the impossibility of closure	Anti-democratic affects

Table based on De Barros (2020)

In anti-democratic imaginaries (often but not exclusively nativist) the inability to register identity in the realm of impossibility, disregards difference and the limits of objectivity and produces a hermetically closed notion of 'we' (Laclau and Mouffe 1985)**.** A perceived 'other' – a foreign nation, an immigrant, an intruder in general terms, that distorts the presumed normality blocks enjoyment – is perceived as responsible for the theft of enjoyment, which is thus experienced partially prohibiting the satisfaction of fully experiencing one's identity

(Žižek, 1989: 47-50). This is often evident in right-wing and nationalist narratives which often reveal a sense of nostalgia. The inability to mourn (the loss of identity, the decline of the nation etc.) blocks the psycho-dynamically transformative processes of collective subjectivity. It gives space to a manic reaction which turns into melancholy: a stuck, isolated and backward-looking emotional state which fuels resentment (Gibson-Graham 2006). Such affects are most commonly evident in radicalised versions of right-wing politics which often take the form of nostalgic and authoritarian mobilisations.

'[F]ar from being antithetical to *jouissance,* democratic subjectivity is capable of inspiring high passions' too (Stavrakakis, 2007: 278). However, democratic affects are profoundly distinct from regressive ones. 'A community that embraces an ethics of radical democracy [...] is one which traverses fantasy and, instead of being lured by idealized objects promising to cope with subjective lack, accepts this subjective lack and finds ways to enjoy it' (Zicman de Barros, 2020:8). In contrast to the blocked *jouissance* described earlier, democratic passions extend beyond 'accumulation, domination and fantasy' since enjoyment is centred around the *non-whole*. 'This is clearly the Lacanian orientation', Stavrakakis (2007:278) argues. In his words, 'Lacan directly connects the signifier of the lack in the Other – the radical, non-foundational foundation of democracy – with another (feminine) jouissance, situated on 'the side of the not-whole'. '[T]his alternative mode of jouissance', Stavrakakis argues, 'traverses the fantasy and encircles its own partiality: 'partial enjoyment involves enjoying one's lack – what one doesn't have, not what one does have' (2007: 278-9).

Table 1.2.	Democratic and anti-democratic affects	
Anti-democratic affects:	Sacrifice 'the other' who steals enjoyment	Inward-looking
Democratic affects:	Sacrifice desire	Outward-looking

Table based on Stavrakakis (2007)

1.3.3. Studying populism in power through the discursive/performative lens

The fact that populism has been mainly understood as an oppositional force does not allow space to shift the analysis from opposition to power; and when it does so, the bumpy conceptual applications are not inconsequential. The core conceptual argument of this research maintains that in order to investigate populism *in government* it is necessary to rethink the very concept of *populism* first. Having defined populism as an affectively constituted collective identity that is constructed through discursive/performative operations, the transformations of populism in power are relevant to the way populists speak and act in government, the ways people identify with them indicating whether populist ideas resonate with the public, and above all how a sense of community is constructed in a relational manner. Thus, one needs to reconsider the transformations that populism undergoes once in power by placing 'the logic of political articulation in the experience of populist governmentality, especially when it is traversed by affects and leadership' at the centre of the analysis (Biglieri & Cadahia, 2021:64).

Following this logic, Biglieri & Cadahia (2021:67) propose that 'we consider the possibility of a populist institutionalist built by ''those on the bottom'' ... One that incorporates the contentious dimension of equivalential logic to compete with those on top for these same (oligarchic or popular) state forms. In other words, the state (and institutions) become another antagonistic space in the dispute between those on the bottom and those on top'. Thus, returning back to a take (*à la* Essex School) on the minimal definition, the way to study institutionalised populism is by focusing on the societal antagonism that it pushes and the forms of political organisation for which that it advocates. *Do populists continue to construct 'the people' antagonistically against 'the elite'? Does their discourse consistently revolve around notions of popular sovereignty? Do they continue to perform on the socio-cultural low? Do they continue to mobilise the people affectively?*

These questions are key in the study of populism in government. They emanate from the conceptual core of populism and seek to examine the phenomenon's transformations in its transition from the opposition to power by securing analytical coherence rather than stretching. The focus of the analysis thus lies in populists' ability to pursue, or maintain, anti-establishment repertoires from the position of the institutions via convincingly presenting themselves as outsiders and simultaneously interpellating a collective popular subject through the effective affective conditioning. There are indeed varieties of ways to observe the repertoires of populism in power. As has been argued throughout, these do not necessarily lie either in the outcomes or in the policies of populists but rather in the variety of performative operations, often thought as 'flaunting the low', that are evident in populist actors' discourse. These comprises rhetoric as well as their general habitus, their campaigning methods and strategies embedded in technologies of diffusion that can be both physical and digital.

That we have criticised existing accounts and their embedded analytical discrepancies does not resolve the contradictions of populism in power. As Biglieri (2021:8) argues, 'there is an ineradicable gap between the moment of the populist rupture and the moment of its institutionalisation': 'On the one hand, the moment of the irruption of populism implies an anti-status quo or anti-institutional impulse that has to deal with a set of sedimented institutions and practices; on the other hand, populisms incarnate [...] a counter-hegemonic will that attempts to create a new set of institutions (ibid.:9).

Populist rupture is by definition an 'exceptional moment' while the process of institutionalisation is by definition a process of normalisation (cf. Kalyvas, 2008). This tension however is of a productive nature. Institutional sedimentation cannot exhaustively absorb and therefore dissolve populist rupture, and vice-versa, populism cannot be totally absorbed by the process of institutionalisation. There will always be 'a loss or remainder' (Biglieri, 2021:9); or in other words, a surplus of meaning, a gap in either structure, or an 'incessant slipping or

sliding of demands for future articulations in different signifying chains'. Nothing can guarantee that demands, absorbed and dormant, will not be reactivated with renewed meanings. The same concerns the state and populists in government who should also be considered as open structures, subjects to be disputed and contested.

The notion of 'demands' plays a fundamental role in Laclau's (2005a) understanding of populism, in that it weaves together heterogeneous sectors in the process of collective identity formation. Their satisfaction, their absorption by the institutions or not, once populism occupies the state may be determinant as to the fade of populist identification. As such the loss of enthusiasm, as a result of politico-affective disillusionment, always lies at the core of decaying populist mobilisations.

1.4. Conclusion

Having reviewed and taxonomised contemporary literature on populism, this chapter identified two overarching general categories with respect to populism in power. First, the outcome-oriented approach, which is constituted by two camps: a) those who think that the relationship between populists and power is absolutely impossible thus their analysis stops there and, b) those who foresee that the populists' fade in government is to turn into a mainstream party or disappear from the political scene. Second, the policy-oriented approach, which is also constituted by two camps: (first) those who argue that populists in government are not capable of drafting, legislating, and implementing policy, and (second), those who argue that they can succeed in doing so. The chapter has argued that the aforementioned approaches distract the study of populism from its conceptual core, which revolves around the notions of *people-centrism* and *anti-elitism,* risking conflation of populism with an avalanche of phenomena that resemble – but are distinct from – populism. Studying populism in power through the lens of outcomes leaves two possibilities: first, that populism cannot be a feature of government or,

second, that the only outcome of populism in government is its transformation into an authoritarian force. Studying populism through the lens of policy risks reducing populism to demagogic political actors who do not keep their electoral promises or irresponsible actors who are not fully competent to govern. Additionally, the reducing populism to a particular type of policy goes against the very fundamentals of populism research, which define the *phenomenon* as a particular political logic that is defined by its rhetorical tropes and can be combined with an array of ideologies. Oddly, the features attributed to populism are neither constitutive nor sufficient to define the phenomenon. A shallow empirical analysis would also point that they are not even isolated to populism but also non-populist and even anti-populist actors. Such analytical discrepancy is rooted in the conventionally anti-populist point of departure for any mainstream discussion about populism.

To overcome these limitations, this chapter proposed rethinking the notion of populism, by thinking of populism *in power*. Building on the discursive and performative canon, this Chapter put emphasis on the notions of discourse, performativity and emotions in constructing a collective identity in the name of and for the people and *against* the elite. Such a take, which redirects the discussion back to the analytical core of the concept, allows for a flexible yet rigorous conceptualisation of populism in government by disconnecting it from any essentialist connotations attached to particular sets of outcomes and Eurocentric biases. The questions to ask then, when studying populists in government, is whether populists continue to push for an antagonism between those 'at the bottom' and 'those at the top' while interpellating affectively invested popular subjectivities and mobilising the masses on their side.

Chapter 2

Research methods

2.1. Introduction

This chapter outlines the research design adopted strategy and the methods followed in order to study *if* and *how* populism, concerning the cases of SYRIZA (2012-2015/2015-2019) and Donald Trump (2015-2016/2017-2020), changed when moved from opposition to power. The chapter is divided in two parts: the first part presents the case selection and comparative logic that this thesis follows. It provides thick descriptions of the two cases and justifies the case selection (Geertz 1973). Focusing on their profound differences – but also similarities – between the left-wing populist party SYRIZA and the right-wing populist leadership of Donald Trump it stresses the most-different research type of comparison that is applied (Przeworski and Teune 1970: 32-39). The study initially considers the two cases as standalone cases and applies a within-case comparison in a cross-time (before/after) manner in order to control for national/structural variables; at a second stage it applies a cross-case comparison by considering the similarities and differences of the individual cases.

The second part of the chapter presents the research methods and data collection. Following a triangulation strategy (Salkind 2010), this study employs mixed methods and conducts discourse analysis on political leaders' speeches, visual analysis on campaigning material such as posters and videos, interviews with activists and participant observation conducted in protest events and 'community' ceremonies in a comparative fashion. The abovementioned methods concern both the supply side of political discourse by populist actors

in order to investigate if and how it changes, as well as the demand side for populist discourse, to investigate the resonance of the populist discourse from the side of 'the people'.

2.2. Research design and case selection: SYRIZA (2012-2015/2015-2019) and Donald Trump (2015-2016/2017-2020)

This section provides thick descriptions of the cases of SYRIZA and Donald Trump and highlights their profound heterogeneity (e.g. with respect to their ideology, organisational structure, the political systems and national frameworks within which they emerged and operated). Against this background of differences, the two cases have achieved a similar outcome – that is, to achieve power. Furthermore, this section highlights 'unexpected' commonalities between the two cases, which are hitherto profoundly neglected in political science research. The nature of their comparative characteristics resonates with the most-different research design which this study adopts (Przeworski and Teune 1970: 32-39).

To begin with, SYRIZA, or the Coalition of the Radical Left, as its acronym stands for, emerged in the midst of a severe economic crisis with severe social implications that brought the two-party system into collapse. Due to the promise the party put forward, it attracted the attention of leftist activists, 'common citizens', journalists, and commentators. Due to its rapid and multilevel transformations, SYRIZA also attracted the attention of political party scholars (Katsourides 2016; Spourdalakis 2014; Vittori 2019). Balampanides accurately captures the phenomenon of SYRIZA as:

> 'a party that emerged all of a sudden, unexpectedly, mobilised socio-political emotions and now seems to be establishing itself as an important actor institutional power, leaving its footprint in its very own era...most importantly, it has created awkwardness for experts, public commentators, who could not place the party and understand it within the hitherto known analytical-explanatory categories' (2019:9)

SYRIZA belongs to a contemporary wave of radical left politics that emerged in the aftermath of the Great Recession of 2008 and through the contentious repertoires of the anti-austerity protests and the indignation of the square movements, like in Spain (see Antentas 2015). The radical left party has its roots in the Global Justice Movement and the Eurocommunist current, but at the same time it breaks with this tradition (Eleftheriou 2019). The party is situated in a specific politico-historical conjuncture in the lifetime of 'the left'. SYRIZA (2012 – 2015) is located in the intersection between the 'radical left' (March 2011) and 'populism' (see Laclau 1977, 2005; Mouffe 2019). What distinguished contemporary left populism from classic left politics was its aspiration to contest and achieve power. 'New left populism' (Kioupkiolis and Katsambekis 2019) attempted to *subvert* rather than abandon the political arena, contesting the status quo and ultimately governing. New left populism sought to change its political vocabulary, its aesthetic and style beyond the orthodox left and beyond centre-left. It '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 centre' (Agustín and Briziarelli 2018: 4). Notwithstanding the multiplicity of possible angles though which the case of SYRIZA can be studied, this research chooses to analyse the *populist* side of SYRIZA, which it considers a paradigmatic case of *left-wing populism* (Stavrakakis and Katsambekis 2014a)*,* in that it has arguably contributed to its dynamic emergence to prominence reshuffling the political agenda in Greece, drawing immense social and expert attention to it.

On 25 January 2015, Alexis Tsipras, who was often portrayed as a danger to the European establishment (see Spiegel 2012; Traynor 2015), sworn in as Prime Minister of the Hellenic Republic and became the first leader of the Radical Left 'party family' to assume power in the aftermath of the financial crash and the political mobilisation that followed. Two

seats short of forming a majority government (149/151), Alexis Tsipras struck a deal overnight with the populist nativist right wing party, ANEL (*Ανεξάρτητοι Έλληνες*, Independent Greeks). This seemingly paradoxical partnership between a radical left and a radical right party became subject to unprecedented public discussion and political analysis. Against a background of a collapsing political establishment, two 'outsiders' moved from the fringes of the party system to the main stage. This seemingly odd partnership between the radical left SYRIZA and the nativist right ANEL was not odd. Their populist antagonistic rupture against the collapsing political establishment and their promise to restore popular sovereignty functioned as a coalition determinant.[22] 'Paradoxically', this peculiar coalition was proven more durable than expected and more long-lasting than the post-democratic and post-ideological administrations which governed between 2010 – 2015 (Lamprinou 2019).

On the other side of the Atlantic, Donald Trump thrived in the right-wing political ecosystem that the party's establishment had fed over the past decades, and which was gradually taking an anti-systemic shift echoing the increasing polarisation in the country (Pierson 2017). The diffusion and normalisation of the ideals of the Alt-right relied not so much on the organisational and numerical dynamics of grassroots activism – such as the Tea Party whose role is not to be discounted; but, in the 'movement's' growing media organs and online presence (Neiwert 2017).

In addition to the political demands that are conventionally thought as part of the traditional (but also radical) right-wing agenda, it is also important to note that Donald Trump's discourse rendered visible elements which exended beyond the 'expected' paradigm of the right. The canditate's rhetoric carried profound elements of economic nationalism manifested

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[22] Political competition in crisis-ridden Greece mainly took place not on the Left/Right axis but on a top/down axis that demarcated those parties that stood in favour of the memoranda and the subsequent austerity policies and those parties that stood against (Vasilopoulou & Halikiopoulou, 2013). This cleavage was also often referred to as the populism/anti-populism cleavage by relevant literature (Nikisianis et al., 2019).

in a protectionist agenda that targeted 'the blue-collar worker', the promise to decrease unemployment, reduce taxes, re-generate the industry and re-open factories. This agenda became synonymous with 'Mak(ing) America Great Again', restoring its wealth and glory. But the rhetoric and the latent political proposals resembled little of the policy that the Republican Party had been pushing for in the last three or four decades (Marsden 2019: 91). Nothwistanding the profoundly white, male, older, Christian and more affluent background of the Trump vote, the high percentage of female vote (51%) and, to a lesser degree, the significant minority of immigrant-background and Latino vote, must not be neglected.

Donald Trump led an outsider campaign which 'splintered the conventional left-right axis' (Ostiguy and Roberts 2016) and structured his rhetoric and style along a vertical, top-down axis pitting the 'people below' agaisnt the 'people above' (Lamont, Park, and Ayala-Hurtado 2017) - the American common people who are forgotten against the political and cultural elites that laboured for corrupting common values (cf. Judis, 2016). A reseach conducted by the libertarian think-tank CATO Institute shows that Trump's voters were not to be percevied as a homegenous bloc with similar anxieties, concerns and motivations. On the contrary his electorate was composed of 'Staunch Conservatives' (31% - they are steadfast fiscal cosnervatives who embrace moral traditionalism and have a moderately nativist conception of American identity and approach to immigration); Free-Marketeers (25% - they are pro-small government, fiscally conservative, pro-free trade, and moderately socially liberal); 'American Preservationists' (20% - they are economically progressive, believe that the system is rigged, they are nativist and have an ethnocultural view conception of American identity); 'Anti-Elites' (19% - often but not exclusively comprised of libertarians, but most commonly maintain a shared contempt against the establishment); and 'the Disengaged' (5% - they are discribed as being detached from and skeptical of politics, institutions and the elites) (Elkins 2017). Then-candidate Donald Trump *de-* and *re*-aligned the electoral body and had

shaken-up the traditional right constituency, constructing an electoral constellation comprising of the pro-market and pro-free trade right ('the elite' of the party) but also its grasroots, anti-establishment and nativist components. 'In doing so, Trump demonstrated the folly of believing that there is a single cohesive conservative movement in the United States, as opposed to separate—not highly correlated, and perhaps unrelated—currents of market fundamentalism and sociocultural nativism' (Roberts & Ostiguy, 2016:28).[23]

On November 8, 2016, Donald Trump was elected the 45th president of the United States of America. His victory against Hillary Clinton was a surprise to experts against a background of political analysts' predictions, leaving the political establishment (as well as the cosmopolitan urban class) speechless. Donald Trump was elected as a political outsider and not a beltway[24] politician – and sought to maintain such profile while in government. His provocative and antagonistic style was characteristic of his policy. His tweeting style became a symbol of his presidency. He circumvented traditional media in order to communicate directly to his followers, through brush rhetoric, memes and personal attacks. He tweeted on an average of five times a day during his first year in the White House and his tweets set the daily media agenda in the country (White 2019).

The leaderships of Alexis Tsipras and Donald Trump constitute two paradigmatic cases of contemporary populism in a number of respects. Against theoretical expectations, which had long perceived populism as a feature of the opposition alone, not only they emerged to prominence, but they also gained power. Whereas until this point populist actors' institutional achievements were restricted to gaining power at the regional/state level, occupying seats in

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[23] Interestingly, taking a historical and comparative perspective, the Roberts and Ostiguy argue that '[t]he bundling of these strands within a single party—the *de facto* political legacy of Nixon's "Southern Strategy"—is a politically contingent alignment, not one formed on ideological imperatives' (ibid.)

[24] Literally, 'the Beltway' refers to a circumferential highway that encircles Washington, D.C. It is a term commonly employed as a metonym for federal government insiders, those 'inside the beltway' (The Wall Street Journal 2017*)*.

their national parliaments and senates, or at best serving as minor coalition-partners, both SYRIZA and Donald Trump achieved power at the national level. Further exceeding theoretical expectations arguing that populists do not last in government, both cases maintained their position in power for a whole term in office in spite of institutional constraints that impeded their plans to implement their promises (e.g. to cancel austerity in Greece or build the wall in the U.S.) as well as immense pressure by external actors (e.g. the troika in Greece and the global community and even the very Republican Party in the U.S.).

Against the avalanche of ideological, organisational and contextual differences that define each actor, one should neglect their common stylistic performativity which led scholars to overwhelmingly define them as populist (for SYRIZA see Stavrakakis and Katsambekis 2014; Venizelos 2020; for Trump see Oliver 2016; Lowndes 2017; Savage 2019). In terms of political style (Ostiguy et al. 2021b), Tsipras appears as the 'cool guy', without a tie, wearing a scuba diving watch, and poor English language skills.[25] On the other side, Trump's spontaneous, 'amateurish yet authentic style' (Enli 2017: 54) demonstrated by political incorrectness, and ignorance on general knowledge define a political actor situated on the 'low' rather than the 'high' in which conventional 'elitist' politicians are situated (Ostiguy and Roberts 2016).[26]

Beyond the similarities that the two political actors present in terms of 'scientific' criteria (i.e. the notion 'populism' as a *concept*), SYRIZA and Donald Trump were referred to as populists by adversaries in order to be denounced as dangerous (populism as a *descriptor*) (cf. de Cleen, Glynos, and Mondon 2018). As the CNBC cites, 'at first glance, the two politicians seem worlds apart: firebrand businessman turned political upstart U.S. President

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[25] See Chapter 4 for an extensive account of 'low' style traits from other SYRIZA members.
[26] Similarly, there is a significant number of people who surrounded Donald Trump and fit the definition of populism, such as Sarah Pallin, and others who certainly do not fit that definition, such as such as Michael Pence.

Donald Trump, and left-wing Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, elected in 2015 to turn his country's troubled, debt-ridden economy around… [however] the trajectories of both politicians are more similar than one might think…this goes back to populism' (Crabtree 2017). To be sure, the CNBC uses 'populism' as a pejorative.

While the two cases present common stylistic characteristics, they also triggered common reactions. Both SYRIZA and Trump met the aversion of anti-populist politicians, experts and commentators. For example, the *U.S. News* warned that 'the solutions proposed by the likes of Donald Trump and Alexis Tsipras come with a hefty price tag' (Rohac and Zilinsky 2015). Throughout the history of Greek and U.S politics, third-party candidates who challenged the two-party dominance, have been dismissed as spoilers, irresponsible, lunatics and above all populists (Judis 2016; Stavrakakis 2019).

The contemporary picture is not different. Major politico-economic journals maintained that 'Alexis Tsipras must be stopped' (Traynor 2015). *Der Spiegel* (2012*)* for example labelled Tsipras amongst 'Europe's 10 most dangerous politicians' placing him next to Marine Le Pen, Viktor Orbán and Geert Wilders. Leading EU officials, such as Eurogroup's president (2013-2018) Jeroen Dijsselbloem and the German Finance Minister (2009-2017) Wolfgang Schäuble framed SYRIZA as a threat to Europe and democracy – and even warned the Greeks about the potential consequences of their future choice (BBC 2014; Financial Times 2017). On the other side of the Atlantic, Trump was framed as 'erratic' (McCarthy 2019), 'peculiar, irrational and self-destructive' (Smith 2019), a 'risk to national security' (Indivisible 2019) while supporters are occasionally presented as 'ignorant', 'uneducated' (see Thompson 2016). Trump's victory reactivated ' ''elite anxiety about the consequences of political ignorance'', something far from new to the extent that such fears of democracy degenerating into [...] ''rule by the ignorant, who will use their power to do the dumbest things'' ' (Galanopoulos and Stavrakakis 2019:1). Anti-populist reactions against populists give further incentives to study the two cases. While

there could be some difficulty in placing all populisms in the same basket from the scientific point of view, pundit anti-populist discourse paves the way for these counterintuitive comparisons to become real.

Table 2.1. Similarities between SYRIZA and Donald Trump

DIMENSION	SYRIZA	Donald Trump
Organisational structure	Populist leadership (political party)	Populist leadership (political party)
Political opportunity structure	Personal leadership emerged within a predominantly non-populist party	Personal leadership emerged within a predominantly non-populist party
Identity Characteristics	Emerged and thrived as a result of crisis (economic, social, representational)	Emerged and thrived as a result of crisis (mostly representational and in terms of values, but also economic and).
	Mobilised the politically disaffected	Mobilised the politically disaffected
	Extended its appeal beyond its constituency	Extended its appeal beyond its constituency
Response	Subject to anti-populist backlash, both domestic and international	Subject to anti-populist backlash, both domestic and international
Characteristics in power	Maintained power, against theoretical predictions	Maintained power, against theoretical predictions
Theoretical implications	Remained populist, against theoretical predictions	Remained populist, against theoretical predictions
Historical legacy	Part of a long-standing populist tradition in Greek politics (Greek populism)	Part of a long-standing populist tradition in American politics (American populism)

Beyond the commonalities outlined above, the two actors present an array of dissimilar characteristics. To begin with, the institutional, economic and historical frameworks in Greece and the U.S. seem to share little among one another. The U.S. has a presidential system, while

Greece a parliamentary one. Each country has distinct legislative procedures and different institutional legacies.

Populism, *in power*, is difficult to achieve in American democracy due to its Madisonian system. 'Compare to most other democracies, [...] the U.S. system offers much less opportunity for organised populist *parties* [...]' (Lee 2020: 370). The federalist constitution, a result of compromises but also explicitly designed to prevent a singularity of power was designed to block anti-executive sentiment and *ressentiment* towards central power – evident in the years that followed the American revolution. It 'divides governance between three branches, breaks up representation over space and time through staggered elections and overlapping electoral units, divides sovereignty between the national government and the subnational states, and dilutes popular political expression into two great parties. Thus there are no sharply defined "populist" parties, nor the ready possibility of caesarist control of the national political system (Lowndes 2021:119). Although the U.S. electoral system limits prospects for populist *parties*, it offers 'far more opportunity for populist *candidacies'* (Lee 2020: 370). Taking into consideration the unpopularity of major parties and the representational gap their politics leaves behind (see Frank 2005; 2017), structural constraints are increasingly turning into opportunities for U.S. populists (cf. Tarrow 1996; Mair 2013).

The Greek political system on the other hand, is founded on a parliamentary type of democracy composed of several parties that constitute a pluralistic democracy (Mavrogordatos 1984). The last century saw a multiplicity of political parties appearing, dissolving and emerging. In the dawn of last century, conflict was organised between republicans and royalists; the civil war in the middle of the century found nationalists and communists on opposing sides (Clogg 1987); since its transition to democracy in 1974, Greece was mainly defined as a two-party system (Pappas 2014). Mass parties, like PASOK and New Democracy, were until recently the main manifestations of political identification and participation. One

observes a highly fragmented political space, especially on the left of the spectrum (Lyrintzis 1990).

Such profound structural differences traditionally raise concerns regarding the viability of comparisons. The impact 'national variables' have on political mobilisation have been at the heart of mainstream political and social science research. Institutional settings may indeed encourage or discourage socio-political mobilisation and change (Kitschelt 1986;Tarrow 1989;Tarrow 1996; Kriesi et al. 1995). However, such concerns may restrain research in inflexible paradigms, impeding its ability to capture and explain social change (Giugni 2009). Nonetheless, it is against such a supposedly rigid structural background that populism in Greece and the U.S. emerged to prominence, achieved power and performed in government. Importantly, as it was argued in Chapter 1, populism is not defined by 'outcomes' produced or 'contents' articulated by actors named as 'populist' but rather by the affectual performativity that interpellates collective subjectivities in the name of 'the people' and against 'the elite'. Thus, the core focus regarding populism in government does not lie in whether movements and parties face open or closed institutional settings, but rather on the extent to which their claims resonate with the public ultimately mobilising it, electorally or in terms of collective action. Whether institutional procedures, elite-coalitions, elite-resistance and so forth (see Best and Higley 2018), enable or block populists from passing legislation and implementing policies or not is secondary. This is again because populism is not defined by its ability to implement policy or the impact it has on democracy.

Nevertheless, one needs not to neglect the rich histories of populist mobilisations in the two countries. According to historian Michael Kazin suggests that populism constitutes 'one vital way in which Americans have argued about politics' (Kazin 1995: 1, see also Goodwyn 1978; Sanders 1999; McMath 1993). On the one hand, (American) 'populism has been at the heart of iterated efforts to reconstitute the people and democracy from the revolutionary period

through today (Grattan 2016: 11). Progressive populist movements date back to the early 1890s when the Kansas Farmers Alliance and the Knights of Labour joint forces to form the People's Party (Postel 2009). They advocated for the nationalisation of the railroad and against the 'the money kings of Wall Street' (Hofstadter 1969: 19), ''money power'' and ''plutocracy'' (Judis 2016: 23). On the right of the spectrum, Father Charles Coughlin in the 1930s is perceived by some as a case of 'Catholic populism' and the four-time serving Governor of Alabama George Wallace in the 1960s marks an epitome in the conservative and racist rebranding of American populism (Lesher 1994). As such, Donald Trump does not constitute a political anomaly of type, but he rather fits well into the history of American democracy (Eiermann 2016). He does, however, represent an anomaly in terms of (electoral) success.

Populism constitutes a reactivating feature in Greek politics too; to the extent, for Pappas, 'the Greek case offers near laboratory conditions for studying all possible facets and successive phases of populist development' (2014:6). While PASOK, under the leadership of Andreas Papandreou in the 1980s, has been described as an archetypal case of populism (see Lyrintzis 1987; Pappas 2003; Stavrakakis and Katsambekis 2019), populism has often jumped on the right of the political spectrum as well (Stavrakakis and Katsambekis 2019). The centrality of populism in Greek politics is often – and not unproblematically – ascribed to some sort of essence of 'cultural dualism' splitting society between parochialism and modernisation (Diamandouros 2000) as well as to the very characteristics of the parliamentary democracy (Pappas 2014).

A second crucial difference between the two cases is their organisational structure. SYRIZA is a *party* (once a coalition of parties), while in the case of Donald Trump one can speak of a personal candidacy or leadership. Beneath the surface, the picture is, however, more complicated. We are not exactly dealing with a *party*, on the one hand, and a *leader,* on the other hand, but rather with two *populist leaderships* which arose within non-populist parties

and had gradually gained the support of their intra and extra-party audience (Eleftheriou 2019; Veremis 2019). On the one hand, Alexis Tsipras represented and led one of the many (indeed the biggest) ideological currents within the highly heterogeneous SYRIZA. Ambitious Tsipras emerged gradually to contest against other fractions for the party's leadership (see Balampanides 2015; 2019). Similarly, and perhaps even more sharply, Donald Trump did not – at least until the middle of his first term in office – represent almost any of the core values of 'the Great Old Party' (GOP). He was rather perceived as an outsider (see Shanahan 2019). It is evident that, initially at least, both Alexis Tsipras and Donald Trump did not represent the whole of their parties but rather particular fractions that had contingently seized the political opportunity during a specific conjuncture and, with the support of extra-party voters, gained advantage (Skocpol and Williamson 2016; Venizelos 2020). In this sense, one cannot speak of SYRIZA or the Republicans as *homogeneously populist parties* but of *populist leaderships* within these parties.

The third concern is related to the different ideological orientation of the two cases, as SYRIZA is located on the left and Donald Trump on the right of the spectrum. The two actors put forward highly contrasting socio-political imaginaries. SYRIZA is often characterised as a case of egalitarian, democratic or inclusionary populism (see Stavrakakis and Katsambekis 2014; Venizelos 2020) while Donald Trump's case is presented as one of authoritarian, regressive, and exclusionary populism (see Ostiguy and Roberts 2016; Mudde 2018; Norris and Inglehart 2019). However, the gradually increasing comparative research between left and right populisms indicates that ideological differences do not impede comparisons across the spectrum (see Ivaldi, Lanzone, and Woods 2017; March 2017; Rooduijn and Akkerman 2017). On the contrary, cross-ideological comparisons indicate that populists' 'host-ideology' plays a significant role in the type of collective socio-political visions they articulate, which have

distinct impact on democracy (De Cleen, Glynos, and Mondon 2021; Galanopoulos and Venizelos 2021; March 2011).

The three key differences reviewed above, highlight the radically contrasting nature of the two cases comprised in this study. However, the two cases are not considered in terms of the dimensions that divide them, but in terms of the dimension that unites them – that is the concept of populism. The concept of populism should be considered as strong and analytically useful to be employed in comparative analysis.[27] Giovanni Sartori's (1970) notion of 'the ladder of abstraction' is a particular heuristic when comparing dissimilar cases. At the lower level of abstraction, concepts have more properties. Features such as their organisational dynamics (leader-centrism, movement-based, media-driven), ideological variant (left, right, centrist) and other morphological differences (patriotic, elitist) are context and case-related. These characteristics can be can be (1) present in some populist phenomena and absent from certain others; and (2) are not exclusive to populism alone. Thus, at the lower level of abstraction 'concepts have higher intension and lower extension' (van Kessel 2014: 111). At the higher level of abstraction, the concept has 'low intension and a high extension' and it can be applied to many more cases, because there are fewer properties (ibid.). At the higher level of abstraction, there are fewer properties. 'Accompanying or varying properties' that are context specific are excluded and a core basis (*a constant*) that is omnipresent in all diverse manifestations of populism is isolated (cf. Collier and Gerring 2009). This refers to the two features that are omnipresent in populist phenomena, regardless of their organisational features, ideological variants and regional specificities (which located on the lower level of abstraction)

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[27] Collier (1993) argued that 'comparativists do not devote enough attention to thinking through how well or poorly concepts are serving them and therefore may have insufficient ground for knowing whether they are making appropriate choices in the effort to achieve theoretical parsimony' (:113). Putting emphasis on the operational consensus achieved among scholars of populism – extracting a core of two minimal criteria for the definition of populism – Collier's concern is resolved with a minimal definition *a la* Sartori.

which is in tern in line with Sartori's (1984) notion of the 'minimal definitions'.[28] These considerations secure 'populism' from concept-stretching and turn it into 'a concept that travels' geographically, across the spectrum while it also allow it to capture its distinct organisational typologies (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2013, 2018).

Table 2.2.   Differences between SYRIZA and Donald Trump

	SYRIZA	Donald Trump
Institutional framework	Parliamentary System	Presidential System
Ideology	Left	Right
Organisational structure	Political party	Personal leadership
World system position	Semi-peripheral country	Core country

The study of such highly heterogeneous cases rests on a most-different research design system. Comparative literature stresses that a small-N research such as the present one, 'usually does not permit strong cross-case tests analysis' (Goertz and Mahoney 2012: 87) for it requires cases to be highly similar among each other (King, Keohane, and Verba 1994). However, as the cases of SYRIZA and Donald Trump highlight as well, it is generally accepted that it is 'extremely difficult to find two cases that resemble each other in every respect but one, as controlled comparison requires' (George and Bennett 2005). As Goertz and Mahoney (2012: 87) maintain 'better results can be obtained from a within-case strategy'. Following Lieberson (1991) then, the study of SYRIZA and Donald Trump applies, at a first stage, internal (within-case) comparisons in a before-after manner and, at a second stage, a cross-case comparison (see also

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[28] This is not to say that 'ideology', 'organisational structure', 'type of leadership' and so on are irrelevant for the study of populism. On the contrary, numerous researchers have studied these features offering crucial findings. What should be clarified is that those characteristics are adjutant to and not *defining* of populism.

Collier, David 1993:112). This two-step comparative strategy goes in line with Campbell's (1975) argument that the case study serves as the basis for most comparative research. More specifically, '[w]ithin-case analysis can be used initially to develop a stand-alone description of each case and then to conduct a cross-case comparison to identify what each case has in common, as well as what attributes about each case are unique' (Paterson 2009).

Following Skocpol and Somers (1980), the two cases are initially approached individually, and in-depth, in order to achieve rich contextualisation as stand-alone cases. Within-case comparisons are concerned with potential changes that take place over the course of time. In historical institutionalist perspectives (but not only), the researcher identifies a moment – an event such as elections – which interferes with the order of things, disrupts continuity or serve as a conjuncture that could generate changes in the trajectory of the case under study (Goertz and Mahoney 2012).[29] In our study of the transitions of populists from the opposition to government, the event/moment is 'elections'. Hence the periods considered are those in 'opposition/campaigns' on the one hand and on the other the period 'during government'. Thus, the first stand-alone comparison concerns with the case of SYRIZA is applied the party's *pre-government phase* (2012- 2015) and the *in-government phase* (2015- 2019). This comparison unfolds in two parts: Chapter 3 (SYRIZA in opposition) and Chapter 4 (SYRIZA in power). The second standalone comparison concerns the case of Donald Trump in the U.S, looking first at the *pre-government period* (June 2015 - June 2016) and second at the *in-government period* (2016 – 2020). This comparison unfolds in two empirical chapters: Chapter 5 ('Make America Great Again!': Donald Trump and the promise to 'the forgotten') and Chapter 6 ('Keep America Great': Trump in Power). Moving to the second stage of

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[29] In other words, the researcher achieves 'control' 'by dividing a single longitudinal case into two sub-cases' which translates into 'a before-after' comparison (George and Bennett 2005: 166). Indeed, even in the occasion of a within-case comparison, certain 'controlled' elements upon which the focus lies are required to be set in order to observe how the cases and the units of analysis change.

comparisons, Chapter 7 applies a cross-case analysis by bringing into discussion the similarities and differences with respect to changes that the populist performativity (as defined in Chapter 1) of SYRIZA and Trump respectively underwent in their transition the opposition to power. This paired comparison enables for the examination of common discursive repertoires of collective identity in diverging settings and helps strengthen and generalise the theory and key arguments beyond single-country evidence. The figure below illustrates the steps followed in order to apply the comparison.
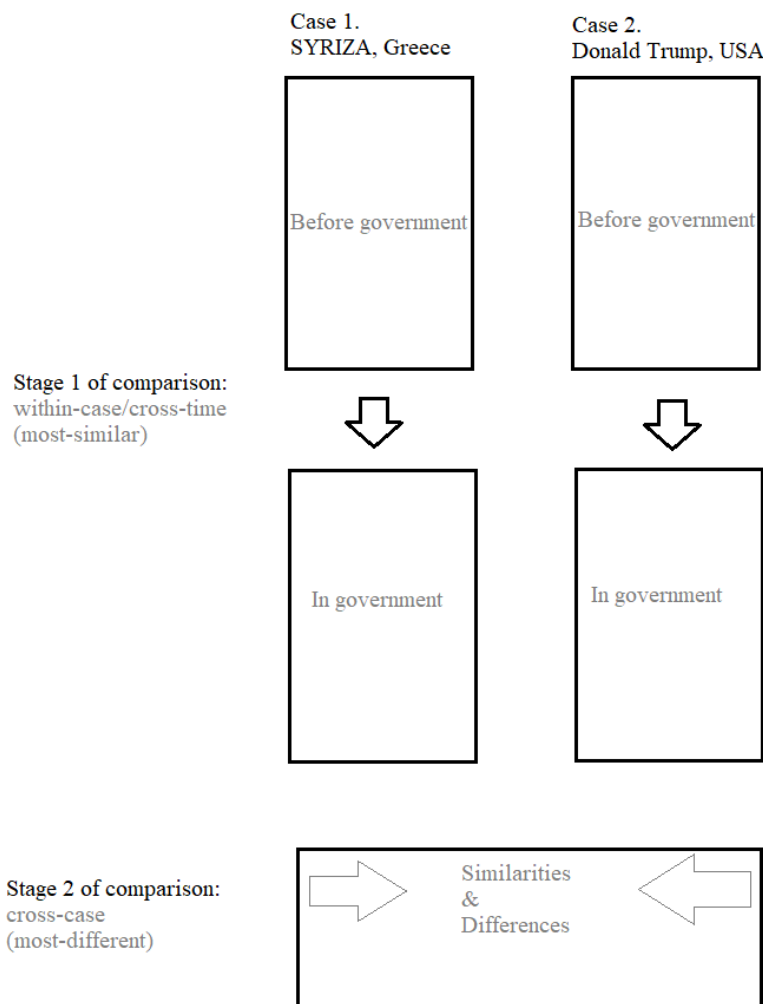
Figure 2.1: Comparative strategy. This figure illustrates graphically the steps of comparison. First the cases are approached as standalone cases and the comparison is applied in a within-case, before-after, manner. At the second stage, I approach the two cases in terms of the similarities and differences found in the two cases.

2.3 Triangulated research methods

Although scholarship disagrees on the genus of populism (strategy, ideology, discourse) (Pappas 2016), it is generally evident that empirical data for the study of such phenomena are generated from the political actors' communication (de Vreese et al. 2018): their rhetoric, the campaigning material, the messages they send out via social media. This is generally in line with the Essex School's discursive approach, whose understanding of 'discourse' extends beyond the narrow 'words' or 'rhetoric'. For this reason, this research extends its understanding of discourse beyond 'textual data' and includes visual data, interviews and ethnographic methods. In this respect, this research employs and triangulates mixed methods. Each of these methods will be discussed in brief below. Overall, this study has conducted empirical analysis on 66 rhetorical data units, 69 visual data units, 11 ethnographic data units and has also conducted a total of 56 interviews. On table 3 below, one can find a summary of the primary data collected. For a detailed outline of primary data collection please see Appendix 1.

Table 2.3. Summary of primary data collection

Data Type	Total
Rhetoric	66
Visual	69
Interviews	56
Ethnographic	11

In line with the core aims and questions of this research, data triangulation is employed in order to capture both the supply side of populist discourse (how populists frame the people and the

elite) and the demand side of populism (how 'the people' respond to and resonate with populist discourse, emotions etc). Table 4 below it is indicated how each method employed corresponds with the core empirical aims to study the supply and demand side of political communication.

Table 2.4.	Research methods' correspondence with empirical analysis
Focus	Data type
'Supply side' of political communication (how populists speak)	Rhetoric, Visual, interviews, ethnographic research
'Demand side' of populism (how 'the people' respond)	Interviews, ethnographic research

Political discourse is no longer centralised; especially concerning *who* articulates populist messages, *where* and *how*. As Moffitt puts it, 'we are no longer dealing with the romantic notion of the populist speaking directly to 'the people' from the soapbox' 2016:3). There are multiple arenas and sources within which discourse is diffused. This reinforces the argument for method triangulation while it also highlights the necessity to collect data from various venues. Taking into consideration Jasper and Duyvendak's (2015:15) suggestions, we must assume that political performance also varies in relation to the arena it takes place. 'The degree to which arenas are institutionalised with bureaucratic rules and legal recognition, as opposed to informal traditions and expectations', affects the performative dynamics of populists. The main selection criterion is the *accessibility* of discourses to the wider part of the population.[30] Thus, parliamentary committees, intra-ministerial meetings and other discourses that are not widely followed by the general public are not of interest. The style of political discourse is not expected to be the same in all political arenas thus to grasp potential variation, this study does

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[30] That is to say that arenas such as parliamentary committees, intra-ministerial meetings and workings which are shielded from the public, and nevertheless are of technocratic nature, are not to be considered.

includes discourses, performances and data from (1) *institutional arenas* (domestic bodies such as the parliament and press conferences and international bodies such as international congresses and the United Nations; and (2) *public arenas* (defined as non-institutional spaces which include televised statements and appearances as well as social media, articles written in newspapers); and 3) *campaigning arenas* (rallies, party manifestos, campaigning material such as posters and videos).

Table 2.5: Arena triangulation

Arenas	Description	Data type
Institutional/formal	Congresses, official statements	Speech, text, visual
Extra-institutional/informal	Campaigns, rallies, public appearances	Speech, text, visual

All methods employed systematically analyse people-centrism and anti-elitism. In order to determine the content of the collective subject and its enemy embedded in the *political orientation* of populism, this research draws on Dani Filc's (2010) three dimensions which determine the positionality of a political phenomenon on the Left/Right axis (see also Bobbio 1996). These include the *material*, *political* and *symbolic* dimensions. The material dimension includes references to material or economic identities such as workers, unemployed, pensioners, the (economically) weak, as well as references to the small-to-medium-sized businesses. The political dimension is comprised of references to groups, classes, identities or demands that are articulated as being included or excluded from democratic, political, social, spheres of participation and contestation. The symbolic dimension is slightly more complicated as it refers to values articulated on a cultural axis such as boundaries, community, identity.

In order to determine the *'nature' of populism,* the research utilises two of the most widely used analytical mechanisms of Frame Theory. First, the *diagnostic frame* which revolves around the *identification and construction of the issue/problem.* Second, the *prognostic frame,* which revolves around the proposed solution to the detected problem (Snow and Benford 1988). The two frames can be combined also with the material, political and symbolic dimensions to see how respective issues are framed as problems and what are the proposed solutions. A final dimension is added, that of the 'master signifier' (or master frame in Social Movements Studies) in order to detect which is the 'nodal point' that structures the whole discourse (e.g. 'equality', 'justice', 'purity', 'democracy'). By getting into the core of what a populist discourse puts into question (e.g. 'the immigrants', 'the banks') and how address it (e.g. 'closing borders', 'taxing the rich'), the nature of each populism's politics is revealed (is it a regressive political phenomenon or an egalitarian one?). Below one can see the codebook used to analyse sources according to the abovementioned main categories.

Table 2.6.   Codebook for mixed-methods data analysis

	Collective 'Us'	Excluded 'other'	Diagnostic Frame	Prognostic frame	Master signifier
Material Dimension					
Political Dimension					
Symbolic Dimension					

In what follows, I outline the methods and the number of data used in detail.

2.3.1 Discourse analysis

In recent years, the focus on 'discourse' in the study of politics and populism has gained increasing popularity (Aslanidis, 2018b; Caiani & Della Porta, 2012; de la Torre, 2015; Ekström et al., 2018; Goffman, 1974; Hawkins, 2009, 2010b; Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Rooduijn & Pauwels, 2011; Snow & Benford, 1988; Wodak et al., 2013). Discourse analysis 'refers to the practice of analysing empirical raw materials and information as discursive forms. This means that discourse analysts treat a wide range of linguistic and non-linguistic data – speeches, reports, manifestos, historical events, interviews, policies, ideas, even organisations and institutions – as 'texts' or 'writing' (Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000: 28).

There is indeed a number of methods stemming out of the 'discourse family' and its accompanied theoretical and epistemological presuppositions. Those are: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough 1992; Wodak et al. 2013), Discourse Theory (Howarth et al. 2000; Laclau and Mouffe 1985), and Frame Theory (Gamson 1988; Goffman 1974; Kuypers 2009; Snow and Benford 1988). They all share the perception that language is important in constructing meaning, and collective identities, while they perceive reality as an interplay between the discursive unit (the text), the discursive practices (production, dissemination reception), and the "social practices" (the wider order of discourses in society) (Phillips and Hardy 2002). However, there are certain epistemological differences among them that result in 'pros and cons'. Here, I will briefly review the above-mentioned strands explain why I opted for the Essex School style discourse theory while adopting some features from Frame Theory.

CDA is a firmly established multidisciplinary method in the family of 'discourse studies', which combines linguistic and sociological elements to capture social change. A major issue it renders visible, is that it often views discourse as a product of power exclusively. This presupposes a hierarchical relationship in which *power, institutions* and *actors*, produce

discourse, identities and meaning. In García Agustín's words (2015:3), CDA understands 'social change as a process of domination, mainly, and the implementation of top-down changes, especially attached to the imposition of neoliberalism as the only possible paradigm'. This move neglects the *processes* though which 'power' itself is constructed (through discourse) while it also neglects processes of negotiation and resistance which in turn neglects the agency of the subjects themselves. Methodologically speaking, CDA focuses almost exclusively on textual data. This methodological orthodoxy does not meet this research's aims to study digital means, visual data, and combine other methods.

Frame Theory is widely used in communication studies and most prominently in social movement studies, while recently it has been used for the study of populist social movements (Aslanidis 2018b). According to Aslanidis (2018:448) '[f]rame analysis involves studying movement flyers, banners, manifestos, memoirs, minutes, and other types of textual resources, frequently accompanied by oral and textual accounts of individual activists, that combine to facilitate uncovering of the main framing elements at work'. Frame theory renders visible cognitivist underpinnings that lie in contrast with the fundamental epistemological and ontological presuppositions of this research. For instance, frame theory's focus on the 'conscious signifying work carried out by political actors' (Lindekilde 2014: 206) presupposes political actors as 'subjects that know' and political action as a matter of strategy (see Snow and Byrd 2007). This reductive conception of culture, politics and society as a series of frames downgrades significant components of mobilisation such as identity and affect, discussed in Chapter 1 (cf. Savage 2018).   Nonetheless, this research utilises Frame Theory, since it offers strong analytical mechanisms that are useful in empirical research. For this reason, this research employs a number of 'frames' that help determine the changes populist discourse takes throughout time. For example, the notion of 'frame bridging' highlights the 'linkage of two or more ideologically congruent but structurally unconnected frames regarding a particular issue

or problem" (Snow et al., 1986, p. 467)'. In addition, 'frame amplification' refers to 'the clarification and invigoration of an interpretive frame that bears on a particular issue, problem, or set of events' (Snow et al., 1986, p. 469). At the same time, the diagnostic frame – set to identify the constructed problem in a political actor's repertoire – and the prognostic frame – set to identify the solution offered by this actor – are useful in determining the ideological orientation of political actors.

In juxtaposition, the discursive and stylistic/performative orientations developed by the Essex School of Discourse Analysis and Ostiguy and Moffitt do not reduce populist discourse to words and rhetoric. Rather they emphasise the *relational* character of discourse and the *co-constitutive* relationship between leaders and publics. This research prioritises the 'Essex School' version of discourse analysis, which rests on post-foundationalist epistemological premises. Put simply, 'the people' and the 'elite' are not keywords to be measured in terms of frequency as in textual analysis (see Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011). They are competing subjects that are constructed through the process of articulation. The collective subject as well as the excluded 'other' appear in different names: 'the many'/'the few', 'the American people'/'the Mexicans', 'the hard-working people'/'the establishment'). Discourse Theory has been applied to a variety of contemporary social and political phenomena – and it is suitable for empirical qualitative analysis (Carpentier 2017; Kim 2022; Marttila 2018; Nikisianis et al. 2019).

Empirically, this research studied a number of 65 'rhetorical units', almost equally divided across the two cases and the four empirical chapters. These rhetorical units refer to speech or text gathered from announcements (text sources) or videos displaying political actors talking and performing (video sources). The breakdown of rhetorical units is displayed in the table below. For a detailed analysis of the sources collected and analyses please see Appendix 1, section 1. The timeframe for the collection of data spans in the periods in which the considered actors performed in opposition and in government. Thus, for the case of SYRIZA

the specific periods are 2012-2015 for phase one and 2015-2019 for the second phase. For Trump, they refer to 2015-2016 for phase one and 2017-2020 for phase two.

Table 2.7.   Overview of discourses analysed

	Source Type	Source origin	Total
SYRIZA			29
Donald Trump	Text, speech	Videos, announcements	36
			65

2.3.2. Visual analysis

This research also employs visual analysis (Messaris and Abraham 2001; Joffe 2008). Until recently, the 'Power of Images' in political conflict has been much neglected from political and sociological analysis (Mitchell 2007). However, as Doerr, Mattoni, and Teune (2013) argue, 'the presence and relevance of images in mobilisations […] is no novelty' (xi). Political actors, both institutional and extra-institutional, have been 'intrinsically tied to the visual sense' in that they 'articulate visual messages, their activities are represented in photos and video sequences and they are ultimately rendered visible or invisible in the public sphere' (ibid.). Contemporary (mainstream) politics rely heavily on new forms of technological advancement such as social media (Twitter, Facebook and Instagram). In less conventional cases, among which is Donald Trump, memes and other mediums of 'up-to-date' internet culture are also employed.

Contemporary research focusing on 'the internet' has analysed social media generated data through online content analysis which associated to the aims and objectives of visual analysis employed in this project (Anduiza, Cristancho, and Sabucedo 2014; Klein and Pirro 2020; Zulianello, Albertini, and Ceccobelli 2018). However, while much of this research accounted for the 'words' and 'hashtags', it has not adequately addressed the use of images

and videos. Images and symbols are an important aspect of politics as it helps spread messages to larger audiences (Entman 2004) as it leaves stronger memory mark and evokes stronger emotions (Joffe 2008:85).

I conceptualise qualitative visual analysis as an extension of discourse analysis in that, arguably, 'vision' is not independent from discourse but rather mediated by it. Discourse provides the semantic reservoir for the comprehension of any visual item while images convey messages which are rooted in a pre-existing and culturally related context that is built on discourse. Hence, the processing of those images is filtered through the very same semantic reservoir that is shared through and is structured in the form of language (Venizelos 2020: 16).

The line between 'visual' and 'verbal' is thin. Researchers of visual content observe that there are similar patterns of framing between textual and visual framing. 'Through the public screens of news media, images present a small fraction of reality (Fahmy 2004) that can be emphasised so that it is felt as overwhelming by selectively focusing on specific elements of an event and influence perception accordingly' (Batziou 2015:23). 'Image', 'sign', 'text', 'video' are all part of the representation process: a process of representing a political event, a political enemy, a social situation in a specific way due to particular 'interests', perspectives, ideologies etc. As in the case of verbal speech, the process of representation through visual material is also 'complex and it arises out of cultural, social and psychological history of the sign-maker, and focused by the specific context in which the sign maker produces the sign' (Kress and Leeuwen 2010:7). In this sense, visual material can be employed as data equal to other methods in social sciences (Ball and Smith 1992).

As far as the empirical analysis is concerned, 69 visual data are considered – 41 of which concern the case of SYRIZA and 28 the case of Trump. The focus of the visual data remains systematically on people-centrism and anti-elitism, the diagnostic and prognostic

frames. Specifically, visual data includes (1) campaign posters and campaign video-clips. In these two categories, text, symbols, colours and music are taken into account in order to interpret in line with our analytical focus; (2) live or recorded videos from rallies, conferences, talks used to grasp bodily choreographies such as gestures and demeanour, tone and volume of the voice of the political actors; (3) social media posts such as tweets, Instagram and Facebook posts. These visual data provide critical supplements to 'speech data' in that they transmit political messages and drawing the frontiers between the antagonistic camps ('the people' versus 'the elite').

Visual material is collected (1) online, through the personal Facebook, Twitter or Instagram accounts of the leaders themselves as both Alexis Tsipras and Donald Trump own all these accounts.[31] Content was also obtained through (2) the websites of the parties as both SYRIZA and the Trump campaign and administration maintain a relevant database. This was particularly useful for the part of the research that focuses on the period before political actors assumed power which has passed before this research was initiated. SYRIZA stores its available posters in this address https://www.syriza.gr/page/ylika.html and Donald Trump in the following ones: http://www.4president.us/websites/2016/donaldjtrump2016website.htm, https://www.donaldjtrump.com/. Where possible, material such as leaflets, stickers and pins was (3) collected physically during fieldwork either in the headquarters of the parties, the offices of the relevant organisations or in rallies and other relevant events. I also photographed events rallies and areas that were relevant in building my narrative and argument. For a detailed list of visual data analysed see Appendix B.

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[31] For Tsipras see: Twitter https://twitter.com/atsipras, https://twitter.com/tsipras_eu, Facebook https://www.facebook.com/tsiprasalexis, Instagram https://www.instagram.com/alexistsipras. For Donald Trump see: Twitter https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump, Facebook https://www.facebook.com/DonaldTrump, Instagram https://www.instagram.com/realdonaldtrump .

Table 2.8.　　　　Summary of visual data collected

Populist actor	Data type	Data Source	Total
SYRIZA TRUMP	Posters, Memes, Videos and other attachments; campaigning spots; rallies	Leaders' personal Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and mailing list; YouTube; personal/campaigning and parties' websites	41 28
			69

2.3.3 Interviews

This study conducted a total of 56 semi-structured interviews. 27 for the case of SYRIZA and 29 for the case of Trump. The interview method is considered as common, key and fruitful tool for the collection of empirical data in qualitative research in that they offer thorough and insight perspective on the case study. Interviews can be supportive of the key arguments in that they can offer diagnostic as well as supplementary material, while they can also be overturning of the key argument (Bennett 2010: 208). Lynch (2013:32) argues that interviews can be undertaken as 'a preliminary to the main study, as the main source of data for a study, or as one component in a multi-method research'. For our case here interviews consist of a supplementary approach to the analysis of political discourse (text, video, pictures).

Interviewees were identified through purposive sampling which 'is a form of non-random sampling that involves selecting elements of a population according to specific characteristics deemed relevant to the analysis' (Lynch 2013: 41). This form of sampling requires 'knowing enough about the characteristics of the population to know what characteristics are likely to be relevant for the research project' (ibid.). To achieve this deeper

knowledge, I spent months reading the local news in my countries of interest, reading academic and non-academic books, and watching films and documentaries in order to grasp cultural aspects that are not necessarily evident in resources generated by experts (e.g. think tanks and journalists). In addition to purposive sampling, this research employed snowballing technique to expand its interview sample (Della Porta 2014), since the specific method is understood as a way of transmitting knowledge and contacts (Noy 2008). Interviewees provided me with useful contacts e.g. co-activists, activists from other political groups, names of other relevant organisations. The snowball strategy was particularly effective and interesting in relatively small communities in which the interviewees, be it activists or politicians, were acquainted or even had close relationships with people of interest.

The semi-structured interviews taken in this study can be categorised in three types. First, the study conducted *expert interviews* which include academics, pundits working in think tanks and research centres as well as the media industry. This type of interview was used as a compass to ground the research in the political culture of each country. Importantly, expert interviews helped the research to identify political groups and organisations at the local level, geographic areas, people and themes that were not initially thought of or that are not easily available to outsiders. In the case of the U.S., for example, experts informed me about local associations that were of particular interest (e.g. rifle and veterans), while they also made me aware of their history, ideological orientation, and political background and involvement. In the case of Greece, experts gave me ideas that enriched my perspective of looking at the events, brought me in contact with people to interview, such as political journalists or government members, as well as local activist organisations.

Second, the study considers *elite interviews*. As Leech suggests, semi-structured elite interviews 'can provide detail, depth, and an insider's perspective (2002:665). Interviews with elites help fill different gaps of the narrative while also including the political actors side of the

story. They also generate comparisons between the academic and the politicians' use of the term populism: do actors that we identify as populist identity as populist themselves? What do they think about populism? how do they use the term in their own discourse? Do actors that academia considers as populist speak as populists on the interviews?

In the case of Greece, elite interviews included the Deputy Minister of Labour, Social Security and Social Solidarity Nasos Iliopoulos (February 2018 – February 2019), the Vice Minister of Digital Policy, Telecommunications and Information Lefteris Kretsos (August 2018 – July 2019), Deputy Minister of Interior (Macedonia-Thrace) Katerina Notopoulou (August – February 2019), the former Head of the Prime Minister Press Office, Head of the Strategic Planning Office and speechwriter of the Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, government advisors and consultants who wish to remain anonymous, and an independent MP who participated in the SYRIZA-ANEL government, initially with the latter party and after the dissolution of the coalition with the former. These interviews were conducted mainly in Athens, where the governing headquarters are located, and in Thessaloniki, were the Deputy-Ministry of Macedonia-Thrace is located. Elite interviews also shed some light on the way a 'populist government' deals with its politics once in power or, more importantly, how it views and frames its politics. In Lynch's (2013) terms, elite interviews functioned as 'window dressing' to the already existing and publicly available data (such as speeches from rallies) in that they provided me with insider's perspective. Especially with respect to the heated period of the Greek government's negotiations with the so-called troika in the first six months of the SYRIZA administration in 2015, these interviews are expected to shed some more light. While much has been written about in the forms of commentaries or opinion articles in newspapers not much academic work has been published yet.

The third type of interview involved representatives of core constituencies, such as social movements, associations, organisations, networks, key activists, party members in order

to grasp the identification between 'the people' and 'the populist', the resonance of the political discourse to the electoral 'base'. This move was vital to the study of collective identity in that it provided 'the people' with agency. Having observed closely the supply side of political communication in the two cases and having studied related electoral surveys, sociological and ethnographic accounts, this research broke down 'collective identity' and reconstructed categories that emerged in the aforementioned sources. The aim here was to examine the resonance between people and populist in a before-after manner.

In the case of Greece, the relevant movements, struggles and identities were identified first through the analysis of the supply-side political discourse of SYRIZA (2012-2015) and second through secondary literature (such Rüdig and Karyotis 2014; Kanellopoulos et al. 2017), expert interviews, and the snowball method while interviewing movement actors themselves. These movements included first and foremost the workers' movement, consisted of a variety of organisations, unions, and projects, such as the occupied factory of VIOME, the struggle against the privatisation of the water in Thessaloniki, the Public Broadcasting Station (ERT), the forceful shut-down of which by the Samaras government generated massive public support, the environmentalist anti-fracking movements in Halkidiki 'Save Skouries/SOS Halkidiki', the anti-racist (anti-discriminations movement), the social medical centres, the various solidarity networks that organised the distribution of food and clothing, the migrant solidarity networks, the LGBTQI community. These movements can be seen as 'peripheral constituencies' in that they were not necessarily (or by majority) SYRIZA members or supporters. Rather, many of these movements supported SYRIZA, as it provided them with political representation. In addition, party members who held key positions in the party before and after achieving power were interviewed too.

In the case of the U.S., many of the groups that appeared in Donald Trump's discourse already existed in the form of official organisations in www.donaldjtrump.com; these included:

'Evangelicals for Trump', 'Women for Trump', 'Workers for Trump', 'Black voices for Trump', 'Latinos for Trump'. Sociological work studying 'the heart of the Right' pointed me to the category of 'the Southerner' and 'the Second Amendment enthusiast' (Hochschild 2016a); literature on the rural consciousness (Cramer 2016), the Appalachian culture (Vance 2016), polarisation and deindustrialisation in America (Frank 2005, 2017), pointed me to categories of 'the Midwestern', 'the Farmer', 'the Veteran', 'the Democrat for Trump', and 'the Forgotten' (Bradlee 2018); political and electoral studies pointed me to the directions of 'the Conservative', 'the Libertarian', the 'alt-Right' and 'the Immigrant' Trump supporter, Arizona's branch of the National Rifle Association (NRA), the Texas Alliance for Life. For a fully elaborated table of interviews, see Appendix C.

2.3.4. Participant observation and ethnography

The next method employed is participant observation, which as Balsiger and Lambelet put it is 'not just a "technique" but an encompassing and intellectually consistent program and research strategy' (2008: 146). Social anthropology has traditionally focused on the ways communities are built and has repeatedly stressed the inherent processes of building 'the self' in relation to 'the other'. In this sense, I attempted to see how the material and symbolic metaphors of 'the people' and 'the elite' were embedded in the context of the towns and communities I passed through in my quest to research Greek and American populism. I attempted to see how the environment, the mood, the aesthetic, the symbols, and the advertisements on billboards could reflect on my central research interests: who is the people? who is the enemy? What are the emotions at play?

Marcus (1995) defines ethnographic/participatory research as multi-sited it extends one's focus beyond one 'place', and particularly that of the researcher's own desk. In his words, 'multi-sited research is designed around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions or juxtapositions

of locations in which the ethnographer establishes some form of literal, physical presence, with the explicit, posited logic of association or connection among sites that in fact defines the argument of the ethnography' (Marcus 1995:105). Participatory and ethnographic research is also defined as 'speech in action' as it identifies implicit meanings such as symbolisms, practices, cultures and perspectives, highlighting aspects of collective behaviour that are often not so public or explicit. These aspects informed my study of both the supply side (diffused by governments or organisations) but also on the demand side of political discourse (expressed by the subjects themselves). For the purposes of this research, ethnographic data did not always and strictly translate into 'real data' but they informed heavily the experience of the author, helping him interpret and conceptualise his findings. To perform ethnographic research, I followed the already mapped out routes with which anthropological and sociological literature provided me. As described in the previous method, I visited locations and people mentioned by those who had pioneered respective research in the two countries before I did.

In Greece, I participated in government-sponsored events. In Thessaloniki, I participated in the Prime Minister's rally to promote the name deal between then-to-be North Macedonia and Greece, which took place in December 2018. I also two public events organised by the Ministry of Macedonia. The first event was a discussion among experts such as journalists, historians, museum curators, and politicians and took place in December 2018. The second event was a public theatre performance. The two events aimed at disarticulating the predominantly nationalist narration of history and rearticulating an egalitarian one by providing an alternative historiography of the city of Thessaloniki by re-examining notions such as 'liberation', 'history', 'past', 'national enemies', 'class enemies'. These events were particularly interesting in that they provided me with the opportunity to observe the government's use of 'extra-political' methods to disseminate political discourse in the cultural sphere as well as in understanding better the nature of the political discourse that was diffused.

In Athens, I participated in two events organised by the Poulantzas Institute, a think tank that is closely associated with SYRIZA. The first event was of political and organisational nature and its aim was to reflect and assess the SYRIZA government. The second event was a theoretical roundtable on 'Left strategy in government' after Syriza's 'capitulation' to the Troika. These events took place between March and April and helped me obtain contacts for interviews, understand the internal party dynamics and structures, the kinds of theoretical and strategic discussions that take place within the party.

In order to investigate the resonance of SYRIZA's frames to the electoral base, I participated in social movements activities such as demonstrations and public discussions. Specifically, I participated in a sizable annual congress of a network of networks called 'Solidarity' 4 all', where movements, networks and campaigns evaluated their own strategy for the year 2017-2018. Listening to the movements' narratives, sharing their experience and perspectives helped me developed better my own picture. It also helped me cross-check which movements from the ones I identified were actually relevant and which were irrelevant to my work. I have also talked to many people there some of which agreed to be interviewed.

I participated in at least five demonstrations during my six months in Greece (in both Thessaloniki and Athens) where I observed their size under the SYRIZA administration in order to compare it with the numbers previous literature provides with respect to the previous cycles of protest. In addition, I observed these demonstrations' consistency (which were the groups that participated?), their ambience (what was the general mood? How did people speak about politics and the SYRIZA government specifically?), the position of SYRIZA (where was it located in the march? Were they many? Were they marginalised? Were they welcomed in discussions?), and the protests' demands, prognostic, and diagnostic frames.

Additionally, in order to understand the ambient social mood, I observed political posters stuck around the cities. I aimed to develop a general sense of the social mood outside the 'core and peripheral constituencies'. By walking around Greek cities (mainly Athens and Thessaloniki), I observed the way social encounters among third parties took place, the types of discussions that took place, while obviously I participated in countless discussions myself (in buses, coffee shops, libraries, taxis and bars).

In the U.S.A, I participated in a big event outside Cincinnati, Ohio organised by the 'Evangelicals for Trump' alliance. I also participated in a weekly meeting of the Young Republicans at Cornell University and observed the distinct political currents reflecting on the national tendencies within the Republican Party. I attended a talk by Michael Cernovich, whom Wikipedia defines as an 'American social media personality, anti-feminist, men's rights activist, political commentator, and conspiracy theorist', organised by the Republicans United group at Arizona State University campus.

I travelled in the between the cities and the countryside to observe how the famous 'urban/rural divide' works. In Pennsylvania, the so-called Trump-land, I have been driven around and shown the dilapidated suburbs. A portrait photo in sepia depicting local soldiers from the WWII, now proud veterans, was attached almost to every lamp post in the main streets cutting through the towns. Houses proudly housed the 'TRUMP – PENCE 2020' flags. I walked into the so-called 'dive bars,' bars with bad reputation which usually gather white male population – and allegedly Trump supporters too – and spoke to them. In Arizona, one of the states with the most 'flexible' regulation on firearm ownership as well as high records of gun related crimes, I walked into a gun shop. I asked questions and tried to understand what the mentality of those ascribe to the gun culture. For a detailed overview of the ethnographic data, please consult Appendix D.

2.3. Conclusion

This chapter mapped out the research strategy followed in order to approach the central inquiry of this research – how does populism change in power in the case of SYRIZA and Trump. The chapter highlighted the vast contextual differences among the two political actors while it also exemplified profound commonalities when SYRIZA and Trump are studied through the lenses of populism studies. These similarities, but also their emergence against theoretical and empirical expectations makes the consideration of the two cases of foremost relevance. The second part of the chapter highlighted the mixed-methods employed in order to collect empirical data. These methods included discourse analysis, visual analysis, interviews and participant observation.

Chapter 3

SYRIZA in Opposition (2012 –2015)

3.1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on SYRIZA in the years between 2012 – 2015, when the party served as the main party of the opposition in the Greek parliament. Focusing on SYRIZA's political discourse, comprising of 25 speeches, posters campaigning videos, and 30 interviews, with activists and supporters of the party, this chapter enquires into SYRIZA's democratic and egalitarian left populism and seeks to understand the ways in which the party created broad social coalitions by affectively mobilising 'the people' in crisis-ridden Greece. The first part of the chapter (section 3.1) zooms into the core of SYRIZA's discourse in order to examine the key components which structured its populist discourse, namely its people-centrism and anti-elitism. It also examines the content of this discourse through the identification of diagnostic and prognostic frames, in order to show the nature of SYRIZA's populism. The second part (section 3.3), focuses of the affectual narratives of 'the people' in order to understand the socio-political emotions embedded in the identification with SYRIZA.

3.2. SYRIZA's radical left populism

This first part of Chapter 3 focuses on SYRIZA's populist performativity in opposition and seeks to investigate the ways the emerging party articulated *people-centrism* and *anti-elitism*. By drawing on a sum of 25 data comprising speeches and posters found on the supply side of discourse, the first part of the chapter investigates: (1) the status of SYRIZA's populism and the key polarities embedded in its oppositional narrative (who is included and who is the

collective ''we the people'' and who is defined as ''the political adversary''?), and (2) the diagnosis the party gave to the socio-political crisis and the solution it promised to achieve when in government.

3.2.1. People-centrism and anti-elitism

Let us initiate the empirical analysis starting with the May 2012 elections. The poster that is located on the left, in Figure 3.1, reads: 'either *us* or *them … together* we can overthrow *them'*, and below 'SYRIZA. Coalition of the Radical Left: Resistance, Disobedience, Solidarity' (VM1). The second poster, located on the right-hand side, reads: '*They* decided without *us*. We move on without them. Overthrow in Greece. Message to Europe' (VM.2). Evidently, the populist polarisation is accompanied by a subversive ('revolutionary') meaning put forward in the posters: the collision with the establishment and the desire for change prevail in these two posters.

Figure 3.1: SYRIZA's 2012 election campaign posters.

The antagonism SYRIZA in opposition put forward was grounded on the juxtaposition between itself and 'the establishment'. Interestingly, while political polarisation is conventionally understood as another name for animosity, the numerous political dilemmas that SYRIZA articulated drew on notions such as 'equality' (Tambakaki 2019). SYRIZA presented itself as

the egalitarian choice while framing its political adversary as something violent and regressive. In other words, the constructed antagonism between positive signifiers (represented in its own name) and negative signifiers (represented in the name of 'the establishment'). The central messages also had a positive status and made reference to democratic visions. Some of the dilemmatic frames revealed in the analysis juxtaposed 'the Greece of the *enlightenment'* (represented by SYRIZA) and 'the *medieval* Greece' (represented by 'the elite') (SYR.3); 'we respond to *fear* with *hope* and to *terror* with *vision''* (SYR.1). 'Elections' were framed as a referendum in which people had to choose between either 'SYRIZA or New Democracy', '*hope* or *memorandum'*, '*prosperity* or *austerity'* (SYR.2). In line with theories of populism, throughout the years between 2012 – 2013, the party put forward a sharp antagonistic dimension which divided the socio-political space into two. But which subject was placed in each side of the dichotomy?

Figure 3.2. Poster from SYRIZA's 1st congress in 2013

The analysis of SYRIZA's political discourse indicates that the core political subject to which the party addressed between 2012 – 2015 was 'the people'. The poster on the left exposes a solidly populist articulation. The poster was presented in 2013, in SYRIZA's first congress as a unitary party. The motivational message that the poster puts forward suggests that a 'strong SYRIZA' equates with a sovereign, 'independent people' (VM.3).

The very same frame was consistently and repeatedly communicated in all of SYRIZA's electoral campaigns between 2012 and 2015 calling 'the people' to push the party towards a majority government (SYR.1, SYR.2, SYR.3). Importantly, the status of people-centrism in the case of SYRIZA seems to be more complicated than the stereotypical associations of populism with unmediated politics (see Urbinati 1998; Taggart 2004). Although SYRIZA made direct references to 'the people' (like the majority of non-populist discourses), it did not undermine the liberal model of democracy within which it operated, nor did it propose the literal dissolution of the representational mechanisms. SYRIZA rarely framed itself as synecdoche of 'the people' (i.e. the party *is* the people). Analysing SYRIZA's people-centrism, one can interpret two distinct subjects which relationally empower each other in a partnership to restore dignity. 'The people' appears as an *assistant* to the party and the party as an assistant to 'the people'. This is reflected in various speeches given by Tsipras who claimed that 'we have on our side a big weapon; the will of the people' (SYR.3). Elsewhere Tsipras claims that 'our victory will not be a victory of SYRIZA but a triumph of the people' while on a different occasion the party's leader claimed that the political elites are 'pursued to stop, not the rise of SYRIZA, but (neither) the rise of ''the people'' to power' (SYR.8).

People-centrism in SYRIZA's political communication was best expressed through its leader, Alexis Tsipras. In the central pre-electoral speech of SYRIZA that took place on the 14th of June 2012 in Omonoia square Tsipras stated:

> This is the time for *our people* because what we are witnessing here today in front
> of us (i.e. the masses) does not fit into the narrow boundaries of the Left. [what we
> are witnessing today] is the wider, patriotic, democratic, gathering of our people
> […] we welcome here today the thousands of democratic citizens, irrespectively of

their political orientation… regardless if until yesterday they voted for PASOK,

New Democracy or the Left (SYR.2).

This extract from the 2012 speech exposes certain qualities of populist discourse that are crucial in the understanding of its nature. To begin with, the presence of the audience in the very same gathering is framed as 'mass participation' that exceeds the frontiers of a single party (SYRIZA) and a single ideology (the left). The alleged consistency of the audience (typical of any political discourse) frames the collective subject not as a leftist subject but as a *democratic and patriotic* subject - a subject that is exhausted from austerity. The architecture of SYRIZA's discourse evident in its attempts to institute a collective subject, renders visible elements of transversality – which, although subject to any political discourse they are particularly tied with successful populist projects according to Laclau (2005). In this sense, SYRIZA's framing did not operate upon the classical Left – Right axis but upon the Popular – Elitist (see Ostiguy 2017). 'The people' appear partially/temporally united against the *ancien regime* of PASOK and New Democracy which is framed as a common enemy to all singularities. This leads our focus to the analysis of the second operational criterion for the identification of populist phenomena: *anti-elitism*.

Anti-elitism is also present in the very same speech at Omonoia square. 'The people's 'political adversary' assumes a variety of names including: 'the two-party system', 'the old establishment that governs the country for the last 40 years', 'those who brought the country into chaos and now are blackmailing ''the people''' (SYR.2). These metaphors were consistently present in SYRIZA's communication throughout 2012-2015. On many occasions SYRIZA split the enemy into the 'internal' and 'the external' troika (SYR.3): the former refers to the memorandum-oriented parties within Greece, irrespective of their ideology, and in particular the two hitherto dominant parties of PASOK and New Democracy which governed

as a coalition until 2015; as SYRIZA, through the mouth of Alexis Tsipras put it, the leaders

of these parties, 'Mr. Samaras and Mr. Venizelos who have a common political program'

(SYR.1). The latter, the 'external troika', refers to the 'real' troika, the European Commission,

the Eurogroup and the IMF, as well as 'Mrs. Merkel and her dogmatic neoliberal politics'

(SYR.1). Together, the internal and external troikas imposed memoranda on Greece and

brought catastrophe to the country (SYR.2).

The antagonistic frontier that is posed against 'the troika*s*' was principally organised

on an anti-memorandum terrain which was the primary terrain upon which SYRIZA articulated

its political communication, proposals and promises during the years that it had served as the

axiomatic opposition in the Greek parliament (Teperoglou and Tsatsanis 2014). The poster on

the left-hand side in Figure 3.3 is indicative of the aforementioned polarisation against the dual

enemy. This poster was prepared for the visit of the German Chancellor Angela Merkel in

Athens in April 2014 and portrays her with the then Greek Prime Minister and New Democracy

leader, Antonis Samaras. They are shown together as an ensemble, and are presented as the

enemy. The poster reads "No more – Thank you" (VM.4). What that slogan refers is answered

on the poster found on the right-hand side: "Memoranda – Never Again" (VM.5).
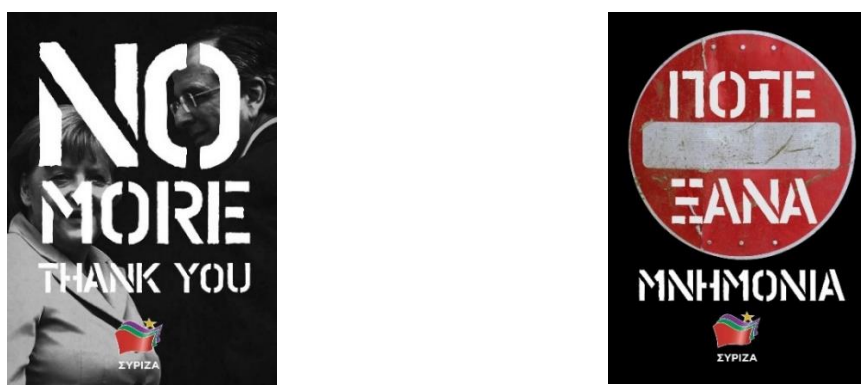
Figure 3.3: SYRIZA's posters for Angela Merkel's visit to Athens in 2014.

Beyond 'the memoranda', SYRIZA framed as the political enemy the 'economic monopolies',

'banks', 'the stock market', 'the profiteers' 'the media moguls', 'the big construction

companies who turned the state into their own clients', 'the mediators who set their cartels and steal the produce of our people' (SYR.2), 'the 1% of the Greek society', 'the 30 families that rule the country', 'the old political elite' (SYR.3). Overall, SYRIZA's political enemy in the period 2012-2015 can be summarized in what Alexis Tsipras, during the May 2012 election campaign, called 'the sinful triangle'. The sinful triangle included 'the corrupt two-party system, the bank-*ocracy (trapezokratia)* and the untransparent and corrupt media' (SYR.2).

The polarity posed by the party during the period between 2012-2015 is best summarised in Alexis Tsipras words displayed below:

> 'we will always serve the public interest, the patriotic interest, the interests of the many, the interests of the people and not the interests of plutocracy and oligarchy' (SYR.1).

The above quote renders visible a polarity that is important for the present analysis. It places, and consequently associates syntactically, 'the public' and 'patriotic interests' which are presented as the interests of 'the many', namely 'the people', in fundamental opposition to the interests of 'the plutocrats' and the 'oligarchs'. Alexis Tsipras performs a syntactic process that bridges these signifiers and ultimately constructs a master narrative, a common sense to use the Gramscian metaphor, in which the collective good – that is an economic reality that favours the impoverished majority rather than the self-indulged elites – is also a patriotic choice.

Moving deeper in the analysis of SYRIZA's populism in opposition, the primary task now is to grasp the *nature* of SYRIZA's populism and the status of 'its people' by deconstructing the party's overall discourse (in line with the codebook presented in Chapter 2). Let us begin by investigating *the way* 'the people' was presented in SYRIZA's discourse by looking at the extract below:

'Mr. Samaras and Mr. Venizelos wish that the people be fearful, subjugated, closed in their shell, to obey, and await their misery. Well, you have picked the wrong people, Mr. Venizelos and Mr. Samaras. This people never bent. This people never surrendered in the toughest times of their own history. Not even when the conquerors invaded our country. [The people] never lowered the flag of dignity, the flag of sovereignty, the flag of the struggle. [the people] will not do it now either... [the people] won't follow you Mr. Samaras. We won't lower the flag of dignity, the flag of hope the flag of popular sovereignty and national sovereignty (*qua independence*) (SYR.1).

Unlike canonical perspectives, which claim that 'the people' are necessarily framed as virtuous or glorified in populist discourse, the extract shows that 'the people' is presented as *being perceived* as fearful (by 'the establishment'). According to Tsipras' narrative 'the people' are being treated as subordinate subjects which is brought to misery. Against the establishment's view, SYRIZA frames 'the people' as 'resisting subject', a subject that does not obey the authorities that take away its sovereignty, a subject that does not lose its dignity:

No one can intimidate or blackmail a wounded people, a people who have been betrayed and humiliated. This coming Sunday, it is not the lenders or their representatives here who will be speaking. This Sunday, the Greek people will speak. And they will give the clearest answer: down with the memoranda; down with subjugation. The blackmail is over! (SYR.8).

A second key task for our analysis is to investigate the *status* of 'the people' in SYRIZA's discourse. Dominant perspectives in the literature have long argued that populism articulates a homogenising, monist, and monolithic view of identity (see Mudde 2004 and Müller 2016). Such narrative resulted to the nearly exclusive association of populism with nationalism. Indeed, the extracts provided above resemble a nation-oriented discourse. But can SYRIZA's

discourse be simply reduced to nationalism or national/ethno-populism (see Pantazopoulos 2016)? Without considering the saliency of patriotic narratives in left-wing discourse in Greece one ends up in a-historical assumptions (see Gavriilidis 2006; Svoronos 2017).[32] Left-wing patriotism, which provided an ample semantic reservoir for SYRIZA, was born out of the (popular) resistance against the Nazi occupation in the1940s, the resistance to the colonels' Junta and the memoires of those exiled or imprisoned by it in the late 1960s, the anti-imperialist discourse of Andreas Papandreou in the 1980s, and, finally, the anti-austerity protests of the early 2010s that often targeted the German *government* and other international organisations for allegedly turning Greece into a debt colony (SYR.3).

Undoubtedly, SYRIZA capitalised politically upon the memory and emotions of the Greek resistance. Crucially however, SYRIZA's discourse has significantly distinct attributes from a nationalist discourse. It is 'the homeland' (*πατρίδα*) rather than 'the nation' (*έθνος*) that lies at the heart of its discourse. At a rally during the 2014 campaigning period for the European Elections, Alexis Tsipras (in)famously stated: 'Go back Mrs Merkel! Go back Mr. Schäuble! Go back ladies and gentlemen of the conservative *nomenklatura*[33] of Europe! Go back Troika! Greece is not a lab rat' (SYR.6). His catch-phrase draws back to the historic memory of 1944 when the communist partisans shouted 'Go back!' while resisting the landing of British troops

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[32] Patriotism in the Greek framework resonates with a particular strain of left-wing identity, rooted in the old communist partisan resistance against the Nazi and Fascist occupation in the 1940s. This identity also informed later social democratic strains of the Greek Left, particularly those who emerged and associated themselves with the old PASOK and the figure of Andreas Papandreou in the 1980s. Although left-wing patriotism cannot be considered as unified or crystallised politico-ideological family in Greek politics, diverse groups may well resonate with it. At the same time, 'patriotism', due to its 'positively' valorised content (i.e. 'one cannot be anti-patriotic') may mobilise constituencies on the non-patriotic left or the non-left in general. Especially in the period between 2010-2015, a revival of this identity is observed. It is linked with the extensive financial and political intervention that Greece faced, and which was often perceived as suspension of national and political sovereignty. Germany's role in reactivating this identity was critical while it served as a key issue in SYRIZA's and other anti-austerity parties which linked the role that the country played during the Nazi occupation in the 1940s with its contemporary one.

[33] A term used in the Soviet Union to describe a category of people who held various key administrative positions in the bureaucracy, running all spheres of activity including government, industry, agriculture, education and so one. These positions were granted only with approval by the communist party of each country or region.

in Mytilene (Paraskevaides 1944). Synchronically, Tsipras' 'left patriotism' has contemporary connotations associated with SYRIZA's framing of the present-day EU as an *economic* caste, principally represented by Germany, that supresses Greece's popular and national sovereignty. This polarisation takes place at the politico-economic level, rather than the symbolic or mythical which defines nationalism. 'The enemy' is not 'the nation of Germany' or its 'nationals' but 'totalitarianism', 'the crimes of the Third Reich', 'the dark side of Europe' (SYR.1) to which SYRIZA counter-proposes 'solidarity' and 'social Europe' (SYR.3). For example, SYRIZA framed itself as a symbol of a changing Europe, 'to strengthen all the voices, that in all the languages and in all the countries are resisting the austerity imposed to the many and the profits of the few (SYR.8).

Critically, in the case of SYRIZA, 'the people' is constructed as a plurality. At the level of collective identity formation, SYRIZA's discourse includes 'the people*s* of Europe, the people*s* of Spain, the people*s* of Italy, the peoples of Ireland...all those who want a different, democratic, future for Europe (SYR.1). This underlined internationalism, as well as its persuasion to include 'people irrespective of gender, sexual orientation or race' (SYR.1) distinguishes SYRIZA's type of populism from the stereotypical association with xenophobic politics and places it along with a pool of inclusionary, egalitarian, left-wing populist phenomena in Europe and beyond. Furthermore, its political vision aimed to *represent* 'those who are affected from the crisis the most' who were usually referred to as 'the non-privileged' (SYR.2). Examining SYRIZA's political discourse in opposition, it becomes obvious that its equivalential chain is long and pluralistic in that in the definition of the people one does not find a monist or single entity nor a homogenising understanding of the collective subject. SYRIZA understood the people to be constituted by 'the weak', 'the unemployed', 'the homeless', 'those who are queuing at the breadlines', 'the poor', 'the precarious workers', 'the peasants', 'the heavily indebted households', 'the youngsters of this country', 'the young

scientists who migrate abroad' (SYR.2). For this reason, the party addressed a multiplicity of social groups and grassroots movements, which will be closely examined in the next part of the chapter, including: 'the workers' movement', 'the water struggles' (as, according to SYRIZA's ideological and programmatic theses, water has to remain a public good), 'the journalists democratic struggle' (as the decision of the Samaras government to shut the public broadcasting channel was perceived as an attack to democracy, generating a dynamic political mobilisation), 'the environmental struggle' (as the private plans for development in protected environmental areas by multinational corporations was perceived as an attack on nature, which was perceived as a common and public good in both social movements and SYRIZA's narrative), and 'the cleaners' movement (who were laid off by the government as a result of austerity politics). Traits of left politics were profoundly evident in SYRIZA's populist articulation which constructed a collective subject as politically subaltern and socially excluded. This is evident in various ways that Alexis Tsipras framed the people: 'those who have been looted all these years but never bended' … 'the pensioners who are brought to the edge of hunger'…'those who live without electricity, without access to healthcare, even without the opportunity for a plate of food…the unemployed, the 99% of the Greek society' (SYR.3).

The posters in Figure 3.4 portray the different social groups which SYRIZA addressed to under the name of 'the people'. The analysis of posters from the 2014 European election indicates that the people are consistently constituted by: manual workers, youth, pensioners, people with disabilities, children, as well as immigrants. In the same order, the messages that the posters communicate read: 'we vote for jobs and wages', '…for our dreams and rights', '…for pensions and dignity', '…for healthcare and social security', '…for the future of our children' while the anti-racist poster portrays a black and white hand together reading 'we vote for justice and equality'. Overall, the multiplicity of groups that were included in SYRIZA's

discourse and were interchangeably used to signify the name of 'the people' expose an inclusionary, 'open', status in the political horizon of the party providing a visual representation of an inclusive populism.

Figure 3.4. SYRIZA's posters from the 2014 European elections campaign.

Both in the form of rhetoric or visual material the discourse of SYRIZA presents the formal characteristics of a pluralistic populism. SYRIZA divides the Greek socio-political space in two, between 'the many' and 'the few', which come in their different names. Seemingly heterogeneous identities and groups are articulated systematically and brought into discursive equivalence.

3.2.2. Diagnosis: neoliberal austerity. Prognosis: popular sovereignty and welfare

To this point, this chapter inquired into SYRIZA's antagonistic narrative deconstructing the notions of 'the people' and 'the elite' as these were articulated by the populist party in opposition. In order to determine the party's ethico-political horizon, this subsection turns the focus the diagnostic and prognostic frames inquiring into the central signifiers and frames SYRIZA used to identify problems and propose solutions in crisis-ridden Greece.

Let us begin with the diagnostic framing. SYRIZA 'engaged with the demands of the anti-austerity movement, trying to represent impoverished and disenfranchised social groups in its discourse, constructing and performing, in its way, its own version of the 'crisis', attributing the blame to the 'old' 'two-party establishment' (PASOK/ND) and to the neoliberal policies imposed by the EU and the IMF' (Stavrakakis and Katsambekis 2019: 43). SYRIZA blamed the unresponsive and alienated political establishment for the situation in Greece, the long-practiced acts of corruption in the past years and the imposition of neoliberal austerity as that was imposed by the troika in the contemporary years. In this sense, SYRIZA constructed the political enemy of 'the people' who were to be blamed and who metonymically took the shapes of 'the political establishment', 'the *ancien regime'*, 'the internal and external troika', 'the political elites', 'PASOK and New Democracy', 'those who governed the country for forty years'. For SYRIZA, '*they* looted our homeland. They looted and impoverished our people. They lowered the Greek flag and gave it as a spoil [*of war*] to Angela Merkel' (SYR.2)

It must be stressed that the anti-memorandum plane was the most important reservoir for SYRIZA - and the one responsible for its success. 'The memorandum' (SYR.3) which SYRIZA labelled as 'a barbaric policy' (SYR.2), and the subsequent 'austerity' which has resulted to the 'economic catastrophe' (SYR.1), thereby bringing the Greek people to 'despair' (SYR.3), was consistently and repeatedly framed as the main issues for the Greek society. At the final electoral rally on June 2012 Tsipras communicated:

> Greece changes this Sunday. It leaves behind fear, it leaves behind insecurity, it leaves behind those who attempted to poison the Greek people by terrorising them. It leaves behind the parties; those parties which guaranteed the memorandum and drove our people to catastrophe. It leaves behind their political personnel, Mr. Samaras and Mr. Venizelos. It leaves behind New Democracy and PASOK – who turned 'lying' into their own flag in order to blackmail the Greek people (SYR.2).

This extract shows how SYRIZA amalgamated the established political parties as a unity among them and amongst the European politico-economic caste, and connected them all together with the memorandum and its austerity dogma which was in its turn responsible for the fear and terrorism applied to the Greek people. The 'primacy of the economy' however does not to downgrade the variety of other struggles that existed at the time which were often pushed by particularistic (identity-political) perspective, such as the LGBTQI+ movement (GR13). Rather, it was the opposition to the memorandum that served as a common denominator which turned, *a là* Laclau, the differential relations among those identities into relations of equivalence (GR14).

Beyond the centrally articulated topic of the memorandum, 'corruption' and 'intransparency' were also key elements in the party's discourse, as they were typically

portrayed as the usual practices of 'the establishment' (SYR.3). Such issues were presented as endemic and defining features of the forces of the 'the old established' (SYR.1); they were perceived as chronic practices of the two-party system and they were highly connected, both in SYRIZA's discourse as well as in public opinion (GR4), with the collapse of the Greek economy in the contemporary years.

The campaigning posters in Figure 3.5, *illustrate* SYRIZA's reading of the Greek state of affairs at the time. Evidently, the chosen framing reflected the general social and economic conditions in Greece. The posters read in order: "our fridge is empty…", ''our money is gone...'', "our power supply is cut off…", ''our produce has rotten ....'', "our medication has run out…", ''our pension is cut ....'', ''our businesses are closed down...'', ''our children migrated ...'', ''our voice is silenced - *our patience is over*". The way they are presented does not indicate any particular ideological orientation either on the Left or the Right as these issues affected a large part of the Greek population at the time (VM.13 to VM.21.)

Figure 3.5: 2014 European election campaign posters: SYRIZA's central demands.

Let us now move to the prognostic frame which highlights SYRIZA's proposed solution for Greece. As a response to the economic, social and political conditions in the country, Alexis Tsipras appeared faithful that 'the people will turn their backs to the parties of the establishment that governed the country for 40 years…those who brought the country into chaos and now are blackmailing us...those who looted the country and impoverished our people' (SYR.2). 'From Monday onwards, the memorandums are over, the bailout is finished...the people will take its future in its own hands' (SYR.2), outside the framework of hard austerity but always 'within the Eurozone' (SYR.1; SYR.3). Operating within the framework of representative democracy, elections were the path for change for SYRIZA; the party defined 'elections' as 'a profound process of popular and social emancipation and a social revolution' (SYR.1) and a 'redemption for the people (SYR.4). During the years 2012 – 2015, Alexis Tsipras has repeatedly stated that 'from Monday[34] we finish with national humiliation, the orders from abroad and the governance of our country through emails' (SYR.1); 'Greece will obtain voice and recognition' (SYR.8). Elections were often presented as the 'referendum on the memorandum that never took place in Greece'. As Tsipras stated, 'in this critical referendum on Sunday (i.e. the elections) our people has already chosen hope ...SYRIZA… change…popular sovereignty' (SYR.2). Not only does this discourse contradict the argument which holds that populism is necessarily anti-democratic or anti-liberal, it also indicates that populists may as well propose a different type of democracy or a democracy with different attributes.

What were SYRIZA's proposals though? At the rallies electoral rallies for the 2015 elections, Alexis Tsipras stated that 'SYRIZA puts an end to the politics that shut down the high streets, that drove the peasants to desperation, that pushes away the young people to look for a job and hope abroad. The people with its vote puts an end to the politics that demolished the welfare state, the social security funds, the public healthcare...the politics that looted the

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[34] Elections are held on Sundays. So 'Monday' refers to the first day of a new government.

labour, sweat, and dignity of the middle strata' (SYR.3). Though not defining of the *populist* identity of the party *per se* - but rather enlightening with respect to the core ideology of the party - the programmatic proposals of SYRIZA may indicate further how, 'practically', Tsipras' party proposed to solve the Greek crisis. The Thessaloniki Program, the manifesto that SYRIZA launched on the 13th of September 2014, was the party's guideline to 'end austerity' and 'reverse all memorandum injustices', and the programmatic proposals upon which SYRIZA got elected a year later. The Thessaloniki Program argued in favour of a European New Deal and included four pillars which together consisted the 'National Reconstruction Plan': first, to confront the humanitarian crisis by providing free electricity to those living under the poverty line, provide meal subsidies to the thousands of families without income, housing guarantee and rebuild the welfare state; second, to restart the economy and prompt tax-justice by alleviating tax suppression of the real economy and relieving citizens of financial burdens while imposing heavy taxation on the middle class on those who tax-evade; third, to restore labour relations by re-instituting the legal framework to protect employment rights and gradually restoring salaries and pensions that were overturned due to the Memoranda; fourth, to reform the political system, restore the rule of law, create a meritocratic state and to deepen democracy through regional government projects and empowering citizens' participation (SYR.5).

In essence, the type of political solutions SYRIZA proposed for the overcoming of the Greek crisis, at least in its manifesto, indicate also the 'thick ideology' of the party which can be defined as neo-Keynesian or left-social democratic (SYR.7). It has to be stressed, however, that the programmatic policy proposals do not cancel out the populist character of SYRIZA. Neither of the 'two' identities of SYRIZA should be studied in an 'either/or' manner; rather, it is more productive to study them as a matter of co-articulation between a Leftist – broadly speaking – discourse and a populist one; or a leftist discourse communicated in a populist way.

It can be argued that, to an extend the populist framing that SYRIZA communicated, interwoven with factors such as the 'purity' of the party and the deep socio-economic dislocations, amplified SYRIZA's potential to mediate its (leftist) political proposals to the wider public. the 36% that SYRIZA gained in the 2015 elections pushing it to power extended beyond its leftist base. SYRIZA to power was the total of the left-wing constituency. In contrast to an orthodox left political communication that would bring 'the working class' against 'capital' in the name of a socialist revolution, SYRIZA juxtaposed 'the people' against 'the elite' in the name of *popular sovereignty*. In this sense, not only popular sovereignty seems to be analytically distinct from both *national* sovereignty analysed in the previous section and *class* 'sovereignty', but it traverses both, thereby creating a wider political net resonant with the post-democratic spirit of the age.

Despite the intense rhetorical polarisation in which SYRIZA engaged, the political vision revealed when studying closely its statements seems egalitarian. Central signifiers in the party's discourse were 'unity' 'negotiation with Europe', 'alliances', 'progress', 'development', 'social solidarity', 'social cohesion' and 'the restoration of democracy (SYR.1). Crucially, the central signifier of the 2015 campaign that led SYRIZA to power was *hope*. SYRIZA launched a 'hopeful' electoral campaign reflected the upcoming reversal of the grim mood in the crisis ridden Greece. This is best evident in the 30-second campaigning spots, which rapidly change mood from the pessimism of the current affairs, as framed by SYRIZA, to the optimism of the future to come. In figure 3.6 below, the screenshot on the left spot portrays numerous signs reading 'For Sale' or 'For Rent'. It narrates a widespread situation where people lived in fear of losing their homes during the crisis (VM.59). The screenshot on the right portrays a female pensioner receiving '300 euros per month which are not enough even for basic medication' (VM.22). Gradually, towards the end of the campaigning spot, the scenario is completely overturned. The melancholic music and colours change to an optimistic

mood. Every single campaigning spot which touches upon a different social issue ends with a phrase which communicates that 'this coming victory allows me to hope. Greece moves forward. Europe is changing. Hope is coming" (ibid.).
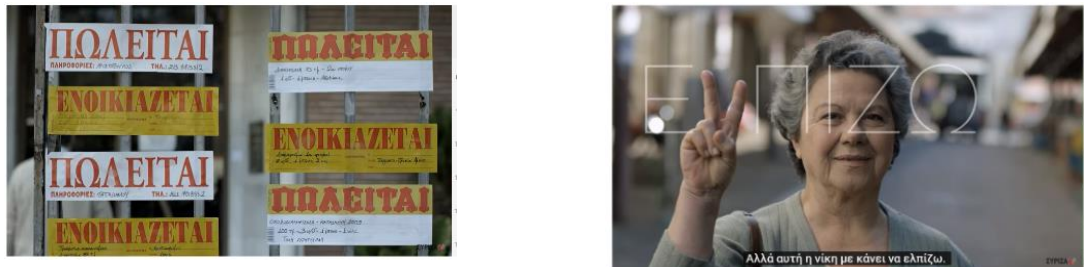
Figure 3.6: Stills from SYRIZA's election campaign spots in January 2015.

3.3. Collective identity: A pluralistic, egalitarian subject of the Left

The analysis presented hitherto focused on the supply side of political discourse shows how SYRIZA – by framing diverse demands and distinct social and economic sectors as part of the same diagnostic narrative on the crisis – articulated a collective identity in the name of 'the people' and against an unresponsive and corrupt 'elite'. In line with the motivations of this research, this chapter now turns to the side of affects in order to exploring socio-political emotions in the period 2012-2015. As we already know from Laclau, there is no collective identity without the release of libidinal energies that would result to a *cathectic* investment (Parkin-Gounelas 2012).

From the 4.6% of 2009, SYRIZA jumped to 16.8% and 26.9% in 2012 and the victorious 36.3% in 2015, thereby disrupting the political 'consensus' since the country's passage to the democratic era. As the analysis of the peoples' affectual narratives reveal, an important factor for the 'success' of SYRIZA's discourse was its ability to mobilise socio-

political affects tapping into the citizens' 'anger', 'frustration' and 'indignation' turning them into 'hope' (GR1; GR4; GR17).

The depth of the economic crisis was a central factor in turning the political scene 'upside-down'. Researchers described Greece as 'a particularly violent case' of austerity with evident anthropological implications (Powers and Rakopoulos 2019). This view was shared by interviewees too. Kalliopi, an activist in the 'solidarity networks', said that 'the people were pauperised': 'middle-aged men, fathers, were searching for food in the dumpsters. Mothers visited the food line twice a day. People hadn't seen any income in weeks or months'. In line with theories of crisis (Moffitt 2015; Roberts 2015), the economic situation resulted in a social – and ultimately representational – crisis, which completely dislocated the socio-political norms, opening the space for new identifications, e.g. with SYRIZA (Stavrakakis, Katsambekis, et al. 2017). In the subsections that follow, the chapter enquires into the processes of collective identity formation and the reasons why SYRIZA rose to prominence in the political struggle for hegemony. The second part of the chapter draws on 30 interviews conducted with 'the people', allowing the subjects themselves to reveal how and why they identified with the radical left populist party.

3.3.1. Turning difference into equivalence

Discussions with SYRIZA sympathisers indicate that an important factor which contributed to the radical left party's dynamism was its intimate relationship with social movements. For this reason, SYRIZA was often described as a movement-party (Prentoulis and Thomassen 2020). Obviously, 'the movements' was *not* another name for 'the people' in that the latter extended *beyond* the militant left. However, it is important to note that the relationship SYRIZA had with the movements was pivotal in diffusing the anti-austerity message across the different 'sectors' and 'identities' of society. The movements, as an omen for the 'electoral revolution'

that was to follow, functioned as a body that transmitted the pulse of the various protest cycles that sparked between 2008 and 2013 climaxing with the squares' Aganaktismenoi – the indignant citizens' movements of the square. This 'pulse' reflected an avalanche of emotions ranging from anger to fear and indignation, but also joy, which characterised the general population too.

Most significant among the struggles that emerged during the anti-austerity protests, leaders and members of which were interviewed for this study, included: (1) the environmental struggle of the villages in Skouries (Northern Greece) against fracking and (2) the struggle against the privatisation of water in Thessaloniki; (3) the fired 'cleaners struggle' and (4) 'school guards' (5) the employees of the public broadcaster (ERT) who were left unemployed after the sudden forced shut down of ERT by the Samaras government; (5) organised components of the workers movement and (6) various solidarity networks who sought to 'substitute' for the weakened public provision services such as hospitals (see Katsambekis 2019). How do social movements and networks become a collective body that seeks to access the central arena of political representation? How do their isolated demands become collective ones?

In the beginnings of the 2010s, one could observe relatively weak communication between the different movements. As activists who were involved with different particular struggles explained in the interviews, initially, the sectorial character of each movement was evident. In an activist's own words, 'before we would communicate with similar types of movements, for example those who fought about the same or similar issues, or at best movements that operated in the same city or region' (GR9). With the intensification of the crisis and an accompanying and deepening sentiment of indignation and anger that stemmed out of the perceived un-representation by the political establishment, 'things changed' (GR8). As the interviewees explained, upon the decision of the New Democracy government on the

11th of June 2013 to shut down 'ERT' (the Greek Public Broadcaster), everything took a different trajectory with respect to grassroots politics (GR1; GR4; GR9). The forced closure of ERT generated wide mobilisation that extended far beyond the activist circles and the Left. The government's unexpected decision was perceived as 'an assault to democracy', a journalist who lost her job due to the closure insistently stated (GR2).

In explaining the formative aspect of that event, a leading activist in the struggle against the privatisation of water in the city of Thessaloniki narrated how 'the event' brought different heterogeneous struggles together under the banner of 'democracy'. In his own words: 'we had an assembly when we got informed that ERT was forced shut. We all left instantly for the station's headquarters and took our own banners with us (GR1). Banners of the movement against the privatisation of water – a distinct struggle – were brought at a venue of protest that was later occupied by journalists – another distinct struggle. 'Democracy' – the central slogan of the journalists who protested the government's decision to close ERT, framing it as authoritarian – was proved to be an empty signifier that connected the multiple struggles of the city of Thessaloniki before they become national struggles. One movement responded with solidarity to the attacks on another movement, highlighting how heterogeneous struggles started merging, forging a universalised movement against 'a common enemy'.

Later, at the height of the economic crisis and anti-austerity protests as a response to it, the then-occupied headquarters of ERT broadcasting online became a central place for the organisation of movements and ideas that received exposure to the public as a counter-hegemonic project (GR2). The blending and linking of banners, slogans and demands under a common roof is characteristic of the political process that followed in Greece. *Differential relations* started turning into *equivalence*, if we are to adopt Laclau and Mouffe's vocabulary. As Eleftheria, a journalist who assumed a central activist position explained, 'we gradually started marching together as one. We exchanged slogans and borrowed each other's symbols'

(GR2). In other words, movements stopped expressing isolated struggles contesting for isolated demands. In demonstrating how the 'abstract' notion of *chain-of-equivalence* was performed empirically, Giorgos explained how the movement against the privatisation of the water in which he participated, like all other particular struggles and demands, entered a process of transformation, incorporating itself into a general movement – a movement of movements, a movement of citizens from different backgrounds that simply demanded political, social and economic change: 'we stopped talking only about ''the trees'', ''fracking'', or ''water'' and we started talking about ''nature'' in general...there was a coherence. Later we spoke about ''democracy'' in the name of ''the people'' and against ''the corrupt establishment''' (GR1).

The argument that particularities were weakening and linkages between different groups deepening is also highlighted in Della Porta et al. (2017: 43): 'while protest was escalating in terms of numbers of participants, repertoires of action, and geographical diffusion, collective action had a tremendous impact upon institutional and party politics; but it was also the definition of the movement itself that was changing: this became evident in the squares during the summer of 2011, when ultra-leftists met with SYRIZA party members or anarchists with (ex-)PASOK voters, all of them opposing the same political establishment and asking for a more fair and equal world'.

Although it holds true that SYRIZA benefited from the movements and vice-versa, social movements literature as well as activists who participated in this research show that their relationship was not straightforward. 'The movements' were not a property of SYRIZA and SYRIZA was not a product of the movements (Kotronaki 2018; Kouki 2018). Rather, both engaged with each other dialectically and relationally, revealing, amplifying, and diffusing an already energised political pulse in Greece. SYRIZA provided potent master frames that tapped into discontent and 'cleverly steered affect and attracted voters' support' (Tambakaki 2019:117). Through this political *process*, salient popular frustration against the Greek

government led by New Democracy and PASOK started to be translated into *political action*. SYRIZA's became a political vehicle for the movements' agendas that aspired to transfer their demands from the streets to the parliament. The party's antagonistic narrative generated libidinal energies, mobilising the previously disaffected electorate and constructing a collective identity.

The issue of framing then is central to political identification in that it provides coherence though linkages among the various autonomous struggles of distinct movements, as overviewed earlier. The verticality of hegemonic politics cross-cut the horizontally situated autonomous struggles in an alchemy of collective identification.

3.3.2. Why SYRIZA?

The heterogeneity and ambiguity of 'the people' as a collective subject was highlighted in the previous section.[35] Amid this contingent choreography of subjects and actors, why did SYRIZA rise to prominence and eventually took power rather than other challengers, such as the Communist Party and other fringe left formations that also articulated sharp messages against neoliberalism, or the nativist populist right ANEL and the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn, who also took aim at the economic model, as well as the elites and immigrants?

To some of the interviewees, such as those who belonged to the most radical components of the movement, SYRIZA was the organic option; 'it was the left choice' (GR11); at worst, it was seen 'a radical alternative in the mainstream of politics' (GR17). The party was perceived as their channel for political change, delivering radical claims from the streets into

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[35] The heterogeneity of the movements and the ambiguity of the people in crisis-ridden Greece is also manifested in the multifaceted phenomenon of Aganaktismenoi and specifically the existence of two parts of the 'square': 'the lower' and 'upper'. While in the lower, the bigger of the two, experiments of democratic deliberation assumed a central role, in the upper square radical right-wing and nationalist elements were most dominant (Kaika and Karaliotas 2016; Sotiropoulos 2017). This speaks to the argument that 'the people' was not necessarily another name for the left, that the movements were not a property of SYRIZA and vice-versa.

the parliament. For the newly politicised citizens, SYRIZA appeared 'consistent' (GR1) and 'honest' (GR3) because it was 'always present' (GR12) in the struggles in which they, as common citizens, participated. As interviewees stated, the radical left party was omnipresent: in their neighbourhoods, in the demonstrations, in the food solidarity struggles (GR5; GR10); sometimes it even provided its local branches for group meetings (GR12). As interviewees further explained, SYRIZA was welcomed by most of the movements as it was perceived as a 'clean' party, a party that was open and sharp about supporting the protests; after all, it had never governed, and thus it had never proven itself untrustworthy (GR3, GR7). All these reasons sufficed to create a sentiment of 'trust' in the left party (GR2).

The proximity between the radical left party and 'the people' was evident from the fact that many local activists – not necessarily party-members – a number of which were also interviewed in this study, were SYRIZA candidates in local, national and European elections between 2012 – 2015 (GR1; GR6; GR14). As we will see in the following chapter, some of these people (often framed as 'our friends', 'colleagues', 'neighbours' by other interviewees) became MPs or ministers (GR19; GR20; GR21; GR22). As Kouki and González (2018:130) note SYRIZA's 'party members were ordinary people and not part of the well-known, corrupted political elites. Even if none of these protest events or spaces were the product of the party's steering, SYRIZA was present in most social struggles publicly supporting anti-austerity claims'.

SYRIZA's break with the traditional, class-centric and orthodox Left, interwoven with its expansive and pluralistic political project that aimed to govern, placed the radical left party in a privileged position. The party's upward trajectory was relevant to the type of organisational patterns it contingently developed across time (GR14). Its interactions with the movements played a significant role in formulating, or even updating, its discourse and strategy in a vibrant and youthful way (Eleftheriou 2019). Its loose organisational character is not irrelevant to the

populist trajectory that the party entered later; nonetheless signs of minoritarian populism were already evident from the early 2000s (Katsambekis 2016).

Unlike other fringe-parties, SYRIZA was perceived as a realistic alternative that articulated a vision and a plan for change. At the same time, it was also on the side of the common people. In contrast, other (left) parties rendered visible an elitism embedded in its stagnated theoretical textbooks. The Communist party, for example, opposed neighbourhood level solidarity campaigns that provided food and clothes to impoverished citizens maintaining that 'feeding people is an obstacle to the revolution' (GR12). As this leading member in the 'Solidarity 4 All' movement said, the solidarity structures were gradually politicised and protested on the side of SYRIZA (GR12).

Citizens' participation not only in protests but neighbourhood-level projects created a sense of community and belonging. Solidarity emerged as a remedy to the social fragility that had prevailed since 2010 (GR8; GR9; GR12). Sentiments of isolation (social, political and economic) were turned into hope with the rise of SYRIZA (GR4). Political engagement generated feelings such as 'euphoria' and 'joy' as interviewees explained (GR11). In this sense, politics, on the streets, neighbourhoods and squares but also at the representative-level generated an array of affects that must be factored into the analysis of the reasons why SYRIZA rose to prominence out the crisis context in Greece.

3.4. Conclusion

This chapter dealt with SYRIZA's populist performativity in opposition. Through its well-framed diagnosis of the crisis as a symptom of the corruptive practices of the old establishment, SYRIZA's discourse assembled the puzzle and created linkages among dispersed sectors of society who felt excluded, marginalised and impoverished by the political *status quo* and channelled popular frustration towards a new political subjectivity with leftist characteristics.

SYRIZA deployed its populism and juxtaposed 'the people' against the neoliberal austerity imposed both by the internal 'political establishment' and the external interventions of 'the troika'. In times of total dislocations rooted in the combined economic, social and representational crisis, SYRIZA's narrative appealed to the wider electorate – not just the left – mobilising an avalanche of affects such as rage but also hope, but most crucially mobilising it toward a goal which offered agency and a potential effect.

Following the empirical analysis of a total of 40 units located on the supply side of communication (including speeches and posters) in combination with the 30 interviews conducted with SYRIZA supporters, several important observations with respect to the party's type of populism can be made. First, while populism – at least in Europe – is habitually associated with the (extreme) right, nationalism and xenophobia, SYRIZA's populism is accompanied a leftist political program which reveals a progressive rather than a regressive vision of society. To be sure, references to 'the nation' were not absent from the party's discourse. Critically however, SYRIZA's narrative differs starkly from a typical nationalist discourse. The party made references to 'the homeland' (*patrida*) rather than 'the nation'. SYRIZA's 'homeland' is not positioned against another 'homeland', 'nation' or enemy defined by culture or blood but rather an *economic and political elite* that is both internal and external to the Greek nation. The 'patriotic subject', which SYRIZA interpellated, was framed as a subject resisting neo-colonisation, rather than a subject of national purity. Additionally, the identity of the homeland/patriot is not closed to foreigners. On the contrary, immigrants and foreigners were included in SYRIZA's definition of 'the people'. Importantly, the party pushed forward the idea of *popular* rather than *national* sovereignty.

Additionally, contrary to conventional understandings of populism, 'the people' that SYRIZA's articulated was not homogenous or monolithic. Rather, the interchangeable manner in which 'the people' were articulated synecdochically with other identities (such as 'the

immigrants'), indicates the pluralistic and inclusionary nature of collective identity. As it follows, SYRIZA's discourse between 2012 – 2015 was not necessarily anti-liberal or against the institutions; rather it sought cooperation (for example with the European institutions) and a preference towards *subverting* the rules of the game rather than 'overturning the table'. In SYRIZA's last pre-electoral rally in the hot winter of 2015 Leonard Cohen's *First We Take Manhattan* was echoing in the background: 'They sentenced me to twenty years of boredom. For trying to change the system from within. I'm coming now, I'm coming to reward them. First we take Manhattan, then we take Berlin'. This song was not played by chance. It was rather full of symbolic meaning. It resonates well with new left populism's aspirations to capture the state and subvert the rules of the game rather than abandoning the mainstream electoral arena treating it as a useless tool. Berlin symbolised the southern European socio-economic experience under the monitoring mechanisms and austerity programs imposed by 'third countries'. Present at that rally was also Tsipras' comrade Pablo Iglesias. Together they promised that after Berlin, that was going to be captured by SYRIZA, there is another, bigger city, of even more symbolic importance that was to be capture by PODEMOS. The next chapter examines SYRIZA's populist performativity in government in the years 2015 – 2019 seeking to understand continuities and discontinuities.

Chapter 4
SYRIZA in power (2015 – 2019)

4.1. Introduction

This chapter examines SYRIZA's populism in government (2015-2019) through the discursive and socio-cultural perspective (Ostiguy et al. 2021b). Going beyond the success/failure paradigm in the study of populism in power, the chapter shows that not only did SYRIZA's populism not fade, but that it constantly reinvented itself during its term in office. This *modus operandi* involved combining its main populist canon with non-populist frames that revolved around socio-political issues that emerged. However, populist performativity alone does not suffice to *maintain* affective popular identifications. SYRIZA's capitulation to the demands of the troika translated into the gradual abandonment of its anti-neoliberal manifesto and served as a catalyst for the downward trajectory of passionate popular identification that followed. Yet, notwithstanding the disillusionment of the radical left and the defeat that the party faced in the 2019 elections, SYRIZA still managed to achieve a significant percentage establishing – itself as a durably important political force in the country.

In outlining its main findings, this chapter is divided into two parts. Drawing from a sum of 37 discursive data, including speeches, tweets, Facebook and Instagram posts located on the supply side of communication, the first part is dedicated to the way the SYRIZA government articulated its discourse. Drawing on a set of 27 interviews, the second part gives priority to 'the people' and their affectual narratives, investigating the way collective identification, and de-identification, with the populist actor played out. Before embarking on the main analysis, the next section provides an overview of SYRIZA's term in office.

4.2. Left populism in power

Against conventional wisdom and theoretical presuppositions that expect populism to 'fade out' once in power (see Chapter 1 for an extended analysis), SYRIZA maintained a populist character in government, both in rhetoric and in style. SYRIZA's populism in power obtained new contents and was co-articulated with other key frames that emerged from the ongoing political developments in Greece.

4.2.1. People-centric and anti-establishment discourse

Populism continued to serve as SYRIZA government's main repertoire. This section focuses on the ways that the SYRIZA-led government articulated and performed people-centrism and anti-elitism in government. In its first phase in power, the newly formed populist government upheld an outsider status by attacking the international and European establishment: an establishment higher that the highest of Greece's national office. The (external) establishment was constituted by the Troika (the International Monetary Fund, the European Central Bank and the European Commission), EU member states such as Germany, the Netherlands and other 'Northern' countries that kept a harsh stance against Greece during the negotiating processes.

Beyond its international enemies, the government antagonised domestic enemies it had already identified while in opposition. Those included, above all, 'the two parties that for forty years governed the country interchangeably' (SYR.9). PASOK and New Democracy continued to be presented as one entity, that often took different names such as 'the old regime' (SYR.9), 'the bipartisan system' or the 'clientelistic state' (SYR.10) and 'the politically bankrupt parties' (SYR.17) who 'covered-up for corrupt businessmen' (SYR.9). SYRIZA in government continued to attack 'the oligarchs', 'the bankers' (SYR.10), 'the few' and 'the neoliberal technocrats' (SYR.17) as well as 'the media system' which was framed as 'corrupt' and 'politically motivated' (SYR.18), in that 'they live on the shoulders of the common people who pay for their debts' (SYR.9). SYRIZA in government continued to view the media as part of

the establishment and launched a war against media moguls, politicising the fact that private channel owners (who happened to be ship and construction-moguls too) had close and familial relations with the two big parties' leaders (SYR.16). The new opposition (especially New Democracy) was framed as a corrupt ally of big TV interests which sought to block SYRIZA's plan to regulate the media landscape (SYR.18). Economic interests could not be absent from the discussion. As Alexis Tsipras argued, 'some channels have direct access, and therefore benefits, from banks' (SYR.16).

Evidently, in SYRIZA's governmental rhetoric, 'the enemy' continued to be a heterogeneous rather than a monist entity. For instance, the Prime Minister maintained that 'political power feeds economic and media power and media power in turn offers total support to politicians to reproduce the very same corrupt system that brought the country to bankruptcy' (SYR.16). The government's antagonistic framing reveals a vertical (top-down) relationship of exclusion is typical of populism: framing the collective subject as being powerless and suppressed by a gang of the privileged few (cf. de Cleen & Stavrakakis, 2017).

In its definition of 'the people', SYRIZA consistently included 'the Greeks', 'the many', 'the social majority', 'those who paid for the crisis' (SYR.14), 'the new generation' (SYR.16) which often took the names of 'the cleaners' 'the school guards' (SYR.10), who were framed as excluded, marginalised, politically subaltern and victims of 'the memorandum barbarism' (SYR.14). Adding a leftist dimension to its populist canon, the government included 'the left' and 'comrades' as references for its collective subject.

Popular sovereignty continued to assume a central role in SYRIZA's discourse. As the new Prime Minister stated, 'we won't negotiate the popular mandate' (SYR.14). In his programmatic statements communicated in front of the newly elected parliament , Alexis Tsipras assured 'the people' that 'for the first time the Greek government won't be receiving

commands from abroad through emails' (SYR.10).[36] This sharp statement that celebrated popular resistance and promised the rebirth of an autonomous, sovereign and independent Greek people, attacked both the two-party system, which was framed as a slave of the international monitoring organisations,[37] but also these very organisations themselves, referring to them even as 'colonisers' (SYR.9).

The Prime Minister stressed that the aim of the government is to 'regain popular sovereignty and restore the dignity of the Greek people' (SYR.10). Although invocations of 'the sovereign' are typically dismissed as nationalist, the SYRIZA government is not to be equalised with the xenophobic nativism that is (stereo)typically associated with populism. Tsipras did not frame the 'Greek nation' as superior to another nation but a nation that should have an 'equal role in the EU' (SYR.10). His diagnosis concerning 'the big issue' in crisis-ridden Greece was not to be found in immigration but rather in the 'profound humanitarian crisis' (SYR.10) caused by austerity. His prognostic solution was not found in attacking minority rights or scapegoating the foreign other but rather in 'social justice'. The Prime Minister framed his government as 'a government of social salvation' (SYR.10). Without downgrading the presence of nationalist elements in the government's rhetoric, it needs to be stressed that SYRIZA's discourse in power continued to resemble inclusionary and patriotic variants of nationalist discourse. SYRIZA's 'calls to the people' resonate with the Gramscian theorisation of the national-popular project that deeply rooted in the nation-state which is perceived as the prime battleground for political identities. Thus, inclusionary national(ist) elements are not foreign to contemporary left populism (cf. Custodi, 2020).

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[36] This reference constitutes an accusation against the previous government led by New Democracy and PASOK. What Tsipras really meant is that the 'memoranda-governments' received orders from 'the troika' through emails and it just executed them. This resonates with SYRIZA's narrative that, through such practices, Greece has lost its national and political sovereignty.

[37] These included the so called Troika, composed of the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

Throughout its term in office, democracy remained central in SYRIZA's discourse. The political vision evident in the government's rhetoric was that 'democracy returns to Europe and Europe returns to its foundational principles' (SYR.11). Thus, although indeed SYRIZA remained highly polarising in government, its antagonistic performances do not resonate with the convictions of those who frame populism as necessarily anti-democratic. SYRIZA's populist rupture aimed at a type of politicisation that was democratic in nature. In this sense, the SYRIZA-led government, especially in its first term in office, 'revived, in a performative way, the notion of democratic representation and popular sovereignty [...and sought to...] implement a programme that was supported by the popular mandate, breaking with the tradition of unresponsive and unreliable elites' (Katsambekis, 2019: 36).

Tsipras called for a referendum in July 2015,[38] after the deadlock in the negotiations with its European partners[39] delivered an ultimatum, bringing Greece to the edge of yet another bailout with further demands for austerity. The Greek Prime Minister framed the events around the notions of 'democracy' and 'popular sovereignty' that were suppressed by the oversight mechanisms. 'In this country, where democracy was born, we cannot ask permission from Mr. Schäuble and Mr Dijsselbloem in order to give voice to the Greek people', Tsipras said to the parliament while justifying his decision to call for a referendum (SYR.11). The referendum

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[38] Due to the regular call for referendums by Latin American populists, this very practice is often perceived as populist (Roberts 2012) – most commonly thought to be denounced as demagogic and folksy. However, it is important to note that frequent referendums also take place in non-populist situations. In this respect one could think of the case of Switzerland. Therefore, referendums should not be understood as a practice that is constitutive to the phenomenon of populism. One can observe fundamental qualitative differences between Tsipras' discursive repertoire around the referendum event and other populist leaders who sought to increase their power, strengthen their rule, and manipulate the constitution through referenda (for Turkey see Gurhanli, 2018; for Hungary see van Eeden, 2019).

[39] Aiming to discursively reshuffle political power relations, SYRIZA dropped the name 'troika' and labelled its adversaries as 'partners'. As a term, 'partners' was strategically vague. It included the European Commission, the Eurogroup, but also the German government or leaders of other states as well as the European Stability Mechanism; in other words, stakeholders that may or may not be part of 'the troika'. This strategic vagueness was embraced by the party in that it attempted to camouflage its failure by leaving behind terms (i.e. the troika) with charged connotations.

was framed as a democratic act in response to what he characterised as 'pressure, blackmailing, ultimatums and fiscal asphyxia' coming from 'Brussels' (SYR.11).

The events of 5 July 2015 demonstrated high degrees of polarisation, both amongst the Greeks who split themselves among the 'NO' and 'YES' camps. The former sided with the government and articulated notions of resistance and sovereignty. The latter sided against the government, and in favour of the opposition, and exposed a pro-European (and often elitist) stance. Tsipras declared that 'the referendum will take place despite 'the European partners'' opposition' (SYR.12). His anti-establishment rhetoric was combined with intense people-centrism in that, beyond antagonism with the political adversary ('the EU', 'the troika', 'Germany' and 'the internal elites'), the notion of popular sovereignty was again at the centre of SYRIZA's narrative.

Standing in Syntagma square, Tsipras addressed the tens of thousands that have gathered to support the 'OXI' campaign:

'Today we do not protest. Today we celebrate democracy... Today we take our destiny in our hands and give voice to the Greek people. Today we celebrate and sing. To overcome fear, to overcome blackmailing... Tonight Europe and the whole world has turned its eyes the Greek people. On the 3 million poor people. On the 1.5 million unemployed people (SYR.12).[40]

Contrary to liberal theorisations that expect populists to articulate 'the people' as superior and glorious, SYRIZA's left populist discourse continued to frame the collective subject as marginalised and resisting, inferior and repressed. With *'OXI...OXI...OXI'* (NO...NO...NO) echoing in the background of Alexis Tsipras' voice in Syntagma (VM.40), the Prime Minister

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[40] In reinforcing the democratic character of the politics of 'the people', Tsipras at Syntagma square stated that 'whatever the outcome will be on Monday, we are already the winners'.

who assumed again the role of the campaigner, said that 'the resistance of our people became a flag for the struggle of all the people around the world' and 'our claim to end austerity finally gets recognised' (SYR.12).

Unable to strike a better economic deal with 'the institutions', the Prime Minister resigned and called for snap elections on July 5, 2015. The period that followed – effectively a second term in office after renewing its mandate – marked a major shift in SYRIZA's discourse. The consistency of its 'the enemy' changed as references to 'the troika', 'Brussels', 'Germany' and 'Merkel', to which SYRIZA 'capitulated' (Nikolakakis 2017), were reduced dramatically as the party retreated from its core promises. However, attacks against the 'domestic' establishment were sustained at increased levels. Despite this change in the definition of 'the elite', SYRIZA' government's people-centrism remained alive.

Addressing his citizens, Tsipras said that 'the *popular mandate* of January 25 has expired. Now it is the time for the *sovereign people* to have a say anew' (SYR.13). Stylistically, the Prime Minister and the great majority of his cabinet presented social, cultural and political traits that are 'antithetical' to the conventional way one thinks about politics and especially government. As a Prime Minister, Alexis Tsipras continued to staunchly reject neckties (this was seen as 'an exemplary piece of political stagecraft' [Friedman, 2015]) and kept his smart-casual dress code. His style attracted the attention of major media outlets around the world. So did his home residence – a flat in the area of Kypseli, which is one of the most densely populated areas of Athens with high migrant and working-class presence. In action, Tsipras' discourse revealed a unique and charismatic style of political leadership that combined irony, cynicism but also humour, a simple but not necessarily simplistic way of speaking. This was employed as a formal way of addressing his adversaries, but also for delivering polemic and disruptive rhetoric that undermined the legitimacy of his enemy. The Prime Minister did not hesitate to make direct references (e.g. name politicians involved in international tax evasion;

or being exposed by the Lagarde list)[41], while he also repeatedly referred to grand scandals (e.g. Siemens;[42] drug lords affiliated to football, media but also the Mitsotakis family)[43]. These attaches were structured in a vertical, bottom-up way that is typical of populist rupture. Attacking the opposition leader, Mitsotakis, Alexis Tsipras said that, 'I wasn't rich when I entered politics and I didn't become rich. (unlike you) I do not come from a family of politicians, who did not do any other job apart of politics, and are billionaires, Mr. Mitsotakis. You are too little to refer to me as part of ''the few'' and ''the elite'' (SYR.15).

Figure 4.1: Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras performing on the socio-cultural low. Pictures from his social media channels. On the picture located on the left he wears black Greek NBA superstar Giannis Antetokounpo's jersey to send an anti-racist message (VM.23). On the picture located on the right the PM enjoys a pint of beer while watching a World Cup game at a pub in London after the Western Balkan summit (VM.23). In comparison to conventional institutional politics where politicians appear bookish and proper, to borrow Ostiguy's terms, Tsipras appears casual, breaking the rules of expected political public image (Venizelos 2020).

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[41] Named after the former French finance minister Christine Lagard, the Lagarde List is a spreadsheet containing roughly 2,000 names of people with undeclared accounts at the Swiss HSBC bank, including ex-Ministers Voulgarakis and Papakonstantinou. In October 2010 the list was passed on to Greek officials to help them combat tax evasion. The Lagard List only became known to the wider public two years later, when the investigative journalist Kostas Vaxevanis published it in his magazine Hot Doc (TVXS 2012).

[42] The Siemens scandal refers to a case of corruption and bribery in Greece is over deals between the company and Greek government officials during the 2004 Summer Olympic Games in Athens, Greece regarding security systems and purchases by OTE (public telecoms) in the 1990s (Reuters 2017).

[43] Marinakis a businessman and media mogul, a football team owner and Mitsotakis confidante seems to have been involved in drug-trafficking (see Helliniscope, 2020).

Undoubtedly, the new Prime Minister represented a showcase of a not-so-conventional politician but he was not the exception within its circle. Deputy Minister of Health, Pavlos Polakis, was renowned for his excessive and Alpha-male style characterised by open confrontations (that involved swearing) with journalists and politicians. Polakis often appeared unshaved, never wearing a tie, while on a panel during the course of an anti-tobacco conference he lit a cigarette. His habitus resonates well with the socio-cultural low, which is often thought as foreign to the way an institutional politician – such as a deputy minister – should behave.

Figure 4.2: Transgressing the socio-political high I: Deputy Minister of Health Pavlos Polakis in his leather jacket inside the Greek parliament (left) and outside his ministry (right) when he took the megaphone to address the protestors demonstrating against his own policies (VM.26; VM.27).

Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis demonstrated emblematically SYRIZA's divergence from the political mainstream. For this reason, he was often described as narcissistic and erratic. Varoufakis rode his motorbike 'to work'; he visited the Maximos Mansion (*Μέγαρο Μαξίμου*) to meet with the Greek Prime Minister wearing just a t-shirt and carrying a red backpack (VM.25); he favoured patterned and floral clothing style that was described as eccentric (at least in comparison to the conventional political dress code). Varoufakis paid an official visit to the British Finance Minister, George Osborne, wearing a leather jacket and a loose, untucked blue shirt. *The Guardian* wrote that Varoufakis 'goes casual at number 10' (Fox 2015) and *The Independent* compared Varoufakis's 'rock' and 'edgy' style with Osborne's 'boring' outfit and framed the aesthetic comparison between the two ministers as a 'ridiculous contrast' (Nianias 2015).

Figure 4.3: Transgressing the socio-political high II. From left to right: Varoufakis visits the Prime Minister; Varoufakis drives the deputy finance minister, who later became finance minister, Euclid Tsakalotos; Pavlos Polakis visits the ministry of health amid a protest (VM.28; VM.29; VM30).

Figure 4.4: SYRIZA cabinet members transgressing the socio-political high III. From top to the bottom: Yannis Varoufakis walks to 'number 10' in a casual style; and sits on the floor during a parliamentary debate; SYRIZA MP and Education Minister Nikos Filis on the podium wearing clothes that do not resemble politicians'' outfit (VM.31; VM.32; VM.33).

This aesthetic and behavioural style that accompanied most of SYRIZA officials and was evident during the rise of SYRIZA from the margins of the political system, continued to be visible during its term in office. The fact is that once elected, the focus was not restricted to the party's leader, but extended to a number of others surrounding Tsipras who projected similar characteristics in their identities amplified this messaging. This is a semi-expected observation in that one's habitus is not subject to easy change. This is not to say that government members were not aware of their own characteristics or that they did not seek to pursue them to the maximum for purposes of political theatricality, but rather that these were already existing traits of their characters that played critical role in political identification between 'the people' and them. SYRIZA's wardrobe politics are relevant to the present analysis. This is not because SYRIZA's politicians masqueraded deliberately in order to attract voters. It is evident SYRIZA's MPs and ministers were not conventional politicians to begin with; they were activists that emerged politically in the alter-globalisation movement and the squares, academics and intellectuals, and in the best-case scenario leaders

of a fringe and loosely structured political organisation. Rather, their general habitus – raging from their dress code to their public manners – resonated more with the common person than the standard politician.

The dialectic relationship between conventional and unconventional political identity in SYRIZA's style in power, points to the tension between *people-centrism* and *anti-elitism*. The Prime Minister, Alexis Tsipras, as well as a number of ministers and MPs flaunted the socio-cultural low with their attitude and (left) cult-like habitus, transgressing the socio-political high, which expects politicians to be proper and polished (cf. Ostiguy, 2017). In this sense, the populist polarisation centred around the antagonism between 'the people' and 'the elite' becomes evident.

As a vocal critic of the neoliberal model and the subsequent austerity measures being implemented by 'Europe', the Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis provocatively referred to the bailout deal offered to Greece as 'fiscal waterboarding' (SYR.22). Talking about his economic plan for Greece, Varoufakis maintained that Greece should have defaulted within the Eurozone and 'stick the finger to Germany' (SYR.23). In a joint meeting with Eurogroup's president Jeroen Dijsselbloem, the Greek Finance Minister called 'the troika' 'a rotten committee' and announced that Greece will no longer be cooperating with it (SYR.24). Thus, beyond the unconventional aesthetic, Varoufakis performed a rhetorical style that is located on the socio-political low too.

Moving beyond rhetoric and style, the government attempted to 'apply' populism through policies and institutional channels. Three months into government, SYRIZA established (through parliamentary procedures) a committee to investigate 'the subjugation of Greece to the supervision regime of memoranda and any other matter' referring to the imposition of austerity measures, as well as other economic scandals which took place in the preceding years

(SYR.21).[44] This procedure, although institutional in character, reveals a populist rupture embedded in its core: it centralised the notion of justice (for the social majority) and an antagonistic opposition to 'the corrupt elites' responsible for making the people suffer.[45] Another important anti-corruption move that was seen as an attack against 'the old establishment' was the government's attempt to uncover one the biggest scandals in contemporary Greece – that of the international pharmaceutical corporation Novartis[46] – which involved high-ranking established politicians and ministers.

The SYRIZA-led coalition initiated an auction for broadcast licences to regulate and enhance transparency in the media sector, which was framed as corrupt and venal. Private media were accused of operating 'for 27 years without licences and taxes to the state' (SYR.16). The aim, according to a TV spot that the party released, was to 'end private monopoly' and make media moguls pay their share for the first time in history (VM.39). At SYRIZA's second congress, the Prime Minister said that 'No deals under the table, no special treatment for anyone' (SYR.9). The government invited all interested parties to an open bidding contest for broadcasting licences. 'Media owners were locked away for more than three days, in a blind auction where mobile phones where banned. They were offered hospital-like cot beds and meals. Leading channels were eliminated by the competition.

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[44] The Tsipras government made it clear that it will not be prosecuting ideas (the neoliberal model and its advocates who implemented austerity in Greece) in that 'establishment parties have been already prosecuted by ''the people'' in the elections' (SYR.9).

[45] Zooming into various symbolic moves the government made, one could identify several populist elements. For example, Tsipras announced the abolition of the numerous consulting posts in ministries, as they were seen as waste of money, the reduction of staff e.g. security guards in Maximos Palace, but also abolish the MP's privilege to be offered a car because MPs could pay with their own money (SYR.9). Tsipras named this a new governing ethos.

[46] The US department of Justice initiated an investigation against Novartis which was involved in bribing in its favour Greek politicians including two ex-Prime Ministers, Antonis Samaras and Panayotis Pikrammenos, as well as numerous ex-Ministers such as Stournaras, Avraamopoulos, Adonis Georgiadis, Evangelos Venizelos, Andreas Loverdos and others (Chryssopoulos 2018).

At a first glance this may seem to resonate with Müller's (2016) conviction that populists foreclose freedom of speech and attack media.[47] However, SYRIZA's 'war on media' had significant qualitative differences that contradict the aforementioned liberal concerns. The government's narrative was organised around notions such as democracy and legality, in the name of the constitution and transparency. Referring to the reactions mainstream media and established parties had regarding SYRIZA's media-licencing competition, the Prime Minister said that 'the political pressure and the pressure of the economic elite towards the judges should end. The judges should be left alone to do their job' and he continued saying that 'democracy cannot be blocked and cannot be boycotted. The laws of the state will be implemented' (SYR.16). Elsewhere the Prime Minister called the reactions against his media policy as 'games with the political institutions' and contented that they are contradictory with the essence of democracy. 'We', he said 'are here to defend democracy and its institutions' (SYR.9).

The auction was framed as an issue of tax justice and social justice as well.[48] Lefteris Kretsos, the Deputy Minister of Digital Policy who was interviewed for the purposes of this study, viewed public broadcasting as a public good that should belong to 'the people' and not 'the few' (GR23). The deputy minister rejected that there was any symbolism behind either the polemic against media moguls and the unique competition process. 'The process was long because we wanted to guarantee transparency', he explained. In his view, that the whole process was about pluralism – and media oligarchs represented the opposite. In fact, media moguls were believed to represent the interests of the few and not the multitude.

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[47] In fact, the political and media opposition has accused the government for autocratic and anti-liberal practices). Indeed, in the years between 2012 and 2015, mainstream media opposed the rise of the radical left party with all their powers; so the possibilities of revenge (or its appearance) cannot be discounted.

[48] In fact, the Greek state gained €250 million euros from the auction.

4.2.2. Patriotic articulations

A key frame along with SYRIZA's populism in government was articulated, was that of '*πατρίδα*' (*patrida* – homeland). The notions of 'national sovereignty', 'independence' and 'autonomy' continued to receive a significant role too. Yet, SYRIZA's invocations of 'the national' presented significant differences from nativist discourses. The government's nationalism continued to be inclusive (what SYRIZA called patriotism) and posed itself against a political and economic 'other' rather than an ethnically defined one.

Immediately after being sworn-in on the 26th of January, Alexis Tsipras visited the shooting range in Kassariani, Athens where he laid roses on the memorial dedicated to the thousands of Greek communists and resistance fighters who were executed by the Nazi regime on 1 May 1944 (VM.34). Tsipras' first act as a Prime Minister had an utter symbolic importance. It sewed together the traditional Greek left identity, rooted in the communist resistance, with the anti-austerity mobilisations of the present, under the umbrella of patriotic consciousness and the desire for popular sovereignty. His move was interpreted as an act of defiance towards Germany, whose role in the contemporary Greek debt crisis was heavily condemned by the leftist party.[49]

The anti-Germanism of the SYRIZA government cannot be reduced to nativism. Its nationalism maintained the inclusionary characteristics it had in the opposition. It opposed Germany as a political entity that financially suppressed Greece through its neo-colonial strategy (vertical exclusion, punching-up) and not on the basis of race (horizontal exclusion) (see also Markou, 2020:40). At the same time, the government maintained a humanitarian

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[49] Tsipras' anti-German narrative drew on the memories of the Nazi occupation of Greece, when his country suffered the German war crimes and inherited an enormous financial burden that resulted from damaged infrastructure and a forced loan. Although the issue of German reparations was subject to periodic discussions in the Greek political discourse, it was Alexis Tsipras who, both as an opposition leader and as a Prime Minister, persistently raised it and sought to discuss it in the process of negotiating for the Greek debt.

perspective on the matters of immigration and refugees. In criticising borders and stressing the value of cooperation, Tsipras addressed the second congress of his party saying that 'I feel proud [because while]. other countries close borders, build fences and throw tear gas to the refugees, [...] Greece [...] showed to Europe the meaning of solidarity and defended the real European value' (SYR.9). He also repeatedly stressed that his government serves 'the people' 'without exclusions and without exemptions' (SYR.10).

Amid the highly divisive 'Prespa agreement'– which sought to settle a long dispute over the name of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) by arriving at 'North Macedonia' as the new name for Greece's neighbour – the notion of 'the nation' received focal attention. SYRIZA's stance to give up 'Macedonia' to its northern neighbour was perceived as an act of betrayal on the right. It brought the end of the coalition with the nativist populist ANEL and sparked unprecedented, and often violent, grassroots nationalist mobilisation. Against this background however, Tsipras sought to subvert the meaning of the 'nation' and 'homeland'. Patriotism, he said:

'is loving your own country, not hating the neighbour, patriotism means not to stand in silence in front of the monster of fascism. [Patriotism is] to stand up against those who humiliate the (Greek) flag dipping it into the blood of the innocent and the weak, those who have (tattooed) the sun of Vergina on the one hand and the Nazi symbol on the other' (SYR.25).

The leftist leader did not hesitate to make references to the Greek flag. Even more, he sought to reinvent its meaning through a leftist perspective, drawing on the rhetorical toolbox of the traditional Greek left:

'[T]he blue and white [flag (*η γαλανόλευκη*)] that was waved in the villages of resistance by EAM which kicked out the occupier (the fascists/Nazis), the blue and

white [flag] that was raised by the students of the Polytechnic University before it turned red from their blood' (SYR.25).

Subversive left inclusionary patriotism was amplified and diffused by an array of governmental and party bodies as well as affiliated media. The Ministry of the Macedonia region in Thessaloniki, organised a number of events (such as public discussions or cultural events involving theatrical and music performances) that sought to re-interpret the history of the country and the city outside the canonical (Greek) exceptionalism. Such events drew on the nation's history but went beyond the mainstream nationalist narrative and stressed the notions of 'solidarity' (with the Jews in the 1940s and the migrants in contemporary times) as well as 'cooperation' (with neighbouring nations) (F.GR1; F.GR2; F.GR3).

Importantly, while the rhetoric drew thematically from a semantic reservoir rooted in the patriotic frame, it was simultaneously structured in a populist way – revealing what Snow et al. (1986) referred to as *frame bridging*. The political antagonism revolving around this national issue took place in a vertical way pitting those at the bottom (defined as the progressive, democratic Greek citizens) against those at the top (defined as the very same old elite). While the solution proposed by the government was presented as the patriotic solution, the political adversary was framed as 'the elite which threw Greece to the rocks, destroyed its economy and brought malaise to the people now attempts to isolate us internationally with their fake nationalism' (SYR.25).

Inquiring into the reinterpretation of the nation through progressive terms, I asked the opinion of the former director of the Prime Minister's press office, who was responsible for Tsipras' communication strategy – and who has also served as one of his speechwriters. 'The government does not talk about ''the nation''. It talks about ''the homeland''. In this sense, he rejected the assertion that his party endorses nationalism and stressed that it endorses

patriotism. 'The homeland is not something that should be left to the extreme-right and the ultra-nationalists (εθνικαράδες)' (GR24). 'To talk about 'the nation'', he continued, 'you need hegemony. The left does not have it. Not even among its own ideological space. Many leftists are allergic to notions such as 'nation' and 'homeland' (GR24).

4.2.3. The revival of the left-right axis

Towards the end of its administration, the government amplified its references to 'the left', which were infused in its populist rhetorical canon. In SYRIZA's poster placed below, released in the context of the 2019 European elections, one can see this intertwining between 'left' and 'populist' discourse. The poster employs the term 'progressive' (which was one of the key signifiers in SYRIZA's last months in office) and advocates for 'a Europe for the many'. Interestingly enough, this has clear affinities with Jeremy Corbyn's central (left populist) slogan ('for the many *not the few*') (VM.35).

Figure 4.5: SYRIZA's poster for the 2019 European elections

Alexis Tsipras made direct references to European left parties, such as Spain's Podemos, and leaders, such as UK Labour Party's Jeremy Corbyn (SYR.9), while he also invited Bolivia's left leader Evo Morales for an official visit in Greece in 2019.

The relevance of the memorandum/anti-memorandum frame started fading gradually (especially after the government's declaration that Greece exited the memoranda) and the Left/Right axis made its reappearance. Especially in the last six months of SYRIZA's administration, issues that emerged in political discourse 'played out along more familiar ideological fault lines, reawakening traditional political identities and bringing the left-right dimension back to relevance' (Tsatsanis et al., 2020: 4).

Left politics cannot exist without its constitutive other, namely right-wing politics. The exit of ANEL from the populist coalition allowed SYRIZA to amplify the anti-right repertoire. During the same period, the government and its proxy bodies who were trying to restore SYRIZA's left profile unleashed severe rhetorical attacks against 'the right'. One could identify four main metonymic dichotomies for the key 'left or right' dilemma that the government rhetorically constructed. In amplifying degrees, SYRIZA articulated a dilemma between 'progress or conservatism', between 'moving forward or returning to back to ''the old'' ' or even 'the medieval times', itself and the right, New Democracy, the right and the far right. SYRIZA associated its name with the positively loaded signifiers and ascribed to its adversary the negative ones.

In the second congress of the party, in 2016, Tsipras denounced Golden Dawn[50] as 'a fascist organisation that often acts with the legitimacy of political parties when political parties don't contribute to the construction of a common front against xenophobia, against racism, against fascism, to build a front for the defend of the humanitarian values and solidarity' (SYR.9). The 'Minister of Macedonia', who had to lead a reactionary institution in a region

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[50] An ultranationalist organisation in Greece that openly embraced Nazism. It operated at the grassroots level, often through pogroms against migrants, and rose to prominence during the economic crisis. The organisation managed to secure more than 7% of the vote effectively entering the Greek parliament as the third most popular party. Following the murder of anti-fascist rapper Pavlos Fyssas by a member of Golden Dawn, the Greek authorities initiated an investigation, arresting several leading members of the organisation which was led to justice. The trial of the Golden Dawn, often described as the biggest Nazi trial after Nuremberg lasted more than 5 years. Its leaders were sentenced to 13 years while the organisation was deemed criminal (Kampagiannis 2020).

that had repeatedly expressed its national(ist) concerns, said to me that before assuming office and seeking to reinvent its meaning, her ministry was 'a museum of the extreme right ideology' (GR22).

SYRIZA-leaning newspapers amplified the governmental narrative by endorsing anti-right and pro-left discourse. They accompanied their Sunday issues with pamphlets dedicated to the trial of the Golden Dawn (F.GR4), the youth riots (described as 'the December of Rage and the youth uprising of 2008') (F.GR5), as well as the history of Greek communism (F.GR6).

Figure 4.6: Pamphlets included in the SYRIZA-leaning *Efimerida ton Syntakton*.

Polarisation though, was not a product of the populist SYRIZA alone. The opposition was highly involved in it and at times initiated severe rhetorical attacks against the government. A close collaborator of the Prime Minister said that 'polarisation is a tool that New Democracy employs because it does not want to legitimise the government…it does not accept that it lost power in 2015' (GR24).

4.2.4. Exiting the memoranda?

A core frame attached to the central populist canon of the SYRIZA government drew on Greece's so-called 'exit from the memoranda'. This frame became evident after summer 2018

when the country nominally exited the monitoring programme after eight years. Being headed towards the summer 2019 elections, rhetoric celebrating SYRIZA's self-professed achievement amplified. Ministers, MPs, party affiliated and leaning newspapers reproduced the frame centred around 'Greece's exit from the memoranda'.

The patriotic repertoire was blended with other ones – such as the core populist master frame which put at its centre people-centrism. The notions of (national and popular) sovereignty, independence and autonomy prevailed once again. The government's diagnosis was found in the misery that resulted from austerity and the brighter days that would come. Thus in a sense, we have once again a typical case of upward-punching and forward-looking variant of populism that is typical of the progressive, democratic and inclusionary-nationalist left.

On the tweet located on the left-hand side, Tsipras states: 'After eight difficult years, we become once again owners of our own homeland. Our future is again on our own hands. The country changes. It gains confidence and vision. It becomes more just, more modern, and more democratic. With values, rules, equality for and respect to every citizen individually'. Like other Tsipras' discourses, this tweet is not particularly populist but, importantly, the notion of 'sovereignty' prevalent. However it is important to note that it is combined with the non-populist, perhaps even elitist/institutionalist

Figure 4.7: Alexis Tsipras announces Greece's exit from the memoranda

and liberal nodal points of progress, legality and equality' (VM.36).

The announcement of the end of the monitoring programmes was celebrated performatively. The Prime Minister, known for his aversion to ties, appeared at Zappeion wearing one (VM.37). This had symbolic resonance in that, when upon his election Tsipras got offered a tie by fellow state leaders, he claimed that he would only wear one when he achieves his goal: to lead Greece out of the suffocating surveillance of the economic monitoring mechanisms. The 'tie' symbolism is a complicated one. This temporal, admittedly humorous, shift from 'the low' to 'the high' (cf. Ostiguy, 2017), tells more about 'the SYRIZA paradigm' in government than one thinks. The 'tie moment' represents the complex dynamics of populism in government in that SYRIZA occasionally amalgamated a status of a responsive (to the popular mandate) actor and simultaneously responsible actor (which accomplished its political goals, paradoxically related to meeting European requirements). Let us return to the co-articulations of the popular and the institutional in the next section though.

Figure 4.8: Alexis Tsipras appears wearing a tie for the first time

4.2.5. Technocratic and managerial articulations

Although conceptually populism and institutionalism are situated on the opposite poles, the case of SYRIZA in power illustrates how the two notions can be combined. This 'paradox' was addressed in a particular way by SYRIZA. Key politicians as well as intellectuals and academics who served as Ministers and MPs in the SYRIZA cabinet distinguished 'government' from 'power' (see Douzinas, 2017; Baltas, 2018, 2019). They saw the former as

a type of administration (*à la* Mouffe (2005) and Crouch (2004)) and the latter as a broader notion that related more with the theories of material and ideological relations articulated in the theories of hegemony (cf. Laclau & Mouffe, 1985), *biopower* (cf. Foucault, 1983) and social reproduction (cf. Althusser, 2014 [1975]; Federici, 2012). According to this narrative, SYRIZA was indeed in office but did not capture power (SYR.19). In line with populism theory, the SYRIZA government maintained that ones who were really in power were the domestic and external establishment that continued to rule. On the one hand, this consisted of those whom SYRIZA recently ousted (i.e. New Democracy and PASOK), who over the last three decades have managed to develop corrupt mechanisms of political influence that remain in place. On the other hand, this entailed European and international establishment: an alliance of economic and political interests – that through their various monitoring institutions – enforced their will over the domestic establishment, which obeyed them.

The SYRIZA government sustained a perfect contradiction: it pursued an anti-establishment character and simultaneously endorsed and performed a technocratic political style and solutions that coexisted quasi-organically alongside its populist narrative. While Laclau's work implies that populism and institutionalism lie at opposite ends of the conceptual spectrum (Laclau 1977, 2005a), such perspective betrays the ethics of contingency and fluidity that discourse theory advocates for. One should rather favour a performative perspective, highlighting the seemingly incompatible logics of populism and institutional/technocratic practice that often lead to technocratic/managerial populist hybrids (Drápalová and Wegrich 2020; de la Torre 2013).

Ostiguy has argued that populist governments 'are located in the two sides of the institutional border' (Ostiguy, 2015:362 in Miró, (2020)). Indeed, SYRIZA in government endorsed this logic that stitched together both the populist style of 'the low' and the managerial style of the institutional 'high'. It articulated a profoundly populist rhetoric revolving around

popular sovereignty, while simultaneously implementing policy through institutional channels. Approaching this as a fundamental impossibility leads to an analytical and empirical deadlock, similar to the one found in the teleological perspective which argues that populism is destined to fail once in power. The amalgamation of populist and institutionalist logics is a necessary contradiction. Populism claims an outsider position but it is nonetheless a power-seeking project. It is, by definition, a political project that aims to bring the marginalised in the main political stage. Thus, for a fruitful political analysis, the tension between populism and power should be conceived as a productive one.

Tsipras' administration negotiated this tension in terms of what Pierre Ostiguy (2015) called 'dirty institutionalism' in that it presented itself being both inside and outside the state, being both the government and the opposition, both the state and the people, being both the institutions and at protest (cf. Miró, 2020). In a way, certain political procedures that pass through committees and laws are by definition a technocratic in nature. But policy *making* is political (in that choices are not neutral) and often so, the public narrative surrounding such process can certainly be political too.

The government performed a discursive move and renamed 'the troika' and 'the eurogroup' to 'institutions'. This move was part of a broader language game that the new Greek government performatively enforced aiming to establish a new framework for the reception of social, political and economic reality in the country. Such a strategy, aimed at dis-articulating and re-articulating hegemonic terms (e.g. the meaning of 'democracy', 'homeland' and 'popular sovereignty'). With regards 'troika's' renaming into 'institutions', this move signified an act of non-recognition of those supranational, non-sovereign, technocratic bodies that monitored Greece and sought to delegitimise their role. The repertoires supplied by the government supplied echoed well in the public sphere as they adopted by the opposition parties, media and the public, highlighting the performative effects of discourse.

But performativity works both ways. Such rhetorical manoeuvres often sought to justify failure and cover up contradictions. For example, what SYRIZA critiques called 'capitulation', SYRIZA called 'honourable compromise' (SYR.28). Between 2012 and 2015 'the troika' took the name of the number one enemy for 'the people'. It was a politically and emotionally loaded term; and the main actor responsible for such framing was SYRIZA in opposition (2012 – 2015) who was elected on an 'anti-troika platform'. After July 2015, 'the troika' was reduced to a technocratic body, washing away the affective semantics that channelled popular frustration into electoral mobilisation. In essence, 'the troika's' role was depoliticised; it no longer constituted superior political and economic interests but rather a group of technocrats seeking to find ways for Greece to get out of the economic crisis. In sum, the rhetorical displacement of contradiction could be understood in terms of what SYRIZA called 'creative ambiguity': (SYR.27).

There were also moments when SYRIZA's managerial style of governance was even more apparent and predominated over its populism. In figure 4.9 below, one can see a picture in which Tsipras appears among six state leaders in the context of the Mediterranean and South European countries' summit (VM.38). This highly institutional setting (comprising of an all-male frame), resembles a conventional political practice. Undoubtedly, this setting is located on Ostiguy's 'high'. Yet, it has to be stated that Tsipras is the only man not wearing a tie which metaphorically highlights the coexistence between populism and institutions.
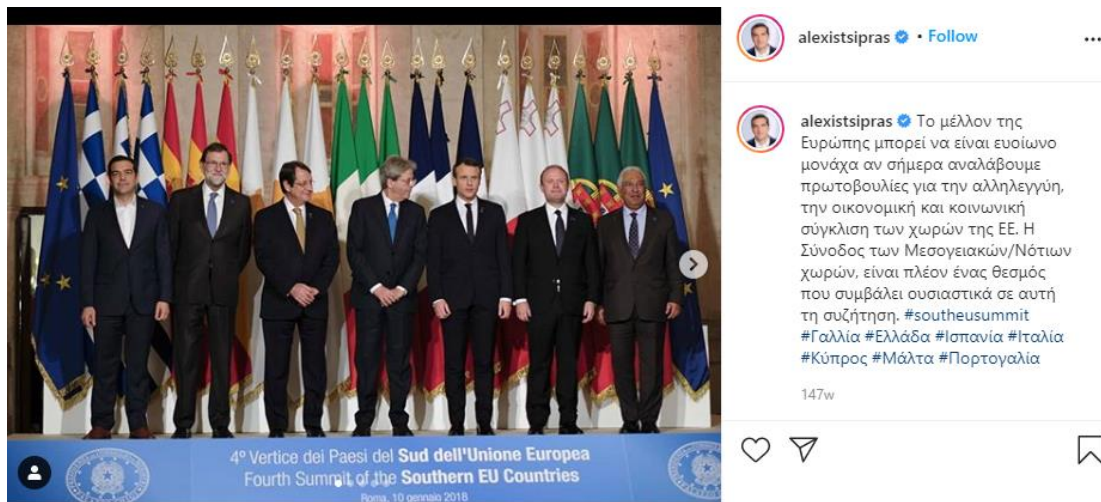
Figure 4.9: Alexis Tsipras on the 'high' of the populist/elitism spectrum

SYRIZA's dealing with the 'Question of Macedonia' could be characterised as purely technocratic. The negotiations took place behind closed doors and at the highest political level, since the key actors involved were the two states' Prime Ministers, Foreign Affairs Ministers and their technical committees. 'The people' received updates related to the political developments through media channels and public statements, while they were not called to decide through a referendum – a method that is considered as populist by many commentators.

The government has condemned those who protested the 'Prespa Agreement', framing them as extremists and nationalists. Most interestingly, Tsipras jumped on the anti-populist and elitist camp (of the populism/anti-populism discursive cleavage) in that in order to demonise demonstrators he them 'irrational' and 'populists' (SYR.26): a label that was often ascribed to SYRIZA by anti-populists who wanted frame the party as dangerous and irrational or by those who viewed SYRIZA through the lens of progressive and democratic populism.

Dipped into 'political pragmatism', and following a fast-track process of 'political maturation'[51] (SYR.29), the government transformed itself from a 'responsive' (to the demands of the people) to a 'responsible' actor (in that in order to maintain political and economic stability from external pressure, it played by the rules of the game) (cf. Mair, 2014). As it often happened, key personnel sought to justify SYRIZA's transformation through the lens of responsibility and rationalism (which is often seen as antithetical to populism). Features that 'populism studies' classify as populist, were not seen as such by the 'populist actors' themselves. *Avgi's* editor, Angelos Tsekeris, claimed that Alexis Tsipras is not a charismatic leader (like populists are often described) but an exceptional problem solver (GR24). Tsekeris, who served as the director for the Prime Minister's press office as well as Tsipras' personal speechwriter rejected the term 'populism' for SYRIZA. The Deputy Minister of Digital Policy rejected the implication that the government's rhetorical repertoires were part of a broader strategy, rather arguing that 'it is just the way we think we should govern and distribute public goods, unlike other political forces that want to perpetuate austerity' (GR23). In a similar manner the Deputy Minister of Labour rebuffed the label 'populist' for SYRIZA in that such label is most commonly associated with the faded PASOK (GR21). Only a regional leader of SYRIZA's youth branch adopted the term saying that 'if populism means fighting for the poor, then yes, we are populists' (GR18).

The tension lays not only between populism and power but also between power and 'the left'. As Douzinas (2017:62) notes, 'when a radical left party takes charge of the state, it encounters a hostile institution organised to prevent its ascendancy and frustrate its plans.

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[51] Yannis Dragasakis, a key SYRIZA figure who served as a Deputy Prime Minister in 2015 and Minister of Economy and Development in 2018, has coined the term violent (or forceful) maturation (*βίαιη ωρίμανση*) referring to a left party's transformation from a fringe to a unified political actor that is potent to compete, challenge and take up responsibilities in the contemporary era.

Marxist political and legal theory has considered state and law antagonistic to the Left in content and form'. Even when it failed to deliver its key promises (e.g. cancelling austerity), the government framed its handling as an attempt to negotiate and modify the troika's suggestions in favour of 'the will of the people'.

The SYRIZA government retreated from its own promise to 'tear apart the memoranda' and 'cancel austerity' and signed a third memorandum, thereby implementing neoliberal policies. To justify measures taken that were not in line with its own ideology, it often referred to the complex issue of being in government and the subsequent (external) restraints.

In order to ameliorate the consequences of the July 2015 compromise, SYRIZA introduced what has become known as 'the parallel program'. The parallel program sought space to manoeuvre within the asphyxiating institutional and fiscal constraints which blocked class politics. Operating within the neoliberal framework of austerity and reduced sovereignty resulting from the international monitoring mechanisms, the government sought to mitigate austerity through social policy that would soothe the burden of 'the popular classes' (SYR.20), 'the lower, marginalised and underprivileged strata' (SYR.14), while it also sought to expand social rights. In Douzinas' understanding, the parallel program 'both completes and undermines memorandum policies' (Douzinas, 2017:70).

The *aporia* whether SYRIZA has failed remains in the air. This is a normative and formless question though. What does it mean to fail? What exactly has failed? And why? For some, the SYRIZA story has a clear end – and it is tragic. SYRIZA has indeed failed to cancel austerity and deliver its key promise upon which it was elected. Importantly though, drawing on the analytically sharp distinction between populism and policy outlined in the theoretical chapter, this suggests, by definition, not the defeat of populism but the defeat of the 'thick ideology' (cf. Mudde 2004) that accompanied SYRIZA's populist repertoire. The gradual

abandonment of its anti-neoliberal commitments highlights that it is the 'radical left' component of the party that has eroded in government. On the contrary, populist repertoires continued to be articulated as SYRIZA's predominant mode of communication.

Nevertheless, populism cannot be reduced to 'rhetoric'. Political identification is not simply a matter of 'framing'. Articulation presupposes affective investment. Thus, what remains to be seen is whether 'the people' maintained affective attachment with the populist SYRIZA. The task of the second part of the chapter is to investigate the emotional underpinnings of 'the people' in Greece.

4.3. Collective identity in the age of governing populism

The second part of Chapter 4 focuses on the emotional dynamics of collective identity in order to identify continuities and discontinuities in the way 'the people' identified with SYRIZA in power.

4.3.1. A left parenthesis?

During the first six months in office, SYRIZA enjoyed impressively high approval rates in public opinion. Whereas in the five years that preceded 2015 Greek governments were used to being confronted by massive protests outside the Hellenic Parliament, in February 2015 thousands of people were gathered in Syntagma square in a pro-government rally to show their solidarity with their delegation in Brussels represented by Tsipras and Varoufakis. For the first time in years, the police fence blocking the entry to the Greek parliament was removed. Even SYRIZA's first moves in government 'were symbolic and had little impact on the citizens, 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'' (Katsambekis, 2019: 35-36).

SYRIZA's first six months in office were characterised by a 'wait and see' approach. The government spent all its energy in negotiating with Brussels, leaving no space for policy implementation at the domestic level. (Left) critics characterised this period as an interval – a leftist parenthesis in a sea of neoliberalism that has closed badly: the party fought against the European economic and political establishment and lost. What followed after that was business as usual. As the Deputy Minister of Labour, Nasos Iliopoulos, stated, ''SYRIZA's biggest mistake was that it underestimated how important it was for the European Union to defeat us in a paradigmatic way'. The Deputy Minister referred to the EU's stance as a 'coup d'etat' which had two aims: 'first, to block the Greek government to exit from the existing memorandum and second, to overthrow the Greek government' (GR21). The government's narrative portrayed itself as a resisting force against the establishment, and this narrative was endorsed by many within but most importantly *outside* Greece.

In line with SYRIZA's narrative, party members and sympathisers perceived the government's politics as an attempt to manoeuver, re-adjust and deliver progressive social policy domestically within a very restricted political and economic framework. Politicians and policy-makers who were interviewed, maintained that this was 'a proof' of contemporary (radical) left policy-making in an era in which collapsing neoliberalism started presenting its morbid symptoms (GR23; GR24). As the Deputy Minister of Labour (2019) stated, 'we abolished the subminimum wage. For the first time Greece achieved pay rise in salaries and we reduced unemployment. This is hard data' (GR21). But could SYRIZA govern as a radical party following capitulation? Did the policies that the government put forward in order to soothe the social crisis suffice to maintain the affective bond with the core of its grassroots? Or was SYRIZA's experience in power a short leftist interval for the TINA (There is No Alternative) dogma? The answers to these questions vary depending on the standpoint one may take. Moderate left voters and party sympathisers justified SYRIZA's failure, putting the blame

on 'the troika', 'the IMF', 'Merkel' etc. They still identified with the party, to an extent. But the enthusiasm that prevailed before SYRIZA's capitulation was long gone. A former activist and candidate, for example, recognised that 'SYRIZA has indeed signed a memorandum'. However, in his perception, despite its failure to realise its promise, the leftist government of Alexis Tsipras was not to be equated with the former governments of PASOK and ND. In his perception, 'SYRIZA has at least tried to incorporate the excluded sectors and provide basic welfare to the super-poor' (GR14). This activist was referring to the 'Social Solidarity Allowance' that the SYRIZA government re-introduced in order to eradicate extreme poverty (Kyriakides 2016). In reinforcing the view that the SYRIZA government contributed towards socio-economic change, an activist involved in the 'food network' explained that during the peak of the economic crisis, 'some people who were fed from the solidarity structures haven't seen a single coin in months. The 200-300 euros that they received from the government was a huge amount for them' (GR12). In her view, the fact that after 2016 the number of people who relied on solidarity structures for food was reduced was a result of governmental labour. 'Some local structures and networks shut, because they were no longer necessary. Unemployment was also reduced', she said.

4.3.2. The great betrayal

SYRIZA's governmental experience was overshadowed by its failure to deliver its key economic promise. The capitulation of the party to troika's demands functioned as a critical juncture with respect to the way sectors of society identified with the government. The forceful governmental narrative of success illustrated in the first part of the chapter was not shared by radical activists. The traumatic experience of July 2015 marked a critical juncture in the way people saw SYRIZA. Ex-voters admitted that 'SYRIZA is not worse than other parties. It may even be better. But this is not enough, it is actually too little' (GR16). Peoples' expectations were so high that the disappointment that followed was immense. Despite the fact that SYRIZA

sought to alleviate poverty for the most excluded sectors of society, outgoing members of the party's central committee and critics of the 'neoliberal' turn that SYRIZA took saw this as a redistribution of poverty rather than of wealth (GR14). As a Katia, a disillusioned activist who left the party after September 2015, 'SYRIZA is a different party now' a party activist who left the party after the former 'turned ''NO'' into a ''YES'' (GR17).

This is not to say that (electoral) support for the government declined but, rather, that passionate identification with the 'radical left party' was undeniably affected by the bitter outcome of the negotiations with troika. After all, collective identification cannot be reduced to electoral percentages and voting intention surveys. Different sectors of the population, different movements – fragments of 'the people' so to speak – experienced SYRIZA's administration in distinct ways and maintained distinct perceptions about the government depending, for example, on the extent to which 'their' demands were met. The most radical components of 'the people' – namely, those who participated actively in 'the movement' within or outside the party – constituted the most disillusioned elements of the collective identity. Others, such as the least politicised components of the LGBT community, expressed their satisfaction for the enactment of a human-rights bill that allowed civil partnership agreements between same-sex couples (GR13). Yet for components of the LGBT community who were heavily involved in 'the movement', the betrayal over the economic promise prevailed, resulting in negative emotions against the governing party (GR17).

Radical, internationalist, but also centrist variants of the left, as well as liberals, gave credit to the government for 'finally' achieving the 'Prespa Agreement' with (now) North Macedonia (GR3; GR7; GR14). Activists acknowledged the government's institutional achievements to grant social and legal rights to immigrants and LGBT people, but they rejected seeing this as a radical move. 'This should have been common sense' (GR10), one interviewee said; another interviewee maintained that this is a 'liberal' or 'social democratic' move at best,

not a radical one (GR15). These most radical components of the movements attacked SYRIZA for using statist tactics and police force to evict squats and exclude migrants from universal access to society and healthcare institutions (GR4; GR11; GR15; GR16). In certain cases, SYRIZA members participating in demonstrations were bullied by the extra-parliamentary left. Activists with Marxist background placed the issue of 'economic exclusion' at the core of their narrative putting other demands such as gender and race in a relatively secondary position. SYRIZA's retreat was perceived as a great betrayal – and was digested as a total failure.

Referring to the trajectory that SYRIZA in government took, an activist said that 'every time I think about it, it hurts'. Olga was very involved in the movement explains how those days were very different than any other period in her life:

> I remember the week of the referendum as if it was a film – a film that I was
>
> playing in. I remember where I was when I first heard that Tsipras
>
> announced a referendum … I remember what I was discussing that night…I
>
> remember the assembly the day after […].

In activists' perception those days were ecstatic, euphoric. 'Everything was on whole new level. We believed that social and political change was at the gates', Olga said (GR11). For many on the left, the referendum was a real manifestation of a class struggle (GR9). The ambience…it was as if there was a sweet conspiracy…it was as if something was about to kick off (GR11). The referendum generated unprecedented politicisation and mobilisation:[52]

> The banks were closed. The Greek petit bourgeoisie could not pick up cash from
>
> the ATM, yet they would still go against 'their interests' and vote NO!

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[52] As Olga explained, the anti-racist movement was supposed to hold a festival on the day of the referendum – a festival they were organising for months and they have announced to the public long ago but due to the referendum they had to cancel (this meant a huge financial burden for them).

All media outlets, the political system and the bosses backed 'YES' to the

referendum.

In workspaces, employers were blackmailing employees …

We were blackmailed by the European Union.

But we continued to hand out leaflets…everywhere in Athens you could see

people to hand out flyers in favour of 'NO'.

The more they (the establishment) amplified their propaganda in favour of

'YES'…the more we flooded the squares to support NO.

People got mobilised. Passing by the squares one could see people handing out

flyers. You took a flyer, people were smiling, they winked their eye as if they

were saying to you ''LET'S GO!'.

The euphoria of the 'referendum days' was followed by anti-climax. SYRIZA's retreat was a

traumatic experience for 'the people' – and especially for the organised sectors of the left.

Activists emotions could be concentrated in three words: 'defeat', 'heavy', 'betrayal'. But it

was nonetheless hard to articulate those emotions. 'It was unconceivable … ouff…OK…I

don't know' Olga said.

From this point onwards, activists viewed SYRIZA as an enemy. It was seen as a

different, 'leader-based' (GR16), 'mainstream' (GR9), 'established'(GR7) 'social democratic'

(GR15) even 'neoliberal' (GR14) and 'established' (GR16), party from that of 2015. 'The only

way that the government could have maintained any relationship with the movements was

conditioned on whether it could have kept its promises', a former party member said (GR17).

4.3.3. Social movements in decline?

After the referendum, political mobilisation dissipated.[53] One could identify (at least) four interconnected reasons for the decline of contentious politics, but also generalised political enthusiasm. First, as it was illustrated in the previous section, movements (as well as other non-organised sectors of society) were put 'on hold' waiting to see the first moves of SYRIZA in power. Second, once their representatives achieved the first leg of its goal (to win the state), 'the people' left their hopes to the government 'allowing' it to act on their behalf. In a sense, by absolving themselves of continuing responsibility, 'the people' gave up their agency to SYRIZA treating the party as a redeemer.

Third, following the massive defeat by the European establishment, the people got deeply disappointed and disillusioned, leading them to give up. In line with resource mobilisation theory (McCarthy and Zald 1977), the long (and not necessarily linear) political cycle of mobilisation exhausted immaterial resources such as energy, will, and passion to continue the struggle, while the cumulative effects of austerity exerted pressure on the material resources available both on individual and collective levels (GR11; GR16; GR17).

Fourth, the jubilant experience of the left in power created an identity crisis for the movements. As an ex-activist, then the Minister of Macedonia region, said before 2015 'SYRIZA *was* 'the movements'. After 2015 it became extremely difficult to continue being the movements. Not because we changed mentality. The party was too small and some of its personnel were moved to the government. Additionally, some movements were dissolved as the government provided institutional responses to issues such as access to basic healthcare and food to the poor and the non-insured citizens' (GR22).

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[53] This is often the case when the left achieves power, at least in the European context. This does not obviously hold true in the Latin American context. In Venezuela, Bolivia and Argentina, for example, supporters of Hugo Chavez and Evo Morales and the Kirchners, continued to organise politically either at the street-level, in the union-level, or in the community-level.

Her view was not shared by the most radical components of the movement. In their view, their radical claims had finally entered institutions. But these institutions are generally considered hostile – even foreign to leftist movements. At the same time, their representative, who was now seen as a traitor, had appropriated their movements' language, articulating it from the power of the state, but not delivering

This had a significant impact on movement strategy. SYRIZA was perceived to use or 'steal the language that the movements were talking all these years' (GR14), leaving grassroots politics stripped of any dynamics to establish (counter-)hegemonic frames. The fact that SYRIZA was in government and had a relative control over powerful mechanisms of ideological reproduction, meant that it had the upper hand to co-opt and defuse leftist messages leaving the movements disarmed and neutralised.

Fifth, contentious activity did not simply decline over time (Kotronaki and Christou 2019). But, it reinvented itself in novel forms of resistance and organisation in space (cf. Sewell & McAdam, 2001). Grassroots mobilisation continued an already existing process of re-territorialisation (Malamidis 2021). It moved beyond the streets the institutional arena, and diffused in decentralised forms of collective projects that dealt with the needs of everyday life – for example, envisioning the politics of the commons (Roussos, 2019: 8). In this sense, there was a shift in collective action repertoires rather than decline (Roussos 2019; Malamidis 2021).

4.3.4. Populism without 'the people'?

Hitherto, the analysis of 'the people's' narratives indicates a deep disappointment towards SYRIZA as a governing party. This opinion was particularly pronounced among those interviewees who before 2015 were either involved in 'the movements' outside the party, or those party militants who belonged in the radical flank of the party and had more ties with 'the street' than the central committee.

The disillusionment of SYRIZA's left component is not synonymous with electoral defeat. Looking at the percentages the outgoing government gained in the 2019 elections, its 31.53% was a significantly high percentage, despite the fact that the party was pushed back into the opposition. In fact, SYRIZA scored only 4.75 % lower than September 2015, when it assumed office. Considering the delegitimisation of the government following the 2015 'backflip', SYRIZA's electoral damage can be considered mild. In addition, Yanis Varoufakis' newly established *MέPA25* (DiEM25)[54] gains (3.4%) were almost equitable to the government's loss. As several electoral surveys showed SYRIZA's electoral loss was a combination of 'the radical vote's' shift to the left and Varoufakis or towards abstention,[55] as well as the mobilisation of the nationalist right against SYRIZA in light of the Macedonia naming dispute (Public Issue 2019).

Nevertheless, when comparing the pre-2012 and post-2015 SYRIZA, one cannot overlook that the percentage the party lost in 2019 equates to the one it once had when it was located at the fringes of the party system. A possible interpretation is that the outgoing militant functioned as the leftover of SYRIZA's populist strategy. Indeed, 'success' requires sacrifices – and the institutionalisation of left populism has evident consequences. This brings the focus onto the tension between left populism and class purity. As argued elsewhere, 'reformism and populism are neither synonymous nor antithetical. Populist strategy cannot be reduced to reformism, but can inform a vernacular revolutionary politics, which can also be explicitly socialist' (Venizelos & Stavrakakis, 2020). Yet, the consequences of narrowing down or

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[54] DiEM25 (Μέτωπο Ευρωπαϊκής Ρεαλιστικής Ανυπακοής, European Realistic Disobedience Front) is transnational political formation that was established by several European intellectuals and politicians among them Yannis Varoufakis. It has established several branches around Europe and in Greece is led by Varoufakis. For an extensive account see de Cleen et al. (2020).

[55] Systematic data on voting shifts are lacking however the survey contacted by Poulantzas Institute (2020) which considers data from 11 surveying companies in Greece help one assemble this puzzle.

expanding one's political terrain, articulating the emptiness of the signifier 'the people' or choosing to fill it, do not cease to exist.

Is the 31.55% (or the loss of 'only' 4.75%) a proof of sustained degrees of collective identification between 'the people' and the populist? Of course not. As it is repeatedly argued throughout this thesis, political identification cannot be reduced to electoral percentages. The 31.53% SYRIZA gained in 2019 is not an indicator of collective identification. Political identification is to be found in the very enthusiasm of the masses, the libidinal energies and the passion of being involved in politics, institutional. This was precisely what was lacking from the picture.

Although SYRIZA in government maintained, to relatively high degrees, its populist profile – pitting the people against the elites and performing the politics of 'the low' – the vibrant affective mobilisation evident in the pre-2015 years was evidently absent. What remained, was a dormant electorate that either voted for SYRIZA in fear of the triumphalist return of the right, or because it was simply happy with a mediocre, unsatisfying and moderate social agenda. In a sense, against a background of a hybrid populist *rhetoric,* Greek politics have returned to 'business as usual'.

4.4. Conclusion

This chapter analysed populist discourse and collective identity in the age of SYRIZA in government. Having analysed political communication of the party in the forms of speeches, bodily choreographies and visual means, the first part of this chapter showed that not only populism constituted SYRIZA's main rhetorical canon in power, but it also transformed and reinvented itself as it was combined with distinct non-populist frames that drew on political developments as well as pre-existing cultural narratives. This is an important development for populism research. Studying populism as a discursive style challenges the conventional view

that populism is not durable in power (Mény and Surel 2002); though it allows a 'rigorous yet flexible method' (Stavrakakis 2014) for the study for the transformations of populism from the opposition to power. The second part of the chapter focused on the understudied topic of populist collective identification essentially giving agency to 'the people' to express the way and the extents to which affective attachment to SYRIZA changed. Evidently, there are both sympathisers and critics. The 31.55% that SYRIZA gained in the 2019 elections turned it from a challenger to a consolidated actor in Greek politics and shows that the damage in the image of the party following its bitter capitulation to the demands of its number one enemy, the troika, was softer than might have been expected.

Chapter 5

'Make America Great Again!':
Donald Trump and the promise to 'the forgotten'

5.1. Introduction

This chapter explores Donald Trump's political campaign for the candidacy of the American presidency in 2016 and investigates the degrees of people-centrism and anti-elitism through the discursive and socio-cultural approaches of the Essex School (Stavrakakis 2017) and Ostiguy (2017) and Moffitt (2016) respectively. It highlights that Trump's profound populist performativity and 'charisma' was grounded on his transgressive style which flaunted the 'socio-cultural low'. The candidate's 'politics of exceptionality' played a pivotal role in interpellating popular subjectivity through ecstatic affective identifications. Having provoked the hegemonc political and cultural norms in the U.S., Trump invited the so-called 'silent majority' to the forefront to speak 'truth' in the face of power. Yet, next to the candidate's populism, one finds increased ideological traits that are external to populism. Having deconstructed Trump's diagnostic and prognostic frames embedded in the ways the candidate articulated 'the people' and its 'other', this chapter highlghts the privileged position nativism and protectionism assume, integral with Trump's populism.

This chapter is divided in two parts. Drawing from 72 discursive data, comprising campaigning speeches, Tweets and performative choreographies, the first part of the chapter focuses on Trump's performativity – that is, the rhetorical and bodily ways he communicated his *people-centrism* and *anti-elitism*. The second part, explores collective affects through 29

interviews conducted with Trump supporters and navigates through their emotions of resentiment and anger, but also feelings of abandonment and underrepresentation.

5.2. Downward-punching nostalgic populism

On June 16, 2015, the billionaire businessman, real-estate tycoon and former reality showman Donald Trump took the golden escalators to the lobby in the Trump Tower in New York City in order to announce his candidacy for President of the United States. He took aim at China, Japan and Mexico. He spoke of borders that no longer constituted lines on paper maps but concrete walls; he blamed the foreign other (TRUMP.1). This event signified disrupted the way American politics were done and thought to that day. Along with 'the foreign other', and 'the left' – signifiers that traditionally constitute core part of the conservative nationalist discourse – Trump identified 'liberalism' and 'the political elites' as the source of economic, political and social malaise in the United States of America. He promised to restore *the* American values that had been lost and 'Make American Great Again' ('MAGA'). This section deconstructs Donald Trump's campaigning discourse. While it demonstrates that Trump's main rhetorical canon is structured in a populist way, nationalism, nativism and protectionism constitute key features in his discourse too.

5.2.1. People-centrism in Donald Trump's discourse

'The people' assumed a central role Donald Trump's discourse during his campaign for the 2016 elections. Throughout his political campaign – including both the nomination for the Republican candidate and the candidate for the presidency of the United States - Donald Trump has addressed to 'the middle class' (TRUMP.6), but also 'the coal miners who are dying for work' (TRUMP.4), the 'steel workers' (TRUMP.2), 'the firefighters' (TRUMP.11), those who work in construction and infrastructure, the automobile industry (TRUMP.3). Importantly though, 'the people' were predominantly framed as 'a nation'. The collective subject that was

articulated as social majority, 'the people' so to speak, received a plethora of names: 'the common people', the common or great or hardworking Americans, the great or the silent majority – to recall Nixon's expansive rhetorical move related to the southern strategy (Ostiguy and Roberts 2016; Polletta and Callahan 2019). Frequently, 'the people' were framed as 'the forgotten men and women of our country. People who work hard but no longer have a voice' (TRUMP.2). Thus, although it is true that Trump often labelled to the people as 'great' or 'amazing', there is a strongly evident nostalgic framing of the people: 'the people' who in the past *used to be* glorious, but no more. The people who had been played or abandoned by those at the top, 'the swamp' as Trump put it (TRUMP.4).

Referring to the 'dishonest political establishment', the candidate addressed his audience saying that 'the only thing that can stop this corrupt machine is you. The only force strong enough to save our country is us. The only people brave enough to vote out this corrupt establishment is you, the American people' (TRUMP.5). This frame reveals a type of people-centrism in which collective subjectivity is instantiated through the body of the leader (you – me – us): 'I see you and I hear you. I am your voice', Trump put it explicitly (TRUMP.5); elsewhere he said that his promise is 'a contract with the American voter' (TRUMP.3). Upon the acceptance of the Republican nomination to run as the party's candidate for the presidency of the United States of America, Donald Trump put it elsewhere, 'I have joined the political arena so that the powerful can no longer beat up on the people who cannot defend themselves (TRUMP.6). At the same time, 'the people' are juxtaposed to a nefarious establishment. The former, the people, are framed as the potent political agent that is to bring change: 'the government will listen to the people once again. The voters, not the special interests, will be in charge', Trump said (TRUMP.7). The latter, the political elites, are blocking the realisation of change.

5.2.2. Diagnosis: 'bad hombres' and 'the elites'

Right from the dawn of his campaign, Donald Trump provided clear evidence that the foreigner constituted a threat to the American way of life. The Mexicans - 'the bad hombres' (TRUMP.8) as the candidate labelled them - received a central role in his campaigning discourse and specifically with respect to the process of *othering*. As Donald Trump infamously stated:

> When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you. They're not sending you. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people. (TRUMP.1)

But it was not just the Mexicans who assumed the role of the evil other that constitutes a threat to the values of the American *ethnos*: 'think of this in terms of the people we are letting in by the thousands' Trump said, were coming 'especially from Syria'. Signifiers often found in the rhetorical area of 'the foreign other' comprised of 'ISIS' (TRUMP.5), 'radical Islamic terrorism' (TRUMP.3), 'Middle East' (TRUMP.8), 'Muslims' (TRUMP.15), 'Criminal aliens', 'illegal immigrants', 'murderers' 'drug lords', 'gang members', 'borders', 'problems' (TRUMP.5.).

Beyond the 'foreign other' who corrupts the nation's core values, the Trump campaign had repeatedly spoke of 'labour participation' and 'jobs' as critical issues that the U.S. was facing (TRUMP.7). While it is evident that 'do nothing' politicians share a big part of responsibility for the situation in the jobs sector, third countries are also blamed: 'A lot of people up there can't get jobs. They can't get jobs, because there are no jobs, because China has our jobs and Mexico has our jobs. They all have jobs' (TRUMP.1). This renders evident the pervasiveness of the foreign other in all the issues that the U.S. faced, according to Trump.

Trump's rhetoric itself reveals the centrality of the nation: 'we're gonna take our nation back, remember it. We're gonna bring it back' (TRUMP.5).

Anti-elitism, the second component of populist discourse, also played a central role in Donald Trump's campaign. In Donald Trump's case, anti-elitism is best understood as an opposition against the political and cultural elites of the country; those who held governmental positions and power in different institutions including politicians, judges, top-rank personnel of the FBI and the Department of Justice as well as journalists and the media. In Trump's discourse, these constituted *'the establishment'*; their values were rejected and for this they were heavily attacked by the populist firebrand.

'The establishment' was diagnosed as the main factor responsible for the political, economic and social issues that are at stake in contemporary America. The candidate had repeatedly referred to 'the system' as being 'rigged' (TRUMP.6), governed by 'special interests' and 'corruption' (TRUMP.7). Donald Trump castigated politicians since, according to him, they 'have heaped scorn and disdain on these wonderful Americans' (TRUMP.2). 'Politicians', Trump claimed, are 'controlled fully — they're controlled fully by the lobbyists, by the donors, and by the special interests, fully' (TRUMP.1).

Donald Trump pushed for profound polarisation. He divided the socio-political space in two camps: on the one hand lied him and his professed movement and on the other hand lied 'the political establishment'. He repeatedly claimed that 'the establishment' opposes the interests of the common people whom he represented. 'The media are not just against me, they are also against you, against what we represent', he claimed (TRUMP.5). Supposedly, the fact that the establishment went against Trump's campaign it provided moral legitimacy to his cause. As the candidate put it '[t]he fact that the Washington establishment has tried so hard to

stop our campaign, is only more proof that our campaign represents the kind of change that only arrives once in a lifetime. And it's true (TRUMP.5).

Since the media were also included in his definition of the establishment, they were also placed on the opposing political camp. More often than not, the media were subject to rhetorical attacks. They were labelled as 'dishonest' (TRUMP.6) and 'fake' (TRUMP.7) in that, not only the media did not provide enough coverage of Trump's movement, but when they did, it was largely negative. Addressing his audience, Donald Trump '[y]ou don't read about that in the *New York Times*, you don't read about that in the other newspapers, because the system is corrupt, the system is broken', Trump argued (TRUMP.5). For candidate Trump, the journalist class worked for the special interests and not for the interests of the people: 'the pundits dislike me and dislike you', he said (TRUMP.5). Donald Trump articulated his relationship with 'the people' as organic. The interests of the common people could only be realised through him. Because he is them, and they are him – a unity. Those who opposed his aspirations opposed the aspirations of the people. Thus Trump's own enemies were framed as enemies of 'the people'. In reinforcing the polarisation between 'the people' and 'the elites', the candidate claimed that the media, as a component of the establishment, opposed the aspirations of the so-called 'Trump movement': 'The media are not just against me, they are also against you, against what we represent' (TRUMP.5).

'The establishment' took different names. Profoundly, the most prominent one was represented in the name of Donald Trump's opponent, Hillary Clinton. Trump described Clinton as 'crooked', 'corrupt' and 'evil'. Referring to the 'emails scandals', and the Clinton Foundation, Trump accused his opponent for having committed 'crimes against our nation' (TRUMP.5). 'Hillary bleached and deleted 33,000 e-mails, lied to Congress under oath, made 13 telephones disappear, some with a hammer, and then told the FBI she couldn't remember 39 different times' (TRUMP.5). In Donald Trump's understanding, the long presence of both Bill

and Hillary Clinton on the American political scene has resulted in corrupting the U.S. government (TRUMP.5). In the end, the U.S. political establishment became synonymous with Hillary Clinton. 'The best evidence that our system is rigged is the fact that Hillary Clinton, despite her many crimes was even allowed to run for president in the first place' (TRUMP.5). 'Here is how all of this affects you', said Trump to his followers: 'When the people who control political power in our society can rig investigations ... like her investigation, was rigged...[they] can rig polls – you see these phony polls...'they] can rig the media, they can wield absolute power over your life, your economy and your country and benefit big time by it' (TRUMP.5). The type of political antagonism that is visible in Donald Trump's rhetoric goes in line with theorisations of populism which indicate that 'the power bloc', however defined in each context, is represented as a force blocking the sovereignty of the majority of common people whose interests and joys are taken away.

5.2.3. Make America Great Again (the death of American exceptionalism)

That Donald Trump's discourse can be described as populist does not mean that other qualities are non-existent within his political rhetoric. As it is known, Trump's rhetoric carried ideological traits resonating well with the nativist, racist, misogynist grassroots right (Neiwert 2017; Ott and Dickinson 2019), while also qualities resonating well with the conservative and Christian right (Marsden 2019). At the same time, Donald Trump articulated an amalgam of positions outside of the conventional Republican orthodoxy, including opposition to free trade, a call for increased corporate taxation, and opposition to American military interventions abroad (Lowndes 2021). Trump's particularity rested on Steve Bannon's (2017) philosophy, which blended a set of seemingly 'contradictory' cultural economic and political positions: a return to Judeo-Christian values in capitalism with caps on wealth creation and distribution and an imperative to use wealth to create jobs and to protect the West in a civilisational clash with forces of Islamist jihadism (Marsden 2019:91).

In announcing his candidacy for the Republican nomination at the Trump Tower lobby on the 16 of June 2015, Donald Trump started his speech saying:

> 'Our country is in serious trouble. We don't have victories anymore. We used to have victories but we don't hav'em.

> When was the last time anybody saw us beating – let's say – China ... in a trade deal. They'd kills us. I beat China all the time. All the time.

> When did we beat Japan? At anything. They send their cars over, by the millions. And what do we do? When was the last time you saw a Chevrolet in Tokyo? It doesn't exist, folks. They beat us all the time.

> When do we beat Mexico at the border? They're laughing at us, at our stupidity. And now they are beating us economically. They are not our friend, believe me. But they're killing us economically'.

> The U.S. has become a dumping ground for everybody else's problems' (TRUMP.1).

This extract of speech contains elements that remained crucial throughout the lifetime of Donald Trump's campaign first for the nomination and then for the presidency of the United States. A constant presence of a foreign other who allegedly constitutes a vital threat to the existence of the United States of America is evident. Though the threat that 'the other' poses obtains distinct statuses. The first is the 'classic' one: the foreign other poses a threat to our culture, purity and values ('Mexico at the border'). The second way that the other is posing a threat to 'the nation' is not cultural or ethnic but economic one. Although there is a foreign other (i.e. China and Japan), the competition between 'us' and 'them' is of economic nature and it has to do with 'who is running the world'. Thus, there is an evidently strong economic element in this discourse.

Importantly, this speech reveals another interesting point which goes in line with the threefold Bannonian philosophy; that is the promise to restore the great American values, in economy, in politics, but also culture, in order to make America great *again*. Crucially this political move reveals a latent proposal that the omnipresent, durable and potent American exceptionalism (i.e. America is Great, no question!) no longer exists. The U.S.A is portrayed as a wounded, 'third world country', 'everybody's dumping ground'. Even more, in his campaign announcement the candidate stated 'the American Dream is dead' (TRUMP.1). 'America', the nation that politicians, cinema and citizens always portrayed as strong, leading and exceptional is now presented as weak and fading; a *dumping ground*. 'Our enemies', Trump said, 'are getting stronger and stronger by the day and we are getting weaker and weaker (ibid.).

This is precisely where 'Chevrolet' ('Chevy') comes into the picture. Digging into the American popular culture, General Motors' Chevrolet's meaning is embedded into the American socio-cultural imaginary. Grattan's (2016) cultural analysis shows how Chevrolet's commercials tap into 'very American' things such as visions of freedom, peoples' unity, memories the 1960s anti-Vietnam protests and Martin Lurther King as well as other moments of American's 'great past'. Chevrolet's advertisement "Our Country, Our Truck" 'celebrates "the American people" rebuilding their nation amid crisis' as well as attempts to revive American democracy 'from the ruins of abandoned Chevrolet factories' (Grattam 2016:16). Chevrolet then, often assumes the role of the nation's revival which is a central notion in Donald Trump's campaigning discourse. Trump's solution to the 'problem of America' is provided through the promise of certain economic proposals such as withdrawing from the NAFTA agreement and TTIP, increasing tariffs on imports from Europe such as cars and steel in order to favour domestic production. Throughout his campaign, Trump vowed consistently to 'repeal and replace Obamacare' (TRUMP.5).

With respect to foreign affairs, the Donald Trump campaign has repeatedly argued for the removal of American troops from abroad: 'We spent $2 trillion in Iraq, $2 trillion. We lost thousands of lives, thousands in Iraq' (TRUMP.5). This political move constitutes a change of dogma in American politics whose involvement in wars abroad constituted the paradigm rather than the exception.

The revival of American democracy presupposed 'clean[ing] up the nation's capital' (TRUMP.5) indicating the centrality of 'anti-corruption' in Donald Trump's discourse. The candidate had repeatedly claimed that the system is immensely rigged and broken that in order to 'deliver real change that once again puts America first' and guarantee transparency, his movement in power would 'have to investigate the investigation' (TRUMP.5). His sense of anti-corruption became synonymus with keeping 'special interests out of business' (TRUMP.7). Taking into account Trump's pro-business and pro-market agenda, one could argue that there is a reverse understanding of anti-corruption. Unlike left populists, such as Democrat Bernie Sanders who aspired to keep business out of the state, Donald Trump aspired to keep state intervention out of the market.

This chapter has thus far analysed Donald Trump's rhetoric during the 2016 campaign for the presidency of the United States. On the ideological plane, Donald Trump combined an amalgam of interventionist economics, exclusionary nationalism, a 'no boots on the ground' take on foreign affairs that puzzled not only political analysts but also Republicans themselves (Schneiker 2020). On the structural level, his discourse manifests a high degree of populism. An evident people-centric and anti-elitist form structures and accompanies the candidate's general rhetoric. In Donald Trump's discourse, 'the people' were intoned with an implied ethnic connotation, since 'the adversary' was mainly defined as a national *other*; but, importantly, this ethnic dimension in Trump's nationalist discourse was accompanied by an attack against the elites which were perceived as evil and corrupt and that they had conspired

against the interest of the common people. The split status of the political adversary points to the direction Judis' argument that right-wing populism is triadic; in that, along with the vintage (populist) antagonism that operates on the vertical axis and pitting the common people at the bottom against the elites at the top of society, it also involves a 'foreign other' who, with the tolerance of the political elites, corrupts 'our' national values and interests.

Critically, to grasp the 'secret' in which Trump's success lies, one must go beyond the *perceived* inconsistency but in the disruptive affectual narrative embedded in populist discourse. The task of the next part of the chapter is to provide agency to 'the people' in order to examine the resonance that Trump's discourse had to his followers. By inquiring into the emotional narratives of 'those below', the second part examines the affective bond that the candidate sustained with his supports.

5.3. The affectual narrative of the Trumpian voter

Emotions played a big role in political identification process towards Trump in the 2016 U.S. election. While experts perceived Hillary Clinton as the most prepared and solid candidate, a part of the population framed her as *boring*. Her opponent, on the contrary, brought 'excitement' thereby mobilising the disaffected electorate. This part of the chapter enquires into the affectual narrative of 'the Trump voter'. It that Donald Trump's transgressive performativity, defined as a low socio-cultural habitus, resonated well with 'the common people' and played a key role in mobilising those who felt 'forgotten' and 'underrepresented' thus resenting the political establishment, whom Trump took aim at.

5.3.1. The forgotten

The first step in analysing the type of collective identity that Donald Trump stitched together in the 2016 election, is to explore who constitutes part of 'the whole' and upon which sentiments their affective bond is grounded. How do they narrate their emotions and how do

they make sense of politics? Giving agency to the people provides answers as to why Donald Trump got elected in the first place.

The 'middle Americans', the people of the 'fly-over country' (US23), felt increasingly neglected and forgotten over the last few decades (Bradlee 2018). In Pennsylvania, for example, the collapse of the mining industry in the 1970s and the decline of industry in the 1980s that was followed by the of interrelated sectors, left the state dry. 'Economically, we were a very industrial area. We had factories, they are all gone. This is a post-industrial area – the Rust-Belt outside the Midwest', explains Mark Riccetti Jr., a historian by training who works as the Director of Operations at the Luzerne County Historical Society (US5). An older interviewee - and firm Trump supporter – narrated: 'when I graduated college in the '70s there were no jobs here in Scranton. So I went to Texas. Then I moved to Florida. I got into industrial sales. In 2008 we got back to Pennsylvania and nothing has changed. There are still no jobs'. (US17).

Due to the traditionally working class character of Pennsylvania, the area was, until 2016, considered to be part of the 'Blue Wall' - the Democrats' historical stronghold since the Great Depression. To exemplify old Democratic character of the Luzerne county, Ricetti pointed that 'we didn't even vote for Lincoln here – we voted for Breckinridge!'. The areas of Scranton and Wilkes-Barre are of particular importance for the Democrats, 'because Hillary Clinton who had family ties to the state, had put it firmly in her column and considered it perhaps her most critical fire wall' (Bradlee 2018). Many of the 'converted' Trump supporters interviewed did not hesitate to explain how their parents and grandparents were hardworking steelworkers, proud unionists, and Democrats too (US1; US9).

Structural transformations impacted the demographics of inner America. As citizens of the Luzerne County explained, 'people go to college away and never come back or they go to

college here and go away to find jobs' (US5). Essentially 'you end up with an older, whiter and socially conservative population (US30). As Ricetti explained, in Pennsylvania's Wyoming Valley where he lived, 'unemployment rates are higher than the state average. Obesity rates are higher than the state average. Smoking rates are higher than the state average. Alcoholism rates are higher than the state average. There are many households in which the husband does two jobs' (US5). In their turn, the changing demographics interwoven with the great party realignment are relevant to the shifting voting patterns.

Importantly, the analysis must move beyond any essentialist understanding of the particular demographic constituency (as a particular type of voter). What is at stake is how the performative dynamics of the very parties themselves favoured the 'abrupt shift in political sentiment' signified by Trump's victory (Bradlee 2018:6). As Frank shows, the Democrats – 'the party of workers, of poor, of the weak and the victimised' (Frank 2005: 1) – shifted to the right and turned into an elitist entity with open 'contempt for average, non-Ivy League Americans, the ones he had the nerve to order into combat' (2005: 3). These people, Bradley (2018:10) explains 'feel like everyone's punching bag, and that their way of life is dying. They sense a loss of dignity and stature'.

The sentiment of being forgotten is experienced in multiple ways, depending on the 'subjects-position'.[56] For the Christians, for example, this feeling had a *moral* character and was rooted in the resistance to some 'evil ideas' that have subverted and corrupted the core and meaning of the American way of life (Horowitz 2002). A local organiser for TRUMP 2020

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[56] By subject-positions I refer to the structuralist and social constructivist position, notably expressed by Stuart Hall and Michel Foucault among others, arguing that subjects' discourse emanates and simultaneously expresses the very discourse which constructs the subject itself (Foucault 1983; Hall 1997). In the case of the USA, one can refer to the Christian/Evangelical discourse and subject, the libertarian discourse and subject and so on. Of course the idea of subject positions, later criticised by Ernesto Laclau, does not give the full picture. While we can analytically distinguish one identity (or subject position) from another, reality is much more complicated as identities are intersectional, overlapping, often instituted in 'contradictory' ways but nonetheless, they do not ever really consist objective formations.

campaign in Cincinnati, Ohio, Melanie, explained that what some people perceive as 'change forward' or 'progress' may not find all people in agreement, as it could have significant impact on American culture: 'We used to be a very Christian nation. People are forgetting Christianity. They are living secular lives and not paying attention to matters of faith. The nation is losing its soul' (US23). Veterans felt that they risked their lives abroad to protect their nation.[57] But they felt betrayed by the elites, the liberals and the anti-war movement. Their love for their nation was manipulated (Frank 2005). They returned home to find no job. Many were homeless (Freeman 2017). They were bullied for their patriotism (Bradlee 2018). Others stated that 'the most devastating changes they experienced is in labour rights' (US28). Changes that were enforced because of NAFTA, or WTO or 'China taking over our industries' (US23; US15).

As Cramer shows in her ethnographic study of rural Wisconsin, these sentiments are rooted in what she calls rural consciousness. It needs to be stressed that her notion does not refer to an essentialist view of the rural population as a 'backward culture' as modernisation theorists wrote between the 1940s and 1970s (see Hofstadter, 1955 and Germani, 1978) but rather a form of rootedness that is formative of political identities. 'An identity as a rural person that includes much more than an attachment to place', Cramer argues. 'It includes a sense that decision makers routinely ignore rural places and fail to give rural communities their fair share of resources, as well as a sense that rural folks are fundamentally different from urbanities in terms of lifestyles, values and work ethic. Rural consciousness signals an identification with rural people and rural places and denotes a multifaceted resentment against cities (Cramer, 2016: 6).

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[57] Most of the interviews with veterans were conducted in Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania is the fourth-largest in veteran population in the USA and veterans represented a key constituency for Trump in Pennsylvania.

Figure 5.1: Abandoned warehouse next to a newly constructed mosque giving a sense of how suburban Pennsylvania looks today. Wilkes – Barre, Pennsylvania. Photo taken by the author.

Figure 5.2: Billboards outside Scranton, Pennsylvania, depicting advertisements for US Marine Corps recruitment. In the same area, sepia images of veterans accompanied with patriotic messages were hung from lamp posts, and homes were decorated proudly with American flags. Photo taken by the author.

Beyond the deep economic inequalities, the United States are characterised by stark differences that are often referred to in terms of 'clash of world views'. The well-studied topic of polarisation in the U.S.A. pointes, metaphorically, to the existence of two nations, two Americas (Campbell 2016; McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2008). 'On the one side are the unpretentious millions of authentic-Americans; on the other side the bookish, all-powerful liberals who run the country but are contemptuous of the tastes and beliefs of the people who inhabit it' (Frank 2005:13). 'This form of thinking about politics', Cramer (2016:5) maintains, 'is often criticised as ignorance'. This is profoundly evident in anti-populist demonisation of the common folk. But, as Cramer argues, the understanding of this cleavage is 'complex, many layered and grounded in fundamental identities'. Those Trump supporters I spoke to recognised this divide themselves. They placed themselves on the side of 'the common people', those at the bottom of society, and expressed their profound antipathy to those at the top, 'the establishment', which often took different names ranging from 'Hillary', 'the liberals', to 'the media' and particularly 'The New York Times'.[58] At the core of this distinction lies Bourdieu's notion 'taste' operating/situated on Ostiguy's 'high' and 'low' ends of the socio-cultural axis.

No wonder, 'political correctness' came up as a prominent issue that structuring the aforementioned divide. 'Political correctness' signified a shift in cultural norms that those on the low were coerced to conform to. Especially for the younger generation of Trump supporters, and particularly those with profound anti-establishment sentiments (be it libertarians, alt-rightists, or Christians) the notion of political correctness served to explain a

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[58] Polarisation is so deep that it extends beyond politics. As many accounts note, polarisation extents to the very everyday life of people, how they speak, how they interact and how they perceive each other. Perhaps, this polarisation is a radicalised version of the urban =-rural divide. Crammer shows how 'people, in casual conversation, are treating each other as enemies'. Her narration of a friend of her's experince is indicative:
Tom tells me that not too long ago he was filling up his car at a gas station here in town. He drives a Prius, and has two bumper stickers on his car that say, "OBAMA 2012" and "RECALL WALKER." [...] Tom is pumping gas into his clearly liberal/Democratic car. A cool vintage convertible pulls in to the station. Tom starts chatting up the driver when he gets out of his car. The man looks at Tom, looks at Tom's car, and says, "I don't talk to people like you'.

culture that, although it is widely perceived as progressive, themselves characterised it as *repressive* and *foreign* to their way of life. Political correctness was perceived as top-down, forced and artificial (Conway, Repke, and Houck 2017), as a form of 'censorship' and 'policing' how people speak, how they behave, and how they are (US8), imposed by the cosmopolitan elites of the 'urban centres' and the 'two coasts' (US3) who essentially left them – the people – *voiceless*; or, to link it with the whole theme of this part of the text *underrepresented* (though, culturally).

'It feels like a wind against the culture we are supposed to have in America', a young Trump fan stated, explaining that 'we were raised in a society where we were told not to treat people different because of what they look like. And here comes a movement that professes that and goes after people who think or act differently' (US18). Interestingly, a commonly shared twist - or even reversed understanding of – what political correctness is meant to mean was evident in Trump supporters' narratives. 'Assuming people because of their skin colour, their race, their gender is wrong!'. The interviewee, who 'got into politics as a reaction to the big wave of feminism' that sparked in his 'area, community and school', believed that 'identity politics is divisive' in that they put in threat the foundational principles of his country such as liberty and diversity (US18). From defending minority and oppressed groups (from racism, sexism, misogyny, homophobia and so on), the political correctness tide as well as identity politics were seen as a totalitarian movement of leftist puritanism that ideologically scapegoat people and limited free speech (see Esposito & Finley, 2019).

Let us not forget that part of the definition of a populist mobilisation presupposes an opposition against the institutions, the traditional structures of power and the hegemonic norms of an era. Political correctness can undeniably be included to these dominant ideas *à la* Canovan. The psychological study on cultural revolt in the age of Donald Trump conducted by Conway et al., (2017), shows that the latter 'is not the cause of cultural deviance – rather,

support for him is (in part) the product of the salience of restrictive communication norms' (2017: 246). In other words, norms produced and maintained by 'movements' espousing 'political correctness' may eventually cause 'a crack on the cultural pane of glass' (ibid.). And this was partly true in the case of Trump (see also Rorty's [1999] essay *Looking backwards from the year 2096*).

The structural conditions described above interwoven with feelings of not being represented by 'the party of the people' extending to the realm of culture, have caused the derangement of the political scene; the Democrats abandoned space and constituencies that used to be core to their success in the past (Frank 2017). 'Suddenly', comes Donald Trump with a rebranded style of conservatism echoing Nixon's calls to 'the silent majority', presenting himself as a champion of the working people by tapping into their fears and address their anxieties. As the citizens of Luzerne County explained, 'he is talking about industries leaving and job losses, but also illegal immigration and crime' (US5). 'Trump is for agriculture. He is for blue-collar workers', another person from Wilkes-Barre added (US9). What this section showed is that the feeling of being forgotten – understood of course in different ways, depending on each 'category's' politics, worldviews, ideology etc. – lay at the core of the populist identification of the rural voter with Donald Trump in the 2016 election.

5.3.2. Anti-establishment sentiments

Besides the 'demographics' that analysts ascribe to 'the population' under study as well as the sentiments of being abandoned, Trump supporters revealed an underlying commonality. They have an open contempt for Washington, and the different names it may take.

Long before the 2016 election, there was a general perception that the Democrats and the Republicans gradually came too close to each other. This was often 'manifested by bi-partisan policy' (US1). The perceived ideological consensus on a variety of issues led many Trump

supporters to frame the two parties, and especially the elites within the them, as 'a different side of the same coin' (US3) or even to have 'switched ideologies' (US9). 'Before Donald Trump it was all about ideological consensus', an interviewee who defined himself as an 'anti-establishment voter' stated (US1). Mary, who used to be involved with her local Tea Party in Kansas and gradually turned to a solid Trump supporter, said that Americans 'were really being ruled by one party called Washington DC'. She characterised 'Washington' as 'an old boys club that has determined America's destiny' (US28). In her view, too much power and control was transferred from the state-level to the federal government, taking away decision-making from 'the people'.

An interviewee from upstate New York explained that by political establishment he defines the people who have been in power in Washington for long time (US1). Following his line of thought, Donald Trump's opponent in the 2016 election, Hillary Clinton, also served as a metonymy for 'the establishment' in many interviewees' views: 'She's been around for ever. She's been the first lady, she was a senator, she was on Obama's cabinet...She is the embodiment of the establishment'(US5). 'Hillary sent me red flags' (US8). 'She is evil, she is corrupt. All the email scandals, the Clinton Foundation' (US9). 'We had an 8 year-long Democratic administration with Obama and we wanted to see change forward' (US8). These perceptions were indeed conditioned by the Fox News discourse (Peck 2019).

Discussions with Trump supporters highlight that the political establishment is perceived as corrupt. As Mary expressed, 'corruption in Washington was great. Because of how wealthy our public servants became. They are becoming millionaires and billionaires by working there. They are stealing money from the American people. Their kids and cousins and nephews are all getting rich too. That goes for the Republicans *and* the Democrats. They are all career politicians. Donald Trump is not' (US28).

For the libertarians, 'the establishment' is perceived to had been gradually limiting the common American's rights and freedoms through different forms of state intervention in the different realms of social, political and economic life. The interventionist foreign policy that the two parties pushed over the last decades, the expansion of the government, surveillance programs, increasing taxation, regulations and restrictions over gun possession are a few examples which, in libertarian discourse, indicate how the ideological consensus of the political class limits the rights of the people (US1; US5; US28).

What this subsection shows is that, active resentment against the elites and the different names the latter may take was profoundly present in Trump voters' attitudes. Indeed, hatred 'Washington' or 'politicians' and the ways it was narrated took different forms depending on the distinct subject positions of the individuals. In linking the previous section with the present one, it needs to be stressed that sentiments of not being represented, jointly with anti-establishment stances, are proven central in populist identifications.

5.3.3. The politics of exceptionality

The analysis hitherto dealt with the heterogeneity of constituencies that Donald Trump's 2016 discourse mobilised, as well as their commonly shared contempt towards the political establishment. It is important to note though that the constitution of collective identities cannot be reduced to a sum of numbers, individuals, 'groups', or 'sectors' that together amount to 'the people'. However, one must move beyond such a rationalistic model of explanation – what Hochschild (2016) refers to as 'inventorying approach' – and shift the focus towards the psychosocial and performative dynamics of political discourse, in that they constitute a productive force that is critical in the institution of political identity. This is the task of this subsection.

The emergence of Trump signified a breach in American politics in various ways. His disruptive figure signified a *break* from 'a politics of bureaucratic rules, forms, and policies' (Wagner-Pacifici and Tavory 2019: 30). Not only did he challenge the political orthodoxy in the converging political centre of the American party system, but it had also challenged the way politics were thought – and above all *done* – for years. Donald Trump's disruptive performativity has been pivotal for the construction of collective identity. His transgressive style provoked hegemonic norms and invited 'the silent majority' – perceiving itself to be suppressed – to assert themselves to the face ofpower. Donald Trump's transgressive habitus resembles 'Weber's definition of charisma as an extraordinary force of symbolic change and an institutional-legal creation able to break with the limitations and constraints of traditionalism, formal legal-rational authority, and bureaucratic rule (Kalyvas, 2008:11).

In pointing out this 'disruptiveness', an excited interviewee who was raised in Texas explained that he 'grew up expecting politicians to be very formal'. 'I grew up with George Bush and Obama. These two are very good public speakers indeed. They are class act. But...' (US18). The interviewee explained that the way he expected politicians to behave publically was not very far from the way *he* was expected to behave in public. He described this as 'a sort of repression' (US18). Comparing the 'conventional' political performative style with that of Trump, the interviewee stated enthusiastically that 'this guy [*Trump*] breaks the rules'. In linking this with the way that he was raised and therefore expected to socialise, the interviewee stated that Trump's style manifests 'the freedom of doing what you want' (US18).

Evidently, disruptiveness extends beyond the narrow understanding of the term as an opposition to the *political* establishment and towards a notion a that captures a broader antagonism to 'the established structures of power, and the dominant ideas and values of society', as Canovan (1999: 3) put it. Trump was perceived of breaking the norms, political and cultural taboos in the age of post-political mutation. An older interviewee who grew up in

the 1970s said that he found Trumps style 'refreshing': 'If you are crook he calls you crooked Wow. This doesn't happen very often in politics' (US17).

Trump's disruptive politics signified a break from what many saw as 'America's inevitable movement toward a more diverse, more liberal future, and a concomitant vacation from the political culture of political correctness (Wagner-Pacifici and Tavory 2019: 30). While some cosmopolitans of the pundit class in New York City believed that the country was steadily moving more and more progressive, that after having elected its first black president, America was ready to elect its first woman president too (US31), others – in the suburban and rural periphery – felt suffocated by political correctness. A twenty-year-old student from Wilkes-Barre in Pennsylvania expressed his concern that 'choosing the wrong word could backfire these days'. He said 'I don't want to disrespect anyone but things like gender issues have become so exaggerated. If you address the wrong person in the wrong way you can get in trouble...it can be career ending' (US3). One could wonder how does his perceived pervasiveness of political correctness relate to the president. As the interviewee put it 'Trump wants to end that. He doesn't believe in political correctness. He believes in freedom of speech' (US3). Trump's self-granted entitelment to offend, to be free from manners, was perceived as a type of freedom to behave however one desires in public. Indeed, Donald Trump made the same diagnosis himself: 'the big problem this country has is being politically correct. I've been challenged by so many people and I don't, frankly, have time for total political correctness' (TRUMP.10).

In Schumpeterian terms, a populist disruption, like that of Trump for instance, is a 'creative destruction' (Ostiguy and Roberts 2016): beyond the *break* with 'the old', 'the conventional', 'the proper', that Trump's candidacy signified, it also functioned as a *unifying* point for all those forgotten Americans who felt abandoned, detached, underrepresented or looked down at (US2). In other words, Trump's candidacy swayed 'between rupture and

rapture' (Wagner-Pacifici & Tavory, 2019: 30). It turned negative partisanship – the accumulated ressentiment against the elites described in the previous section - into a powerful libidinal energy: that is, a force of identification between the base and the leader.

Trump's figure functioned as a figure of 'the Father' promising to restore the 'lost' values of American society. In this sense, George Lakoff's (1996) notion of the strict father morality in that he offers a model that protects, disciplines and controls the family and other related (conservative) values.[59] Underneath the flamboyant style, the promiscuous mannerism and the scandalous rhetoric, Trump's 'incorrectness' reveals an opposition to a way of life that is perceived as morally corrupt.[60] An opposition to a way of life that political and cultural elites, liberal university professors and intellectuals and urbanites have imposed.

These theoretical considerations reflect on the empirical findings too. The Texan interviewee, to whom this moral yet defiant model of leadership resonated well, argued that 'Donald Trump is so popular is because he is so Alpha': 'If you look at the Republican debates (2016) he just interrupts people. And if they keep talking he keeps starting his sentence until they shut up' (US18). Trump's political incorrectness, his demeanour, or style so to speak, is not necessarily to be linked with something improper – at least in the eyes of his supporters. His style is politically incorrect 'only' in the eyes of politically correct people. In their majority, Trump's followers did not perceive their leader's behaviour as incorrect or improper but rather as a quality of 'honesty' (US3) and 'strength' (US16). In highlighting this belief, a Pennsylvanian Trump fan stated that 'this guy has real guts' (US17).

Trump's campaigning style is generally assessed as flamboyant, crude, centralised and authoritarian – labels that are undoubtedly conceived as *negative*. However, studying Trump,

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[59] Comparatively a 'nurturing father' in Lakoff's account is the one who promotes a parental moral model based on caring for those less fortunate, putting social support mechanisms in place, and embracing difference.
[60] For example, by ridiculing certain subjects (e.g. women) Trump questions feminist politics that in his and his supporters' understanding. By taking aim at foreigners, Trump is perceived to question multiculturalism.

and above all his supporters, through the lens of '*creative* destruction' one can identify a 'productive' (and attractive) aspect in this *macho*, loud and angry style. The Texan interviewee conceived the way that people are expected to socialise as repressing his freedom stated that 'everyone, deep inside, wants to insult everyone at their leisure without any problems. This guy (*Trump*) does that (US18)'. In this sense, Trump's crude performance is also emancipatory for those felt that their demands were neglected. Whether it liberates 'unbridled hatred', as Judith Butler (2016) put it, it is no less emancipatory.

Ostiguy's (2017) conceptualisation of populism as 'the flaunting of the socio-cultural' low is particularly important in understanding how and why Trump's style works. The notions of people-centrism and anti-elitism do not simply refer to rhetorical references; rather, as in Laclau who prioritises the *ontological* aspect of discourse, the antagonistic division of the political space between 'the people' and 'the elite', is evident in some fundamental qualities that are embedded in Donald Trump's own *habitus*: that is, his mannerism and demeanour, the traits of his socio-cultural 'being' that relate and resonate with those of 'the people'. All these characteristics, are characteristics of a transgressive figure that displays cultural markers from the 'low', the vulgar, the popular that are located in the opposite end of the 'proper', 'expected', 'institutional', 'elitist' way of behaving (cf. Casullo, 2020; Ostiguy et al., 2021).

Trump's hyperbolic hand gestures, as displayed below, his unrefined way of speaking, comprising of very short, even incomplete, sentences suffering of poor syntax, unadorned, folksy vocabulary and informal, or even casual style, where is usually conceived as a formal circumstance, as well as his facial expressions and awkward diction, are examples of performing or flaunting the socio-cultural low. Where conventional politicians supplement important statements with some sort of institutional or scientific reference (e.g. 'according to the Intelligence Service', the 'Department of Energy', '...Health' etc.), he places speech tags like '*believe me*' or '*I tell you that*' at the end of his sentences (MSNBC 2017). Additionally,

Trump uses colloquial and slangish expressions such as *'well'* and *'by the way'* or *'bigly'* and *'amazingly'*. This, according Sclafani (2018), makes Trump's speech sound like everybody else's.

Figure 5.3: Stills from Trump's hand gestures within the time frame of 1 minute during a rally at Wilkes – Barre, Pennsylvania on 25 April 2016 (VM.41).

His discourse reveals lack of knowledge, or in fact ignorance, with respect to institutional matters. Yet, while this constitutes a problem for experts, analysts and politicians, it is certainly not an issue for many of his voters. On the contrary, it is an indication which reinforces the outsider nature of Donald Trump. In their majority, his followers believed that their leader is 'authentic' (US1). There are obviously those who were not really fond of his speech and act style; they preffered a proper future leader; but still, they 'wouldn't mind it' (US14). Trump's style was generally perceived as one style among many: 'everyone has his own way' (US17), 'what really matters is the results' (US15).

During the 2016 presidential campaign, Donald Trump addressed an audience in Golden, Colorado with a wall of hay, horse saddles and cowboy rope, and the American flag as his background. Indeed, this setting is product of communication tactics aiming to create a warm environment that relates with the audience. But the performer's own soul always adds to the artificiality of the environment. 'So I spent a lo[oo]ng time today making my shoes so beautiful. So shiny. And then *I walk though more dusty floors* than I ever seen in my life' (TRUMP.11).

Figure 5.4: Donald Trump with an 'authentic' background, Golden, Colorado, October 2016 (VM.42)

With this statement, the candidate Donald Trump attempts to relate to people, to walk where they walk. This style resonates the audience. 'People see him and say ''Trump was always here with us... he is one of us''' (US9) an interviewee stated, while another one expressed the view that 'he has been on the mud with the guy that pours the concrete and the guy who drive his track' (US28). It is no secret to his supporters that he has actually never moved bricks or hammered nails in his life, that 'he may not have experienced the same hardships as blue-collar people' (US9). But, as Kevin argued, 'he still finds a way to become one with the people. He understands what they go through on a daily basis' (US9). In a similar line of thought, another interviewee said 'you get what you get. He is not faking it' (US3). Donald Trump's 'being', comprising of his direct nature and his 'off-script' character, create a sense of 'sameness', of 'being from here' and 'being like us'; or, in other words, an authentic personality when compared to the polished politicians who read from the script.

Indeed, Trump's coarseness extends beyond the realm of verbal speech. The candidate's use of social media, and particularly Twitter, attracted a lot of attention due to his frequent use and aggressive style which tend to mirror his own rough and crude verbal speech

style.[61] As seen on the figure below, the candidate employs capital letters, frequent and exaggerated use of punctuation and particularly exclamation marks and a meme-like outlook to bully his opponents (VM.43; VM.44; VM.45; VM.46; VM.47; VM.48). While he is neither the first nor the last politician to use twitter, his way of using it reminds not a candidate for the presidency of the United States but a keyboard warrior.
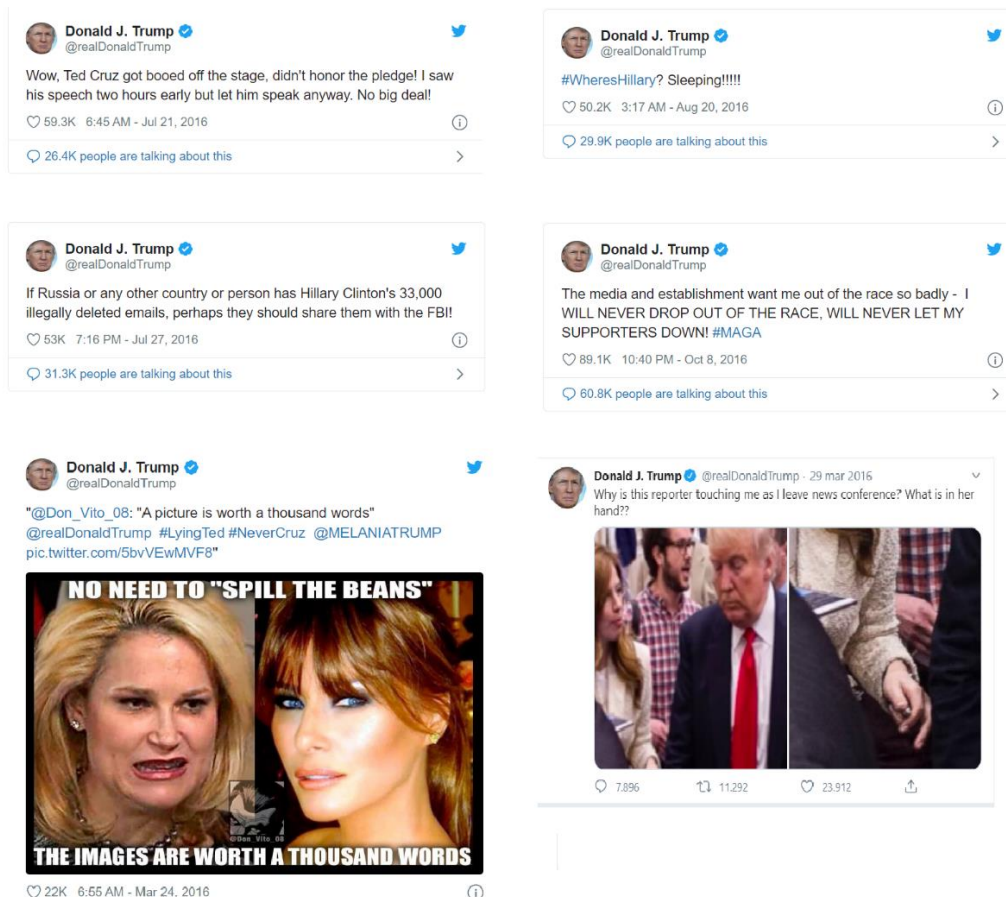
Figure 5.5: Trump's tweets during his 2016 campaign follow the internet culture.

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[61] Trump relied heavily on Twitter for his campaign (or better, his personal views on Twitter became part of his political campaign) and this is often the case with many populist political actors. However, it is important to note that the relationship between populism and digital media is not necessarily symbiotic. Not all populists use and rely on digital media to that extent and not all digital media users are populist actors. Barack Obama who was not conventionally classified as a populist for example launched and relied on a campaign that was very infused in the new forms of social media; SYRIZA in Greece, a party that is conventionally thought as populist did not really rely to any excessive or paradigmatic way on digital media– as Movimento Cinque Stelle in Italy did for example. For a more thorough theoretical and empirical exploration of the relationship between digital media and populism see Venizelos (2020).

There is another important aspect in Trump's habitus that is prominent in populist performances. That is, the *politicisation of social markers*, through 'private expressions in the public sphere or the publicisation of the private man (Ostiguy, 2020: 42). Undeniably, this has been a key characteristic of the presidential candidate. Trump displayed publically his preference for younger 'trophy women' as well as his passion for fast food (as in the tweets and Instagram posts desplayed below ref. VM.49; VM.50; VM.51). In this sense, Trump quickly became a master of media spectacle in that he disrupted the 'ordinary' and the 'expected' and captured media attention to a degree that it extended beyond the realm of 'politics' diffusing his *logos, ethos,* and *pathos* widely and within the popular strata through highly accessible and everyday digital technologies such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram (Kellner 2016).

Figure 5.6: Moments depicting Donald Trump's 'passion' for fast food. The first two, from left to right.

In addition to the quality of his public behaviour, the *content* of his speech is also critical in understanding why Trump is placed on 'the low'.[62] The candidate received heavy criticisms for his comments about and actions against women – in their vast majority sexist and

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[62] Outside the realm of Ostiguy's socio-cultural approach, it is interesting to note that the linguist John McWhorter, who exemplified the high and the low of speech (i.e. formal and colloquial), placed Donald Trump on the low. Analysing Trump, McWhorter maintained that education and schooling had not have impact on the way he used language. Trump speaks like someone who paid no attention to one of the main goals of education which is to refine speech' (MSNBC 2017). Although this research takes seriously such analyses and in fact endorses many of its arguments, it also signals the embedded elitism that takes the form of antipathy against Donald Trump – and is by no means restricted to the specific expert - reveals how the expert class was alienated and repulsed from a critical aspect of Donald Trump's appeal.

misogynist *but also absurd, awkward and un-thoughtful*. In the 1990s, Donald Trump claimed that his daughter is 'hot' and more recently that if she wasn't his daughter he would probably date her (TRUMP.12). Upon the incident of a fainting woman in one of his 2016 rallies, the candidate joked to his audience saying: 'I love the women that faint when I speak' (TRUMP.17).[63] The colourful, provocative and charge rhetoric of the candidate left the analysts wondering Having been asked about his view on his rival for the Republican nomination, Carly Fiorina, at an interview for Rolling Stone magazine, Donald Trump responded: *'Look at that face ...Would anyone vote for that? Can you imagine that, the face of our next president?!"* (TRUMP.13). During the final presidential debate, he (in)famously called his opponent, Hillary Clinton 'a nasty woman' (TRUMP.8). That she is 'guilty of stupidity' (TRUMP.9) 'a world class liar' (TRUMP.14), 'the devil' (TRUMP.15). He labelled journalists, think tanks and senators, among others, as 'clown' (VM.53) 'dummy' (VM.53) 'phoney' (VM.54), 'lightweight' (VM.55) and 'pathetic' (VM.56). Yet, despite the offensive character of his speech, Donald Trump as a candidate at first and nominee at second, was able to' command the discursive terrain of the election' (Montgomery, 2017:2).

Despite its incorrect character, Donald Trump's broader performative quality is key in understanding his success. To put it more provocatively, it is precicely due to his very temperament that Trump's style works. In other words, 'Trump's entertaining, sensational, inflammatory words and actions make him the kind of phenomenon we just can't look away from' (Lawrence & Boydstun, 2017: 150). 'I like his style, he is not afraid to say what he thinks' (US14); 'speaks his mind out' (US4), he is 'being vocal' (US25). These are just some

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[63] A similar incident took place while the former U.S. President Barack Obama's talking, in 2013. In this respect, it would be useful to compare reactions to similar incidents by the two politicians in order to better understand the difference in Trump's style. Obama stopped his speech once he realised that something was going wrong behind him. He actually 'caught' the woman before falling and waited until White House staff escort her outside. Obama said jokingly 'this is what happens when I speak too long'. He took a minute, and before he continues his speech, he received an applause from the audience. Link here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CbSFw7NTneQ

of the statements his supporters gave in describing his style favourably. This performative style was essential for him to be framed as a political outsider, and hence resonating with 'the people': 'He doesn't have that politician background; he doesn't know when to keep his mouth shut; he just says what he wants to say' Shelby said proving this point (US7).

5.3.4. How can a billionaire represent 'the people'?

The idea that someone like Donald Trump can be the champion of 'the people', as described in the preceding analysis – the forgotten of the Midwestern country, the veterans, those left behind by globalisation – brings to the fore many explicit paradoxes. Trump is an urbanite; yet he is warmly supported by those in the suburban and rural areas. Trump starred in Hollywood programs and owns his own star in the 'Walk of Fame' on Sunset Boulevard; yet he is backed by those hostile to the cultural elites. Donald Trump did not serve in the American Army during the war in Vietnam due to alleged bone spurs. In July 2015, at a forum in Iowa made the following statement about John McCain: 'He was a "war hero" because he was captured. I like people that weren't captured'; yet, he is enthusiastically supported by veterans. Despite all the above-mentioned contradictions, Donald Trump not only advanced his popularity but he eventually won the Republican nomination for the candidacy of the U.S. presidency. Putting it in Donald Trump's own words, 'I could stand in the middle of Fifth Avenue and shoot somebody and I wouldn't lose any voters, OK?' (TRUMP.16). These contradictions can be certainly approached through the notions of the politics of exceptionality and the socio-cultural takes of political performance, as well as through the as well as through what I call 'the paradox of identity' which will be better addressed in the next chapter. This subsection deals with one of these paradoxes; the paradox that has perhaps received most attention in the world of political analysis: how can a billionaire represent the marginalised and working classes?

The obvious place to starts this inquiry is Ostiguy's own words: 'It cannot be stressed enough that the "low" in politics is not synonymous with poor people or lower social strata' (Ostiguy,

2020: 45). For various reasons rooted in the supporters' ideological cosmos, Donald Trump's economic status played little (negative) role with respect to the ways they identified with 'their leader'. Despite his wealth, that nominally places him in among the economically 'few', Donald Trump is widely perceived as a *political outsider* by his supporters. 'In the United States', an interviewee from Pennsylvania stated, 'when you become a politician you become rich. Donald Trump was rich and gave that style up to become a politician. He doesn't have to worry about making money' (US14). While it holds true that Trump was *political* outsider in the strict sense, he could still be included in his own definition of the elites in the cultural sense. He be belonged to the world of entertainment – and had access to an extravagance that cannot easily be defined the common way of life. But even from this perspective Trump justified his position by saying that 'nobody knows the system better than me. Which is why I alone can fix it' (TRUMP.6).

The perception that Trump was a candidate who would run against the U.S. political establishment was evident in all supporters' narratives, but it was expressed with particular dynamism by those who self-defined themselves as 'anti-elite' or 'anti-establishment' voters. In their reasoning, the candidate's economic status was not a significant factor and did not suffice to include him in their definition of 'the elite'. Trump was perceived as an outsider, not in the economic, but in the *political* sense. Trump never served as a politician, he never interacted with the political structures of power, and he had little to do with the institutions. This perception was evident in the unavoidable comparisons that Trump's supporters made between 'their candidate' and long-established politicians. For example, in an interviewee's rationale, Donald Trump 'wasn't a politician so he could not be so corrupt as Hillary' (US7). This belief is not necessarily based on 'actual facts'. There is no necessary correlation between 'politics' and 'corruption'. However, they highlighted a perceived division between a 'political insider' a 'political outsider', as well as a profound distrust toward what is allegedly as inherent

to the political class. The fact that Trump on the one hand and Clinton on the other, were and were not, respectively, politicians, sufficed to determine whether they were corrupt or not. In the case of Clinton, the signifier 'politician' functions as a metaphor for 'corruption' and 'insider'. In contrast, in the case of Trump, the candidate's non-politician background sufficed to name him an 'outsider'. The vew that Trump was an outsider resonated very well with what the candidate himself claimed throughout his 2016 campaing 'I am not a politician and I never wanted to be one' (TRUMP.5).

This dichotomy is best evident in the oft-repeated perception that describes Trump's relation with the 'established politicians': 'they are all career politicians. Donald Trump has not been' (US28). In this sense, his wealth was evidently discounted. The supporters' definition of 'the establishment' extended beyond the political class. The media for example were identified as another crucial and defining component comprising 'the establishment' comprising of the media, especially 'liberal media', that were described as 'corrupt', 'dishonest, and that 'should not be trusted' (US24). As interviewee stated, 'one of the reasons he got elected in the first place is the dishonesty and the corruption of the media we have seen over the last decades' (US3). Not only their perception of the American media accredited their candidate with the legitimacy to 'go after them' (US13) but, his anti-media stance it proved to them how Trump's 'anti-establishment nature as authentic!'. As this interviewee exemplified, Donald Trump 'the embodiment of the middle finger to the establishment' (US1).

For the right-wing libertarians, Trump's wealth did not come up as an issue at all. On the contrary, as a champions of individual freedom, among which is the freedom of individual prosperity, libertarians felt that such freedom has been very much under attack under the Obama administration. Explaining this to me, an interviewee stated that 'we spent eight years having a president who very much had an open contempt for wealthy people. To me as a libertarian taxation is pillaging and it touches my moral senses' (US1). For the less

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(economically) radical rightists, such as the free-marketeers, not only Trump's business (as opposed to politician) background did not concern them but, they actually saw it as a merit. 'He was a businessman. He is a billionaire. He knows a lot about the economy. He understands how to run a business. He knows how to work with industry and therefore how to run the country', an interviewee explained (US7). For the business-oriented type of voter, there is no distinction between the state and the economy, the government and the business sector: 'the government is like a business and should run through such a model' (US14). In other words, not only did Trump's economic status does not pose any impediment in terms of representing the interest of 'the people', but in many cases it constitutes a crucial positive factor in political identification. As an interviewee said, 'I come from a fairly wealthy family myself. His wealth is not a problem for me' (US1).

Donald Trump's 'extravagance' and narcissism did not generate aversion on the part of his (potential) voters. On the contrary, they 'relished the role of the billionaire with everyday blue-collar tastes' (Ostiguy & Roberts, 2016:44). 'Trump's continual call for recognition of himself has become a source of appeal among those who yearn for others to recognise their deep story' (Hochschild, 2016: 688). Throughout his campaign, the candidate promoted himself and his properties; he advertised his companies and buildings and let the people know of how much he owns around the world. In other words, the candidate projected an image of a self-made billionaire which was central in his success in that it became synonymus with the promise of greatness and success. As the candidate 'bragged about himself' in an interview with CNN's Anderson Cooper 'people love me. And you know what, I have been very successful. Everybody loves me' CNN, 2015).

The Freudian concept of the 'ego ideal' could be of particular importance here in that it introduces a type of identification between a subject and its ideal model. In this sense, Trump functioned as a model, not only for all those with such background but, above all, the collective

American unconscious that was cultivated in the cultural fantasy of the American Dream. 'In a society distinctively characterised by the dream of becoming rich at any cost – even in a tacky, flamboyant way as illustrated by Trump's golden apartment – Trump is this cultural fantasy come true...The fact that he was formerly a famous star of a reality television show helped his candidacy even more' (Ostiguy & Roberts, 2016: 2).

5.4. Conclusion

This chapter enquired into Donald Trump's campaigning discourse focusing in its populist traits, trasngressive style and the role it played in mobilising disaffected voters. The first part of the chapter highlighted that, although profoundly populist, Trump's discourse was accompanied by key ideological qualities located on the (extreme) right of the spectrum, combined with heterorthodox (for the conservative discourse) characteristics. His central slogan – promising to 'Make America Great Again' – tapped into cultural nostalgia, reinforcing an inward-looking national narrative. Even if it is true that nationalism, and more explicitly its exclusionary variant, was salient in Trump's discourse, one could observe a plethora of sectors and identities being included in the equivalential chain that constituted 'the people'. This finding challenges the normative conception that populism, and commonly its right-wing variant is necessarily monist or homogenising (see Müller, 2016).

The emergence of Donald Trump in the mainstream of the American political scene functioned as a 'remedy' to a style of politics perceived as sterilised and elitist. Trump's disruptive habitus signified a break from politics-as-usual. He attacked, not just 'the foreigner other' but also liberalism – an 'ideology' that has been supported by both major parties' converging political elites whom both the candidate and his supporters explicitly referred to as 'the establishment'. His narrative and charismatic style housed popular and working class frustration and channelled affects of hatred and ressentiment – such as white rage and misogyny

– and turned it into action. Whether 'action' took the form online discussions that took place on Facebook, Twitter, blogs and other social media, quasi-violent episodes or simply casting the ballot, a political subject was rendered evident during the 2016 electoral campaign.

Chapter 6

Trump in Power: 'Keep America Great!'

6.1. Introduction

This chapter transfers the analysis on Trump's populism in the years that he served as the president of the United States, between 2016 and 2020. Employing the discursive and sociocultural perspectives of the Essex School (Stavrakakis 2017) and Ostiguy (2017) and Moffitt (2016) respectively, this chapter investigates people-centritic and anti-elitist performativity, as well as its function to interpellate collective identities. In order to understand the nature and the content of Trump's populism embedded in the ways that 'the people' and its 'other' were articulated, the chapter investigates the diagnostic and prognostic frames embedded in the candidate's discursive horizon. In exploring the resonance of the candidate's discourse to 'the people', the second part of the chapter explores collective identity and affect in the age of Trump. Through primary interviews with Trump supporters the chapter navigates through their emotions: of resentment and anger against the establishment on the one hand and ecstatic identification with the president on the other hand.

6.2. Populist discourse in government

6.2.1. People-centrism and anti-elitism

Right from the outset of his administration, Donald Trump performed a solid populist style. His rhetoric structured the socio-political space between 'the people' *as those in 'the bottom'* and a 'political class' *as those on 'the top'*. His inauguration speech was one the shortest in the history of the United States of America at 1433 words, as well as the most combative and divisive. As White (2019:34) argues, 'inaugural speeches are important because they enable a leader, with the whole nation, indeed entire world, looking on, to give rhetorical definition to

their presidency at its outset'. Trump's January 2017 inaugural address provided an exemplar of a populist frame:

> 'Today we are not merely transferring power from one Administration to another, or from one party to another – but we are transferring power from Washington D.C. and giving it back to you, the people' (TRUMP.17).

In the sworn-in president's vocabulary, 'Washington' symbolises an amalgam in which the Democratic and the Republican party, the Liberals and the Conservatives, cannot be clearly distinguished. This rhetorical move escapes the horizontal distinction between Left and Right and constructs a vertical antagonism between 'the people' and 'the establishment', in which the latter has been gaining at the expense of the former. In Trump's own wards:

> 'Washington flourished – but the people did not share in its wealth.
>
> Politicians prospered – but the jobs left, and the factories closed.
>
> The establishment protected itself, but not the citizens of our country' (TRUMP.17).

In this juxtaposition, 'the people' are framed as politically subaltern in relation to the political class and the collective subject to which Trump addresses to, and as a result constructs, is explicitly referred to as 'the forgotten'. In juxtaposing the people and the establishment Trump's claims that:

> 'Their victories have not been your victories; their triumphs have not been your triumphs; and while they celebrated in our nation's Capital, there was little to celebrate for struggling families all across our land' (TRUMP.17).

A sense of nostalgia, longing for 'America's golden era', is evident in Donald Trump's discourse. The 'common Americans' are framed as abandoned – ignored by the political establishment that benefited in the peoples' absence from the economic and political

decision making arenas: 'the forgotten men and women of our country will be forgotten no longer' Trump promises (TRUMP.17). And, despite his business background, Trump made a promise to reverse this economic paradigm – perhaps not traditional capitalism but its exaggerated version, neoliberalism – a term he never used but always implied that it takes peoples' sovereignty away. The people then is presented as 'the sovereign' subject that should govern. This is emphasised in the following sentence: 'What truly matters is not which party controls our government, but whether our government is controlled by the people' (TRUMP.17).

During the impeachment inquiry against Donald Trump for abuse of power and obstruction of Congress, the president tweeted the photo displayed below (VM.60). Trump claimed that 'they' – the political establishment – is not after him but after his supporters. In this relationship, between leader and base, one can observe an intimate association. Trump claims to be the champion of the people; thus, if 'the establishment' is after him, it is automatically after 'the people' and their interests. What the establishment 'actually' has a problem with, according to Trump, is 'the people'; being anti-Trump, is, supposedly, a proxy for anti-popular politics. The term 'in reality' serves in explaining this relationship better. There are two levels embedded in Trump's populist narrative: a symbolic one and a 'real' one. While symbolically 'the elite' is after Trump, 'in reality' they are after 'the people'. The last sentence stating 'I'm just in the way' makes this explicit. Donald Trump portrays himself as a protector. His (populist) body functions, as Casullo (2020:31) puts it, as 'a kind of signifying surface, a symbolic tapestry of flesh and blood'.

Figure 6.1: Donald Trump's tweet during the first impeachment process

When examining people-centrism in Trump's discourse, it is equally important to pay attention to the performative dimension, the way he speaks, the way he acts, his demeanour and his general style describe a persona of the socio-cultural low. In power now, Donald Trump continued to flaunt the socio-cultural low (cf. Ostiguy 2017); unsurprisingly, he continued to use unrefined and folksy speech, spoke in an informal style in public appearances – often polarising and even awkward. Obviously, such personal qualities (habitus) are not easy to change; political institutions cannot easily reverse the way a person socialises for six or seven decades of life.

The second criterion for the identification of populist phenomena, *anti-elitism,* was also consistently present in president Donald Trump's discourse in power. The president waged high-profile public battles with an increasingly growing list of perceived enemies which he frequently framed as 'the establishment'. The establishment took different names: a 'swamp'

of those who worked in Washington, liberal cities and universities and the so-called 'deep state' of law enforcement, courts and the national security apparatus' (Pierson 2017: 112). During his first year in office, the president was in constant fight with the 'MSM' – that is, the mainstream media. He persistently denounced any media that criticised any 'media that did not match his narrative as ''fake news''' (Shanahan 2019: 24). His abrasive style, hostile rhetoric and constant attacks on the press and judiciary are unique in the history of the American presidency (White 2019: 33). Donald Trump's discourse in power constituted a stark departure from the way politics was done until 2016. Although in government now Trump perpetuated his anti-establishment narrative and, by arguing that 'the system is rigged', he continued to frame himself as a political outsider. Additionally, against a background of an evidently privileged economic and political position, Donald Trump framed himself as victim. He frequently presented himself as being attacked by his political opponents, including the established media and politicians of America.

Despite being in office, Trump distinguished himself from 'the political establishment' which he persistently opposed. Amid the coronavirus crisis for example, the president openly encouraged people to protest their governors' restrictions and orders to 'stay-at-home' in order to avoid spreading the COVID-19 virus, framing such decisions as a matter of freedom. He tweeted 'LIBERATE MICHIGAN!'(VM.57), 'LIBERATE MINNESOTA' (VM.58) and claimed that American citizens' rights are 'under siege' (VM.59). Trump's calls for liberation from state orders restricting socialisation and imposing rules to wear masks echoed well among alt-right conspiracy theorists and grassroots groups who denied the existence of the virus and saw this as a direct intervention to their freedom. Trump sought to shift the attention away from his administration and the inadequate way it managed and respond to the health crisis by attacking governors and members of Congress as responsible for limiting the freedom of speech and movement for the American citizens. Notwithstanding the distortive nature of Trump's

discourse, his rhetoric appealed to his base. I will return to this topic later in this chapter. The complicated task of performing 'anti-establishment' while being in power at the same time demands consideration. 'The political establishment' is not defined by holding institutional positions, but rather one's supposed proximity with the common people.

The Democratic Party continued to constitute a central metaphor for 'the establishment'. Trump has frequently named the party as 'the do-nothing Democrats'. In the president's narrative the rival party 'betrayed the American people' on issues such as gun rights and immigration, and it is 'obsessed with demented hoaxes, crazy witch hunts, and deranged partisan crusades'. 'Democrats stand for crime, corruption and chaos', Trump said (TRUMP.19). Elsewhere he called them 'lousy politicians', 'phony, dangerous and charade', 'a party of blatant corruption' (TRUMP.23). The attacks against the Democrats were not constrained against the party in general. Rather, they were directed against specific individuals too. Trump's former opponent 'crooked Hillary Clinton' may have no longer been on 'the game' but she continued to serve as a metaphor for the political establishment. Yet, amid a highly polarising administration other Democrats, especially centrists and established politicians, became subjects to brutal rhetorical attacks too. The president called the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, with whom he went onto a heated public battle during the impeachment times, 'crazy' 'a waste of time', 'a sick woman with a lot of mental problems' (TRUMP.37) Democratic candidate and Senator Elisabeth Warren, who claimed to have native American ancestry was repeatedly called 'Pocahontas' by Donald Trump (TRUMP.30) while the president made a play out of Pete Buttigieg's name on stage ('Buddha-dedge' 'buddha-jedge') and eventually deemed it unpronounceable (TRUMP.31). Joe Biden who ended up winning the nomination to run against Trump in 2020 was frequently referred to as 'sleepy Joe' due to his allegedly deteriorating health condition that affected his social abilities.

Figure 6.2: An email sent by the 2020 Donald Trump campaign (VM.61).

Figure 6.3: Trump's Instagram post after the 2020 State of the Union speech targeting Nancy Pelosi.

The Instagram post located on the left was posted by the president after the end of his 2020 State of the Union speech. In the middle lies Nancy Pelosi – president Trump's number one enemy during the impeachment process. Pelosi is pictured tearing apart Donald Trump's speech highlighting her disagreements with him. She is surrounded with pictures of *diverse* common Americans who were invited by Donald Trump to be present in the State of the Union speech in order to be honoured for their service to the country (VM.65). Following Trump's formula, by attacking Trump, Pelosi attacks 'the people'.

Conspicuously, Trump's representation of common American included veterans, single mothers, soldiers and ex-substance users (TRUMP.28). Conspicuously, his discourse presents a racially diverse group, suggesting a strongly inclusive equivalential construction of the people in common opposition to Pelosi. In tearing the speech apart (which according to Trump praised the people), Pelosi is represented turning herself against the interests of the common

Americans. This presidential post can be interpreted as another populist move in that it demarcated 'the people' from 'the establishment'.

The numerous instances of insulting political opponents may not resemble the standard method of populist polarisation, which antagonises elitism on the basis of merit and privilege. Thus, one could argue that there is an embedded elitism and perceived superiority in bullying opponents based on abilities, racial background and so on. In fact, addressing to his audience, Trump himself suggested that 'you're the elite, they're not the elite' (TRUMP.23). On another occasion the president asked his supporters: 'You ever notice they always call the other side "the elite"? The elite. Why are they elite? I have a much better apartment than they do. I'm smarter than they are. I'm richer than they are. I became President, and they didn't' (TRUMP.33). Clearly, Trump's narrative, and particularly its content, does not really relate to the way a discourse-theoretical perspective conceptualises populist architectonics – that is pitting the underdog against the power bloc. However, looking at it from a socio-cultural perspective, Trump's unfiltered communication style is the manifestation of the opposition to the 'norm' in political and social discourse. His politically incorrect style challenges the proper and polished way one is expected to behave in public and especially a head of a nation. Thus, it is important to note that it is not Trump's vulgar rhetoric that makes him populist bur rather the performance of low qua popular character in opposition to the established norms of political and social interaction.

This last point leads us to the performative aspects of populism. In terms of 'style', the president steadily and persistently performed on the socio-cultural 'low' – *qua* the place that is spatially located in distance from institutionalism. He antagonised the political establishment with a communication style that is diametrically opposed to the conventional one, resonating well with the people. Using his favourite social media, Twitter, the president tweeted frequently meme-like photos. He did not hesitate to 'cartoon-*ise*' himself – something that is profoundly

rare in anti-populist political styles – affirming his place on the socio-cultural 'low'. While Trump's tweets often did not contain any caption or explanation, the symbolisms embedded in the meme-like posts could offer useful material for analysis through the populist framework. On the tweet located on the left, Donald Trump is depicted standing comfortably inside his golden Trump Tower while his predecessor, Barack Obama, scaling the Trump Tower and spying from the window (VM.66). In terms of symbolism, there is a distinction between the two figures that could reflect on populism's antagonistic features: Trump as a champion of the people is being spied upon by the old establishment.[64] On the tweet located on the right, the president photoshopped himself into Rocky Balboa's well-exercised body (VM.67.). A possible interpretation is the self-description of Trump as a fighter – a winning-fighter indeed – against the political establishment.
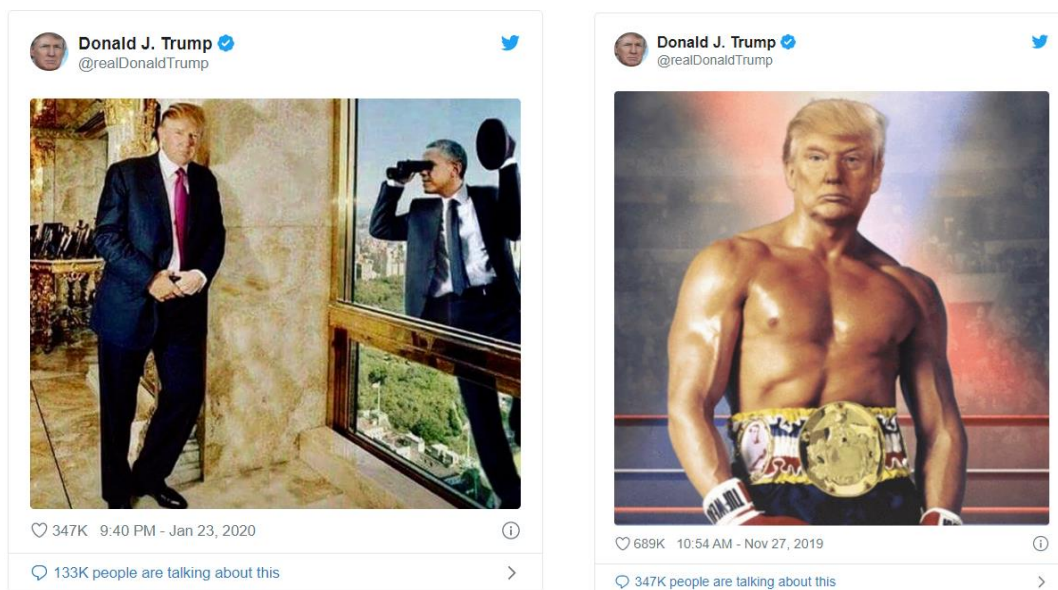
Figure 6.4: Trump's meme-like tweets depicting himself being spied by Obama and as Rocky Balboa flaunt the socio-political low

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[64] Although no caption was added to this specific tweet indicating to what exactly it referred to, Fox News provided two possible interpretations. First, it may refer to Donald Trump's claim (2017) that Barack Obama had ''wiretapped'' the Trump Tower during the 2016 elections. Second, it may refer to the developments around the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act warrants issued against a Trump's ex-adviser and whose legitimacy has been questioned by the president (Wulfsohn 2020). Nonetheless with the distinction between inside and outside there is a clear distinction between the establishment on the one hand and the populist on the other.

Trump's style in power was also polarising. Although this characteristic is not exclusive to populism, it is immanent to it. His rhetoric against other nations was 'brash, belligerent and at times juvenile' (White 2019: 40). He referred to the North Korean leader as short and fat and threatened to unleash 'fire and fury' against him and his nation (tweets). In comparing his...power to that of his counterpart, President Trump tweeted that "North Korean Leader Kim Jong-un just stated that the 'Nuclear Button is on his desk at all times.' Will someone from his depleted and food starved regime please inform him that I too have a Nuclear Button, but it is a much bigger & more powerful one than his, and my Button works!" (VM.63).

Domestically, Trump continued to hold campaigning rallies even after his election. This indicates perhaps the antagonistic, polarising, energised and direct style of governance. indicating a campaigning and direct style. According to Wikipedia, which even has its own page with the list of the Trump's rallies, the president held 111 rallies nationwide from December 2016 until September 2020.
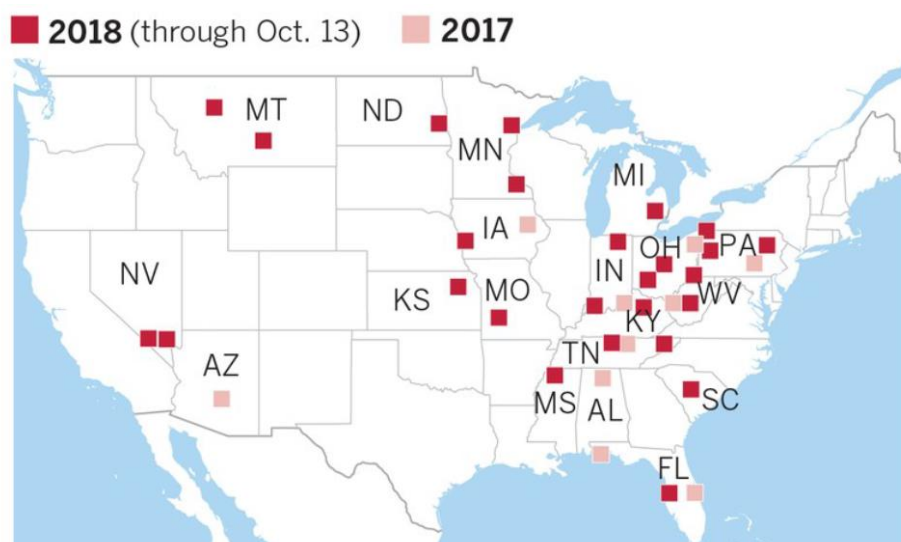
Figure 6.5: A map of Trump rallies that took place between 2017 and 2018 when Trump was in office. Source L.A. Times.

When focusing solely on the *populist* discourse articulated by Trump, it is difficult to distinguish left from right, because political-rhetorical competition also takes place vertically. But this does not mean that other components, that are often secondary in Trump's discourse, are absent. In fact, this would undermine the ideological component of Trump's populism. Often, Trump's discourse makes it difficult to distinguish Left from Right. Yet, as we will see later in this chapter, elements from the Left-Right axis were not absent from his discourse but they were frequently (co-)articulated too.

6.2.2. The framing of the people as a nation

Along with the typical populist juxtaposition in Donald Trump's discourse in office that operated vertically, dividing 'those at the bottom' and 'those at the top' of society, he promoted a nationalist discourse that operated horizontally, demarcating between 'those inside' and 'those outside'. The collective unity of 'the people' took place in the name of *ethnos* (cf. de Cleen and Stavrakakis 2020). In short, nationalism continued to constitute a key quality in Donald Trump's discourse which was co-articulated with – and often prevailed over – populist discourse.

In his inaugural speech, the US president stated that 'we are one nation...we share one heart, one home and one glorious destiny'. To be sure, every state leader of political modernity is expected to make references to 'the nation'. Yet, the choice of certain words and phrases, such as 'allegiance', 'national pride' 'loyalty to the United States of America', especially when they are placed next to signifiers like 'soul' and 'pride' and 'national anthem' (TRUMP.33), diverge from a generic nation-centric (perhaps non-nationalist) discourse, and point towards the direction of exclusionary nationalism. 'The nation' functions as a nodal point in much of Donald Trump's rhetoric in power filling 'the people' with nationalist content. 'Trump's nationalism seemed to signal "an abrupt turning inward, entailing a narrower definition of the

national interest' (Ryan 2019: 206). His profoundly nationalist rhetoric signalled a diversion from the rhetoric that previous presidencies put forward:

Together, We Will Make America Strong Again.

We Will Make America Wealthy Again.

We Will Make America Proud Again.

We Will Make America Safe Again.

And, Yes, Together, We Will Make America Great Again (TRUMP.17).

Although the main terrain upon which the president's discourse operates is that of *economy*, the demarcation that takes is between *nations*. On the one hand lies 'America' ('we') and on the other a 'racially different foreign power that had historically or in contemporary times tense relations with the U.S. (White 2019:29). Other nations are presented to have benefited (economically) at the expense of the USA. Yet, while Trump framed the American nation as superior to other nations, he also presupposed 'a lost glory' that is 'to return'. America is not presented as the greatest power at the moment. Rather, it is presented as *wounded*, as if it had lost its prestige and power in the global arena. Trump's nationalism in office was not simply ethnic. It amalgamated economic and cultural elements. Above all, this idiosyncratic type of nationalism was a 'rupture in the West world order' (Ryan, 2019: 206): it challenged the norm of American exceptionalism in that the U.S. were awkwardly presented as the weak partner and put the nail in the coffin of the liberal global order established in the aftermath of the World War II:

we've enriched foreign industry at the expense of American industry;

Subsidized the armies of other countries while allowing for the very sad depletion
of our military;

We've defended other nation's borders while refusing to defend our own;

And spent trillions of dollars overseas while America's infrastructure has fallen
into disrepair and decay.

We've made other countries rich while the wealth, strength, and confidence of
our country has disappeared over the horizon.

One by one, the factories shuttered and left our shores, with not even a thought
about the millions upon millions of American workers left behind.

The wealth of our middle class has been ripped from their homes and then
redistributed across the entire world (TRUMP.18).

In Trump's diagnosis America was falling apart. '.. [F]or too many of our citizens, a different reality exists: Mothers and children trapped in poverty in our inner cities; rusted-out factories scattered like tombstones across the landscape of our nation; an education system, flush with cash, but which leaves our young and beautiful students deprived of knowledge; and the crime and gangs and drugs that have stolen too many lives and robbed our country of so much unrealized potential' (ibid.). The Trump administration attempted to 'reduce international commitments in order to focus on the nation's domestic needs' (White 2019: 34). Trump's solution (prognostic frame) evident in his central slogans 'Make America Great Again' and 'America First', involved repealing Obamacare – the totem policy for Trump's first months in office (Shanahan 2019). It also involved an avalanche of positions that shifted from the conventional Republican Party agenda which included 'withdrawing from free-trade agreements, compelling other North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) countries to contribute more so as to reduce America's financial commitment to the Western alliance,

building a great wall on America's Southern border[65] to stem the flow of illegal immigration from Mexico, and avoiding the sorts of wars that had characterised recent US foreign policy' (White 2019:35). Trump's 'economic patriotism' it attacked globalised neoliberalism which his party previously endorsed.

'America First' and 'MAGA' tap into the American conservative-nationalist semantic reservoir and echo political tropes of America's political history. 'America First' became a prominent slogan when advocated by the America First Committee pushing for a non-interventionist and nationalist stance in the World War II. The Committee advocated for American nationalism and unilateralism in global affairs. Membership in the America First Committee peaked around 800,000 paying members. While members came from different ideological backgrounds, some members also expressed anti-Semitic and pro-fascist values (Calamur 2017). In the 1980s, Roland Reagan used a slogan similar to Trump's MAGA – 'Let's Make America Great Again' – to promise to the Americans 'prosperity and power after the setbacks of the 1970s' (Morgan 2019). Whether references to the historical past of the United States was a strategic and conscious move or a contingent one matters little. In terms of cultural analysis, this discursive repertoire on the nation that resonated with parts of the population that felt that their country was changing for bad, constructed a collective identity founded on civilizational nostalgia.

'MAGA' and 'America First' point to a nostalgic version of nationalism – one that looks back to the past and promises to restore it. From a psychoanalytic point of view, Trump's discourse on the nation essentially mourns the end of 'the empire' (the loss of American dominance) and the loss of the American dream. Freud maintained that mourning is not just a

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[65] Southern border was not a common term until the Trump presidency. 'Border with Mexico' or 'Mexican border' were commonly used.

'ritual' for the loss of a person but it can be thought in abstraction, that is, 'the loss' of one's country liberty, an ideal, and so on' (Freud [1917]1966:243). Yet, Freud went on to observe that mourning had another side – a manic one – that refuses to accept loss and turns into melancholia. 'Whereas mourning frees the subject to move on, melancholia is stuck and isolated, looking backward rather than the future, looking inward rather than seeking new alliances and connections' (Gibson-Graham 2006:5). Psycho-socially, 'the inability to mourn forecloses transformation and fuels ressentiment (Stavrakakis 2007: 276). In the case of the contemporary U.S. therefore, the MAGA discourse is a melancholic response to the end of American empire and the American dream. Trump and his followers seem unable to mourn the 'lost golden age' and opt for a nostalgic resentful and inward-looking reaction that fantasies the return of the past glory.

6.2.3. White nationalism

Trump's discourse extended beyond (economic) nationalism (see Bannon 2017). As it is commonly acknowledged, elements of the president's discourse resonated well with the alt-right's white nationalism and the white rage of the American far-right, as well as unorganised segments of the American population (Neiwert 2017). A week into the administration, the president signed an executive order banning citizens from seven Muslim-majority countries from entering the USA. 'This is not about religion - this is about terror and keeping our country safe' (TRUMP.32). Upon the COVID-19 outbreak and the global pandemic, the president extended the travel ban to six more countries, while he racialised the virus – frequently referring to it as 'the Chinese virus'. Referring to migrants coming into the country he said that 'these aren't people. These are animals' (TRUMP.35) that 'pour into and infest our country' (VM.64). Infestation is a term most commonly used when vermin, rodents and insects take over; a typical human response is 'to exterminate' them. Of course Trump does not go far enough to suggest this, but the racially-oriented demarcations are audible in his discourse.

In the context of the 'Unite the Right' rally that took place in Charlottesville, Virginia in August 2017, and the clashes between Klansmen and American Nazi supporters on the one hand and Black Lives Matter (BLM) protestors on the other, President Trump condemned 'hatred, bigotry, and violence on *many sides*', essentially equating morally the violence of white supremacists and those who opposed the former's racism. While Trump contemned racism nominally, he did so by relativising and depoliticising social and institutional racism. In response to the National Football League (NFL) players who 'took a knee' during the national anthem in order to draw attention to the issue of racism and police brutality in the U.S, Trump tweeted that 'the issue of kneeling has nothing to do with race. It is about respect for our Country, Flag and National Anthem. NFL must respect this' (TRUMP.26). Even more, the president called those players 'son of a bitch' and maintained that they should be thrown out of the field (TRUMP.27). Elsewhere he stated that 'we only kneel to the almighty God' (TRUMP.20).

Trump showed a similar stance in the context of the protests that followed the killing of black man George Floyd after a white policeman kneeled on his neck for 8 minutes in Minneapolis in May 2020. In the context of the riots that erupted in the aftermath of Floyd's death, Trump framed the protesters as a 'dangerous movement' (TRUMP.20). Trump's discourse during the events, relativised the hierarchies embedded in race relations. Its attempt to equalise racist and anti-racist struggles – via advocating for 'the right' to oppose anti-racism as a matter of freedom of speech – aimed at subverting the (liberal and cosmopolitan) hegemonic articulations on equality, race and human rights. This rhetorical move enacted by the president provided space for arguments such as 'all lives natter', 'white lives matter', even 'blue lives matter' (referring to the police) deployed by white supremacist and neo-Nazi groups (Edwards 2020). Referring to discussions and actions taken against public statuary, such as those of Christopher Columbus and Confederate leaders, the president argued that 'angry mobs

are trying to tear down statues of our Founders, deface our most sacred memorials, and unleash a wave of violent crime in our cities' (TRUMP.20). Standing in front of Mount Rushmore and the founding fathers on July 4 (2020), the president vowed to 'protect our nation's children, end this radical assault, and preserve our beloved American way of life' (TRUMP.20). Donald Trump's rhetoric presented a profoundly contrasting picture as to the vision for the American society, resembling the narratives on 'two Americas'. Alluding to the BLM movement and its sympathisers, Trump claimed that 'the radical view of American history is a web of lies — all perspective is removed, every virtue is obscured, every motive is twisted, every fact is distorted' (TRUMP.20). Essentially, the president denigrated the protests against police violence and for racial equality, presenting those involved (and those supportive of them) as un-American and un-patriotic. that want to distort the values of their country.

Figure 6.6: 'Law & Order!'. Donald Trump's Instagram post reading one of his main phrases in response to the Black Lives Matter protests (VM.62).

In response to protest events such as those described here, the president called repeatedly for 'swift restoration of law and order' (TRUMP.24; TRUMP.25): 'I am deploying federal law enforcement to protect our monuments, arrest the rioters, and prosecute offenders to the fullest extent of the law' Trump stated (TRUMP.20). His overall choice of words resembles authoritarian right-wing rhetoric.[66] While violence is a serious and recurring issue in the U.S., it is generally not state-sponsored.[67]

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[66] Indeed, Trump was not the first to call the federal troops on protesters. In 2015, under Obama, the National Guard troops were sent to Baltimore to repress riots that emerged after the killing of a black man, Freddie Gray, by police.

[67] For example, incidents of gun shootings and mass killings in American shopping malls and schools committed by individuals (often described as lone wolves who ascribe to extreme right ideologies) are not rare in the United States.

This is the case with Trump too. Despite his aggressive style, the U.S. president cannot be described as the typical strongman who manipulates 'his' base. Rather he was described 'as a boy who starts tossing matches near a gasoline spill to see what happens' (Packer 2019). In other words, while Trump does not order his followers to commit acts of violence, his rhetoric emancipates resentful emotions, shapes public opinion, deepens social polarisation and – more rarely indeed - it mobilises extremist grassroots organisations, such as the various vigilante mobilisations observed during that period. For example, anti-black armed militias and far right and libertarian vigilantes made their presence felt in response to the Black Live Matters protests.

Xenophobia was highly present in the president's narrative. Although unbuilt, 'the wall' was constantly present in Trump's discourse and it constituted 'a flagship policy' for many his supporters (US20). Talking about the issue of immigration from the southern border at a rally in the Florida Panhandle, the president said that 'we can't let them [border patrol] use weapons … I would never do that. But how do you stop these people?'. While his question was rhetorical, someone from the crowd responded: 'Shoot them!' (TRUMP.21). As the Atlantic commentator George Packer (2019) put it, the president 'didn't put the words in her mouth, but he made it likelier that someone would speak them. He didn't urge a massacre of Latino shoppers on the Texas border, but he made it possible for a 21-year-old white supremacist to think he had the president's support'. The nativist tone embedded in Donald Trump's discourse, as well as his furious communication style, served in normalising aggressiveness among society (US31) through the emancipation and legitimisation of hatred (Butler 2016). Above all, what is evident in Trump's discourse in power is that populism is not the only quality that

characterises his style but other elements, such as white nationalism[68] with authoritarian and aggressive tones often prevail.

'Illegal immigration' and 'aliens' continued to receive central position in Trump's discourse in office (TRUMP.19). During the campaigning period for the 2020 elections, at a Rally in Manchester, New Hampshire, the U.S President read out – in a rather theatrical manner – the lyrics of 'The Snake'; a 1968 hit sung by the black American Al Wilson. *'People were screaming to me for the last four or five rallies ''read 'The Snake'''. 'The Snake'. Does anybody know what I'm talking about?'* (TRUMP.34), the president asked. That was not the first time that Donald Trump reads out the lyrics of the specific song which narrates the story of a snake found cold outside a woman's house and she decided to take it in and nurture it until it becomes well. *'But instead of saying thank you, the snake gave her a vicious bite'. The woman gets by surprise, starts crying and asks 'why? I saved you'. The reptile responds 'shut up, silly woman…you knew well I was a snake before you took me in'* (TRUMP.34). No wonder, Trump appropriated the song in order to make an (in)direct reference to the issue immigration. Indeed, after the end of his theatrical narration he affirmed his audience that *'this is about immigration...illegal immigration, right?...they should come in through merit and legally'* (TRUMP.34).[69] This section shows that elements from right-wing discourse were significantly

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[68] 'White nationalists see their countries as threatened by immigration and social advancement by non-whites They contend that national identity and belonging must be built around racial whiteness – rather than culture, language, or place – and that it is the *whiteness* if the nation's past, present, and future that ensures its continued historical development and survival'(Geary et al., 2020: 3).

[69] These are the lyrics of the song 'The Snake':

'On our way to work one morning down the path along the lake, a tender hearted woman saw a poor half frozen snake. His pretty coloured skin had been all frosted with the dew. "Poor thing," she cried, "I'll take you in and I'll take care of you." Take me in, oh tender woman, take me in for heaven's sake. Take me in, oh tender woman, sighed the vicious snake.

She wrapped him up all cosy in a comforter of silk and laid him by her fireside with some honey and some milk. She hurried home from work that night and as soon as she arrived, she found that pretty snake she'd taken in had been fully, fully revived. Take me in, oh tender woman, take me in for heaven sake. Take me in, oh tender woman, sighed that vicious snake.

She clutched him to her bosom. "You're so beautiful," she cried. "But if I hadn't brought you in by now, you truly would have died." She stroked his pretty skin again and kissed him and held him tight. But instead of saying thank

present in Donald Trump's rhetoric. Interestingly enough, the theatrical delivery of 'The Snake' provides a good example that shows the way low (populist) and xenophobic (nativist) discourse can be co-articulated.

6.2.4. 'Crazy Bernie' and the 'Radical Left Democrats'

In Donald Trump diagnosis, 'the left' was the root of fading America. Anti-leftism received a profound position in Trump's discourse in government and, as the administration was unfolding towards its second half, it was increasingly intensified. During the post-political times described by a consensus in the centre of the American party system, polarisation across the left – right axis was weak(er) (almost non-existent).[70] However, Bernie Sanders' rise to prominence (in dynamic relationship with the emergence of Trump) reactivated the dormant discourse against 'the left' rooted in the Cold War's anti-communism. Though, while the discursive polarisation *against* the left was evident, there were no clear signs of self-identification with 'the right' in Trump's discourse. In other words, while the out-group was 'the left' the in group identity ('us', the people whom Trump sought to represent) there was not explicitly referred to as 'the right'.

Due to his 'socialist' ideas, Donald Trump's 'counterpart' – the left populist opponent Bernie Sanders – was repeatedly referred to as the 'crazy Bernie' (TRUMP.19). Soon, the Democratic Party was associated with 'the left', which took different names in Trump's discourse: 'fanatics', extremists', 'radical Leftists filled with rage' (TRUMP.19). In the wake of the riots about the police brutality against black Americans, the president framed protesters

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you, the snake gave her a vicious bite. Take me in, oh tender woman, take me in for heaven's sake. Take me in, oh tender woman, sighed the vicious snake.
"I saved you," cried the woman, "and you've bitten me, but why? You know your bite is poisonous and now I'm going to die." "Shut up, silly woman," said the reptile with a grin. "You knew damn well I was a snake before you took me in."

[70] One may argue that this is not true, that the Obama-led healthcare act is a 'socialist policy' that highlights left-right antagonism but of course such a claim would depend on one's relative ideological positioning. And this is of course not to say that Obama's version of neoliberalism or politics in general does not differ from that of Trump.

as 'professional anarchists, violent mobs, looters, criminals, rioters, *Antifa*' (TRUMP.22). This move of distinguishing protesters from looters, 'good guys' from 'bad guys', is certainly not new in political discourses that seek to shape public view against demonstrators. In this specific instance, the president sought to associate the 'bad guys' with the 'radical left': a label that Trump, steadily and progressively, connoted pejoratively.

President Trump warned the public repeatedly, and in an amplified manner about the 'socialist takeover of healthcare': 'Democrats are trying to take away your health care, take away your doctors, take away all of the good care that we fought, and we fought hard, and we're doing well and now we're doing better' (TRUMP.19). In his 2020 State of the Union speech, Trump assured 'his' base that he 'will never let socialism destroy American healthcare' (TRUMP.28). He denounced as socialist any policy proposal raging from 'free tuition fees' to 'access to healthcare' advocated even by the most moderate Democratic candidates, framing state social provision as something radical and underlining a reversed understanding of the access to welfare – one that exists only through private and not public rights. In warning the public about the 'tyrannical' nature of the socialist ideology he criticised the former for aiming to 'shut down free markets, suppressed free speech, and set up a relentless propaganda machine, rigged elections, used the government to persecute their political opponents, and destroyed the impartial rule of law' (TRUMP.29; VM.68). Such discourse that opposed the hypothetical socialist plans of the Democratic party had clear resonance with the (economically) right-wing component of the Republican party. In the 2020 re-election campaign, materials made the opposition to socialism and simultaneously the favouring of pro-capitalism ideals evident. The campaigning material below demonstrate this:
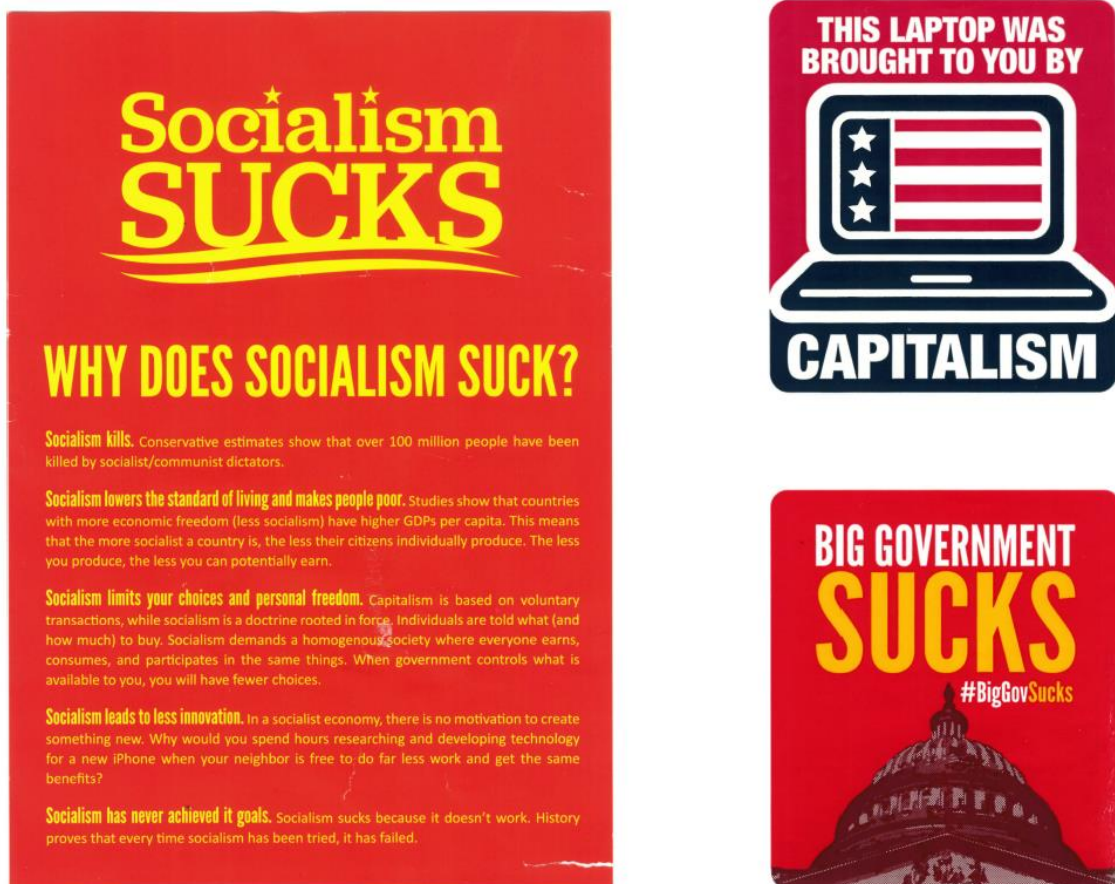
Figure 6.7: 2020 campaigning flyer and stickers collected from a petition rally in Scranton, Pennsylvania (F.US.5).

In attacking the Democratic establishment, president said that the Americans had 'enough of their socialism and enough of their vile hoaxes and scams' (TRUMP.19). Indeed, different elements – ranging from Sanders' (leftist) radicalism to Hillary Clinton's corruption – are assembled in one statement, discursively constructing the Democrats as a synonymous with radical liars. Yet, beyond the economic and political issues identified in left democrats, cultural aspects were evident in Trump's discourse. 'Left wing cultural revolution is designed to overthrow the American Revolution' (Trump.20). Trump argued. On the one hand lies, allegedly, an American Revolution (aiming to Make America Great Again) 'brought to 'the people' by Trump and on the other hand lies supposedly lies a reactionary revolution (characterised by political correctness and cosmopolitan values that are foreign to the American culture) imposed by the urban left.

Following characteristics of old-fashioned American anti-communism, the new American right placed 'cultural Marxism' at the core of diagnosis of a fading America. Trump saw in cultural Marxism a quasi-conspiracy-oriented ideology that seeks to wreck 'true' American morality (Mirrelees 2018). Identifying 'our schools, our newsrooms, even our corporate boardrooms' as the key cultural domains in which cultural Marxism had supposedly infiltrated, Trump asserted that 'there is a new far-left fascism that demands absolute allegiance. If you do not speak its language, perform its rituals, recite its mantras, and follow its commandments, then you will be censored, banished, blacklisted, persecuted, and punished' (TRUMP.20). Trump's 'cultural' discourse drew on the deep anti-political correctness (PC) sentiments that are commonly shared among his supporters. An important feature in Donald Trump's anti-PC cultural discourse is the subversive style which seeks to reverse the hegemonic norm. While political correctness is thought to advocate for justice and equality, Trump (and his supporters) saw the opposite. In his fiery speech in in front of Mount Rushmore, Trump argued that 'the radical ideology attacking our country advances under the banner of social justice. But in truth, it would demolish both justice and society. It would transform justice into an instrument of division and vengeance, and it would turn our free and inclusive society into a place of repression, domination, and exclusion' (TRUMP.20).

Populism was neither the lone nor always the principal feature describing Donald Trump's discourse in office. As this subsection showed, an increasingly anti-left discourse grounded on political, economic and cultural issues has accompanied and often prevailed over Trump's populism in office.

6.3. Collective identification in the age of Trump

Against theoretical expectations that want populists 'to fail' in power, Trump's popularity increased from 30% to 40% in 2017 and to 45% in January 2018, when Americans felt the

effects of his policies, and particularly the Tax Cut and Job Acts, on their own pockets.[71] Many of the interviewees stated that 'the economy is doing great' (US17) that 'businesses are profiting' (US23), that their president 'is trying to bring jobs back to the United States' (US7) and that 'unemployment is on the historic low' (US1). 'He works with the coal mines, the blue collar workers' a Pennsylvanian said (US7) while an Evangelical Christian called Trump 'a blue collar-billionaire' in that he is supporting 'the underdog' (F.US1). Critically, in many of Trump followers' very own discourse one could identify populist elements. Referring to Donald Trump, a supporter stated:

> the policies that he puts in place benefit everybody. Not the rich not the poor. Everybody. All sectors black or white, Hispanic, Caucasian, rich or poor. Everybody is being served. This is attractive to me. You should not favour one or the other. We are all equal no matter of who you are, where you come from and what you do. You don't get that from your average politician. A politician in America caters to the corporations and the big entities not to the individual. He caters to the individual not the special interests and the different lobbies that are out there. He never had a president like that before (US23).

At times, Trump's popularity fell – especially in the aftermath of the Black Lives Matters uprising and during the coronavirus pandemic. To be sure, not every single of Trump's supporters agreed with every single policy of their leader. Additionally, the president's style was an issue for many. For example, an interviewee said that he wishes that 'someone will take twitter off his hands' (US4); another one admitted that Trump's style is not his 'favourite style

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[71] D. Trump Presidential Approval Rating, Gallup, December 2017–March 2018,
http://news.gallup.com/poll/203198/presidential-approval-ratings-donald-trump.aspx
[last accessed 9 April 2018].

of statesmanship' (US20). Most supporters though, confessed that his language doesn't bother them: 'What I care about is the results' (US17).

Nonetheless, beyond inventorying individual opinions, I maintain that collective identification cannot be grasped through a rationalistic perspective that seeks continuity and discontinuity between 'policy outcomes' and 'public opinion'. Reducing political identity to percentages and experts' measurements risks missing the affective dimension of politics. Donald Trump's disruptive style – conceptualised here in terms of Lakoff's strict father's morality and Ostiguy's flaunting of the socio-political 'low' – continued to play a pivotal role in maintaining and re-activating political identification. The deepening schism evident through in the increasing polarisation in 'Trump's America' exemplifies the particular energetics of the politics of enjoyment that are vital in collective identity formation (Mazzarella, Santner, and Schuster 2020). Enquiring into the psycho-social dynamics of populism, this second part of the chapter gives agency to 'the people'. The aim is to understand the ways that Trump's supporters identify with their leader, how do they reason about their participation in 'their movement', which sentiments are at stake and how they justify the contradictions in Trump's narrative.

6.3.1. The establishment against Trump

The profound antagonism between the president, on the one hand, and what him and his supporters referred to as 'the establishment' on the other hand, was widely acknowledged by his supporters. In fact, the deep polarisation evident during Trump's term in office was a central theme in discussions with Trump voters. On the one hand, Trump's followers maintained that their president persistently went after 'the deep state' (US17), a term that was rarely heard in U.S. politics before. This was the reason, that he was continuously 'being chased by the establishment' (US1), on the other hand. In general, the populist president was viewed as a victim of the establishment by his supporters. A young supporter from rural Pennsylvania argued that 'for almost of his entire presidency, he is being investigated for many things' (US8).

'The Democrats are attacking him all the time. See the impeachment for example' its keeping the government busy from passing legislation' (US7), another supporter stated; while in the eyes of the libertarian supporter 'if they [the establishment] can do this to a president imagine what they can do to a citizen' (US1).

In general, it was 'the establishment' to be blamed for the deep political polarisation in contemporary America, not their leader. Acts that Democrats considered as forms of legal and institutional resistance against an authoritarian and corrupt president, such as the impeachment for instance, were considered as 'a waste of tax-payers' money' by Trump supporters (US11). As Ethan argued, 'for almost his entire presidency he is being investigated for many things but nothing came from these investigations. He was never found guilty...he was not impeached. They produced a 500-pages document saying nothing' (US8).

Interestingly enough, Trump's polarisation *against* 'the establishment' was fully justified in that it was perceived as defence:[72] 'If he goes after someone, he really goes after them. *And they probably deserve it*', an interviewee said affirmatively (US13). 'He is after people who are doing wrong. Look at the Biden case and Ukraine', another interviewee added (US12). Such views expose strong anti-establishment values that are core in populist identification (cf. Hawkins, Rovira Kaltwasser, and Andreadis 2018). In identifying positively with their leader, Trump supporters simultaneously identified negatively with the establishment. In the words of a candidate for the U.S. House of Representatives for the 12th district of the Lackawanna County's Republican Party 'when they attack him, I feel they attack me' (US12). This direct identification travelled well across the regions, the libertarian I interviewed in rural New York said that 'when you talk about Donald Trump, I know you are

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[72] When referring to Trump's interaction with 'his enemies', White House spokepeople argued that the president 'counterpunches' (see The Young Turks 2019). This clearly resonates with supporters' views that Trump behaved as such in order to 'defend', himself, his politics, his supporters.

talking about me' (US1). On the contrary, as Austin, who grew up in Michigan, said, 'Middle Americans do not feel like they are being talked down to when *he* is speaking' referring obviously to his leader (US3).

Resonating with their leader's discourse, Trump followers identified the media as a key component of 'the establishment' that attacked them and their leader. They refer to the media as 'the unfree press' and they believed that they looked down them in that they framed Republican voters as 'sexist, racist' misogynist, homophones, xenophobes, whatever label' (US14). Thus, distrust towards the media was central in Trump's supporters. As an interviewee stated, 'there is so much dishonesty and lie that comes out of the media at the moment' (US3). 'The media are so corrupt!' (US26). 'Fake news' and 'Full of hoaxes' (US1). Another interviewee maintained that 'nowadays it becomes kind of murky to determine what a truth or a lie is. More liberal outlets are determined to say ''That's a lie!''' (US4). The negative opinion people had about the media sufficed in justifying, almost unconditionally, the polarisation Trump pursued against the former. As an interviewee said, Trump 'goes after the press. He calls them what they are. They are fake news. I wouldn't even call it news. I would call it pure propaganda...They really are the enemies of 'the people' (US14).

Talking about the ethics of governing in such a polarising way, a number of interviewees stated that they had no problem with it. 'He is very polarising indeed', Melanie, the field organiser for TRUMP 2020 in Ohio, said. 'For me it's good. For them it's bad' (US23).

6.3.2. Racist, nationalist and authoritarian?

Donald Trump was widely criticised in that his statements revealed bigotry, xenophobia amongst others, while commentators expressed their concerns for his authoritarian tendencies. Only a few of the interviewees believed that 'there is a good evidence that he is a bigot' (US4). Others stated that they find 'these accusations funny' (US3). 'Sometimes he is on the bully

side...sometimes he gets a bit too far when attacking minorities', an Evangelical Christian said (US24). Kevin, who self-identified as an independent-conservative, maintained that president Trump 'definitely has racial tendencies but his nationalism has not gone out of hand. He only goes after the undocumented immigrants' (US9). Yet, these supporters favoured the president's 'policy results' or agenda over his racism in that it reflected better on their personal or sectorial interests. The majority of his followers however found little resonance Trump's framing as a racist, nationalist and authoritarian.

'A ra...racist? Oh...No one said he was a racist before he decided to run', a young student stated with an expression of wonder as to where did my question come from (US14). Shelby thought that 'he is not a racist – he just stereotypes people'. More boldly, Mary from Kansas believed that the president 'is not a racist whatsoever. If you observe Donald Trump's lifestyle', she said 'the people who he has around him and pays to do his jobs... he doesn't care what colour you are, where you are coming from or what language you speak' (US28).

Among the interviewed supporters were migrants, including first generation migrants who fled warzones such as Syria. Not only migrant supporters saw no contradiction in their political identification but they justified it on the grounds of *legality*. A 60-year-old female supporter and migrant from Argentina asserted that 'If you come here you have to come legally, as I did. You cannot come through the back door' (US16).

Contrary to liberal interpretations seeing racism and division in America's southern border, Trump enthusiasts framed it as a 'flagship policy' (US18). '*The wall?* It's not extreme. America has been abused, we have been abused. I can give you names of people who came here and abused the system, went to schools and hospitals without paying taxes' (US16), said the Argentine woman. Resonating with Trump's narrative 'the meaning of the wall' shifted from an issue related to race to an issue related to crime. 'The only people who will cross the

border illegally are drug and all sort of traffickers and smugglers. Other people like asylum seekers a migrant will be forced to go through legal ports of entry' (US18). 'This wall is meant to stop trucks [e.g. bringing drugs] not individuals' (US17) said the Pennsylvanian pensioner and Trump supporter married to an immigrant.

Even more, a supposed humanitarian aspect was added to Trump's immigration policies generally perceived as xenophobic. 'From a humanitarian perspective this is better. If you have go up in the middle of the desert where there is a lot of coyotes it's really dangerous…there is no water… people don't necessarily have the navigation skills to go where they want to. It's about the security and the wellbeing of people', PJ from Texas said (US18). In backing this position, the Pennsylvanian pensioner argued that 'some people come here and God knows what happens to them. They are exploited. If you have a wall... (US17).

While commentators globally continuously urge for the authoritarian tendencies of Trump's exclusionary politics his supporters think that 'there is nothing in the Trump administration that makes him a dictatorial figure. People say he is mean to journalists but Barack Obama took away the licenses of some journalists and repressed them in ways that Trump didn't. Trump is just critical towards them. But they earned it as they are rude all the time' (US3). Whether Trump is a nationalist or not it seems to be again a matter of interpretation. Melanie, self-identified as a nationalist and thought that her president is 'very nationalist'. 'He loves America and wants to put her first. But I don't think he is authoritarian' (US23), she concluded.

6.3.3. Subversive rhetoric

The analysis presented hitherto exposes how Trump supporters, with whom their leaders' discourse resonates, question values accepted and even cherished by the preponderant majority of society – such as matters of race, culture, and gender. In my view, this does not point to the

direction of what many have called post-truth politics and therefore associated with irrationality and populism. Such a claim would presuppose an exclusive access to truth – a kind of truth (often technocratic) that is superior (Galanopoulos and Stavrakakis 2019). On the contrary, what this 'backlash' that often took the form of trolling exemplifies, is the (counter-) hegemonic battles over 'the right to truth' – for instance over the meaning of America. As Riggio (2017:67) put it, 'American nationalist conservatism today has adopted the form and rhetoric of subversion values'. Thus, instead of trying to identify what is 'fake news' and what is not, it is arguably more productive to observe the language games and the proliferation of meanings in contemporary societies in that they are central to political representation. While liberal commentators, politicians and academics framed 'Trump's movement' as post-truth, themselves saw it as a battle to defend their values. Let us look into some examples.

In response to the symbolic act of tearing down Confederate and slave traders' statues by the Black Lives Matter movement in the aftermath George Floyd's killing, grassroots supporters on supersized trucks carrying Trump flags, blended with far-right wing militias such as the 'Proud Boys' who describe themselves as 'Western chauvinists', went on counter-protests. The counter-demonstrators replicated the presidents' narrative, they protested 'prejudice' and urged for 'tolerance' revealing the contested nature of socio-political reality (Voice of America 2020). While for anti-racist activists – and liberals broadly speaking – tearing-down statuses symbolised an attack on the ideas of slavery and supremacy that they represented, for Trump supporters it was a radical and unpatriotic attack against freedom of speech. Trump supporters organised around their leader's master frame that saw 'the radical left' (that is, the Democrats) adapting to 'cancel culture' by calling for the boycott of certain ideas or products because of the beliefs they represented (see Hooks 2020). (Liberal and mainstream) public criticism, and even felony charges, against individuals who pointed guns at Black Lives Matter protesters were also perceived as attempts to 'cancel culture' by the

'Trump camp', in that critics opposed the second amendment right of individuals to keep and bear arms (Santucci n.d.). Such interpretation of 'the norm' is reflected in the words of Noble C. Hathaway, the President of the Arizona State Rifle & Pistol Association, who explained to me that Donald Trump 'is vocal about gun rights because he is pro-Constitution (US22).

In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic one saw the questioning of science as the natural descendant of climate denialism. *'Re-open'* protests 'activated a diverse array of groups: anti-vaccination activists, gun rights advocates, adherents of the QAnon conspiracy theory, members of private armed militias, and Trump supporters among them' (Lowndes 2020:55). A notable and omnipresent placard read 'MY BODY MY CHOICE', as shown in the picture below. It included a crossed-out surgical mask, such as those used to prevent contagion during the Covid outbreak, and a 'TRUMP 2020' tag. The re-appropriation of the classic feminist slogan by the radical right exemplifies another instance of subversion of liberal articulations perceived as hegemonic by Trump and his supporters. In the public debate, 'the mask' functioned as a multimodal signifier.

Figure 6.8: Re-appropriating signifiers
Photo: Sergio Flores | Credit: Getty Images

On the 'liberal camp', broadly speaking, it functioned as a signifier of reason, science and pragmatism in the public debate. On the 'Trump camp' however, it functioned as a symbol of ideological and bodily repression. Trump supporters, especially libertarians, thought that the government should not tell the people what to do with their bodies.

'We're not anti-mask. We're not for masks. We're for choice', one protester said exemplifying this point (Bianco 2020).

Another instance showcasing the contested understanding of norms has to do with perceptions of pluralism. Benjamin was raised in a traditionally liberal family and he used to identify as a 'fairly left' himself. In 2016 he was a supporter of Bernie Sanders but he ended up voting for Hillary Clinton. He explained that he got disappointed with Hillary and the Democrats in general, mainly due to their stance on faith and culture issues which he found arrogant and 'condescending', thus he completely changed sides. He was not a 'full-on' Trump supporter but he would vote for him in 2020, he said (US4). The root cause behind this shift, that was definitely not an isolated case, was a perceived shift in values by the parties themselves (see Frank 2005). Benjamin explained that 'the Democratic Party doesn't stand for pluralism anymore. They want to take a hammer and smash everything if you don't believe what they believe, if you don't think how they think. They frame you as a bad person ... The Democrats want to revoke the tax exemptions to institutions, like the church, that oppose same-sex marriage.' Benjamin, who is bisexual explained that 'I may marry a man one day but I won't force a church to change its beliefs'.[73]

What is the meaning of pluralism and who defends it? In many Trump supporters' discourse, pluralism is perceived as the right to hold multiple and co-existing opinions. The Democrats were framed as intolerant, censorious toward those who hold opinions with which the Democrats disagree. The positions Trump supporters held, based on 'alternative facts' may point towards a divergent reality. But, above all, they highlight their opponents' ignorance over the contested nature of this very 'reality'. The presumption of an epistemic and exclusive access

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[73] Benjamin's statement referred to a public comment made by Beto O' Rourke who sought the Democratic nomination in 2020. O' Rouke was asked by the CNN if he thought "religious institutions like colleges, churches, charities, should they lose their tax-exempt status if they oppose same-sex marriage". He replied ''Yes'' adding that "there can be no reward, no benefit, no tax break for anyone or any institution, any organization in America that denies the full human rights and the full civil rights of every single one of us" (see Lybrand and Subramaniam 2020).

to truth not only reinforces the elitist character of 'objectivity' but also betrays its limits as it was defeated with the 'popular' (reactionary) backlash of 2016 onwards.

The positions Trump supporters held may reveal a 'reversed' understanding of reality. But, above all, they highlight their opponents' ignorance over the contested nature of this very 'reality'. The presumption for an epistemic, and exclusive, access to truth not only reinforces its elitist character but its limits and arrogance became visible with the 'popular' (reactionary) backlash of 2016 onwards.

'Political correctness' cannot be negated from this picture. The instances described above (such as the governors' advice to wear masks, the recommendations on the use of language regarding gender, sex, and race) were perceived as a form of speech code and policing. Referring to this issue, Ethan argued that 'I am not anti-gay; I support gay marriage. But this thing has blown out of proportion' (US8). Trump supporters were fighting a war that aimed to destabilise an order imposed by the liberal elites; for them however, these rules were repressive – they did not consent to them. This 'culture war' can be understood as an act of subversion (cf. Riggio 2017). Drawing on populism theory, one can think of political correctness as 'the dominant ideas and values of society' (Canovan 1999:3) which populism, perceived as the politics of the repressed, opposes. When it comes to contemporary America, 'Trumpism's most powerful claim to the mantle of the true subversives of society, the virtuous rebel overthrowing a corrupt mainstream' (Riggio 2017:72). The way Trump's base perceives and justifies its leader's discourse points, not necessarily to a distant reality but rather, to the hegemonic battle over the *meaning* of that reality itself, which Trump supporters aim to subvert.

6.3.4. The paradox of identity

There are indeed a series of 'paradoxes' embedded in this articulation. Yet, they pose little problem for his base in identifying with the president. Trump is a billionaire who is supported by parts of the population that consider themselves as marginalised and left-behind. He is a New Yorker who is supported by the people of the 'fly-over country', the 'forgotten' common men of the middle America. He is a former TV persona who is backed by those who resent cultural elites. Trump leads an extravagant lifestyle, has had three marriages and he allegedly had a tryst with a former porn star Stormy Daniels. Yet, he is supported by people of faith, conservatives and groups who oppose LGBT+ rights, gay marriage and abortion. Despite all these contradictions, identification between base and leader during Trump's first term in office, was maintained at high levels through libidinal investment that released bodily energies, resulting in political enthusiasm and generated political participation to those previously disaffected. Melanie from Ohio explained how, from a quasi-apolitical person became a field officer for the TRUMP 2020 campaign in her area:

> I don't like volunteering. I don't like participating in politics. I am more of a quiet person...an introvert. Usually I would just go vote. But I feel it is important to do my part. So this is the first time that I volunteer. He creates job opportunities. I do not like this job but I do it to keep him in office (US23).

The paradox of identity presupposes that political identification is not necessarily a product of reason and rationality or continuity and consistency between (public) claims and (policy) outcomes. 'Paradoxical' identifications stress the pivotal function of the politics of exceptionality. Drawing once again on Weber (2012) Kalyvas (2008:47) argues that 'the model of charismatic politics takes us to the origins of these worldviews and imaginary significations that enable a variety of separate individuals to form a shared sense of honour, lifestyle, and

dignity; to identify themselves as members of a distinct homogeneous political group, of a common 'we'; and to recognize or reject the validity of a system of political authority'.

Trump's transgressive style provoked the hegemonic cultural and political norms in the US and invited the so-called 'silent majority' to speak up in the face of power. As an interviewee explained, 'a politician is monotone. Donald Trump is real. The other day he cursed on national television' (US14). The omnipresent division between 'politicians' (framed as monotone) and 'Trump' (framed as 'real') seems to be a central aspect in Trumpian popular identification which perceived Trump as 'authentic'. Moreover, the act of cursing – an improper act often performed in the private sphere – highlights further, how socio-culturally low performances resonates well with 'the common people'.

I visited the Evangelical Solid Rock Church outside Cincinnati, Ohio, during an 'Evangelicals for Trump' event to find out more about this seemingly paradoxical relationship between people of faith and Trump, and more specifically how they justify their support towards the president. Members of the congregation explained that they 'believe that everyone deserves a second chance'. 'Or a third chance...', an interviewee added after I mentioned that Trump has been married three times. 'Nobody is perfect, except from one. People make mistakes. We have lots of people in our congregation that changed their ways' (US25), he continued. 'I am not Jesus...Trump is not Jesus either. We are all forgotten', another interviewee justified (US24). Similarly, Deirdre Cooper, from the Texas Alliance for Life – an organisation that advocates against abortion, said that 'the pro-life movement is very diverse, made up of people of all backgrounds, and is full of converts to the cause. We welcome all who want to work to protect innocent human life from conception through natural death, regardless of their image or their past' (US27).

The figure of the Vice-President Mike Pence is a critical factor which compensates for Trump's unpalatable style. Pence is considered 'a solid Christian, staunch social conservative, and anti-gay and pro-life supporter' by Evangelical Christians (US4). Yet, policy is also important. The transactional elements in the relationship between Trump and the Christian right should not be neglected. Trump 'has done nearly everything that the pro-life movement has asked of him' (Ponnuru 2020). Through executive orders, his administration blocked federal funds for family planning organisations and advocates of abortion, while it had also imposed funding restrictions for fetal-tissue research. He also appointed pro-life judges (see Israel 2020). As the representative from the Texas Alliance for Life explained to me 'President Trump takes bold positions. He isn't afraid to be unpopular in the media. He also understands that his base is solidly pro-life and expects him to stick to his commitments on nominating pro-life judges' (US27).

Certainly, past conservative administrations in U.S. history sympathised with the pro-life movement. However, while previous Republican presidents were hesitant to express openly their support towards the movement, or at least to be as crude and polarising – perhaps due to the popularity of these issues or even their own private beliefs – Donald Trump was the first to attend the 'March for Life'. Despite Donald Trump's lifestyle, he mobilised conservative constituencies such as pro-lifers and evangelical Christians. In explaining the influence Trump has for the pro-lifers, Cooper stated that 'President Trump attending the March for Life was a huge boost for the pro-life movement. He isn't afraid to be pro-life and doesn't mind being attacked in the media for his pro-life support. Attending the March for Life was a big encouragement for pro-lifers' (US27).

What if president Trump does not seem follow the rules of faith? This is the central question revolving around the Trump/Christian paradox? 'His parents were good Christians', said Bishop Jackson to the audience at the Evangelical service in Ohio. 'When you cut him....

he is gonna bleed...Good, family, red, white, and blue patriotism' (F2), complemented Paula White, who led the event. While Donald Trump himself may not seem to live up to the Christian values, 'his presidency *is* pro-life!' (US4). An organiser from the Solid Rock community who described himself as 'biblically sound', explained that he is 'looking for things that line up with the Bible: pro-life is a big part of me and my values ... things against...the same-sex marriage...these are the kind of things that I am looking for on a candidate' (US25).

Indeed, when Trump's public discourse came up in the discussions, his supporters recognised how it could be problematic. 'He is very vocal about everything' (US25); Sometimes he is on the bully side...Sometimes he gets a bit too far when he attacks certain groups like minorities (US24); or 'says things against women' (US25). Explaining how religion and government should not interfere, and that religious matters are not to be solved through politics, Melanie said: 'He is not my pastor. He is my president' (US23). What she effectively meant is echoed in Austin's words: 'I don't believe that the main role of the government is to provide cultural and moral leadership. The main aim is to make law and give citizens protection under the law' (US3). In other words, it is politics and policy that matter and not moral issues. Being critical about this, an Evangelical leader stated that his community often prefers to turn a blind eye on certain things that President Trump *does* or *says* that are distant from the Christian ethical values and credit him for policies that are in line with their faith. 'They take the whole package in the end' (US24).

6.3.5. Ecstatic Evangelicals

The most prominent paradox embedded in the identification between the people and Trump is perhaps that of the Evangelical Christians. 'Although Trump is nobody's model Christian, he has uncannily appropriated the iconography of belief: images of a long-awaited judgment soon to come, when merciless vengeance will be wreaked on evil-doers, wrongs will be righted, and untold blessings delivered to the deserving' (Hochschild 2016: 688). With a long history of

infidelity and extravagance, Trump's private lifestyle does not really convince for the conservative moral values he professes as a president. 'As a Christian', Austin said, 'I find his behaviour atrocious. The guy has been married three times, he has done many questionable things over the course of his life. He is a Hollywood guy. A very Left environment' (US3). 'In public, before he became a president, Trump, flipped-flopped on abortion. He doesn't have a big record of anti-gay statements either. He used to be a Democrat too!' (US4). 'He is not Christian. He claims to be' (US3). In fact, in the year 1999, Donald Trump stated that he has no issue with gay people, he is 'very-pro-choice' and that he 'hate[s] the concept of abortion' (TRUMP.36). Paradoxically though, while these issues are presumably of central concern for conservatives such as Evangelical Christians and Pro-Lifers, they seem to affect little these groups' opinion towards Trump.

Like other conservative constituencies, Evangelicals too were afraid of the liberal turn to which they believed America succumbed. The response to this fear was found in the Christian civilisationist – 'Judeo-Christian' – values purported by Steven Bannon's strategy (see also Brubaker 2017; Haynes 2021). That is, the belief that 'culturally, socially, and politically, US principles and achievements stem from the country's claimed Judeo-Christian values' (Haynes 2020: 493; see the previous chapter for an extended overview). The ambition to retake the culturally and morally decadent institutions of contemporary America (FitzGerald 2017), fits well with the psychoanalytic theory on identity formation that takes the promise of return to the lost state constitutes a key mechanism that structures socio-political imaginaries (Stavrakakis 1999).

The Evangelicals for Trump event at the Solid Rock Church outside Cincinnati, Ohio - an idiosyncratic amalgam of religion and politics - took me deep into the heart of the American Christian right: a fringe (Christian) movement that declared a holy war against 'secular

humanism' and vowed to mobilise evangelicals to arrest the moral decay of the country (FitzGerald 2017). *Rolling Stone* magazine describes the Evangelicals as a:

> '...ragtag group of prosperity gospellers (like his "spiritual adviser" Paula White, a televangelist who promises her donors their own personal angel), Christian dominionists (who believe that America's laws should be founded explicitly on biblical ones — including stoning homosexuals), and charismatic or Pentecostal outliers (like Frank Amedia, the Trump campaign's "liaison for Christian policy" who once claimed to have raised an ant from the dead). Considering their extreme views, these folks had an alarming number of followers, but certainly nothing of voting-bloc magnitude' (Morris 2019).

Organised by 'The Evangelicals for Trump', a group set to engage the Christian community to help re-elect Donald Trump, the event of March 6, 2020 was almost typical of an Evangelical worship service; and, as I was told, a very typical of the Solid Rock Church services. Sermons employed a rather vernacular preaching style**.** Yet, the discourse articulated by the religious representatives was essentially identical to that of the president. They used the same phrases as Trump such as 'unemployment is on a historic low', and they referred to the same constituencies such as 'Hispanic-Americans' and 'African Americans'. Importantly, it highlights the resonance and amplification of discursive narratives. The problem for America in the preachers' discourse was essentially identical to that in president Trump's discourse: 'Fake News', 'Hoaxes', 'political correctness', 'the academic elite', the 'post-modern and post-Christian path that Europe follows' (FUS1; FUS2; FUS3; FUS4). Through the use of irony, they dragged politics into their religious discourse blurring the line between the two. 'If pastors don't speak up we end up with men in women's restroom'(FUS4), said Laurence Bishop II, a former rodeo competitor and pastor at the Solid Rock Church, attacking the transgender rights. In denouncing gay marriage, preacher Rod Parsley stated that 'Jesus could never be illegally

married...'. According to Parsley, this moral corruption is what drives religious people like him into politics (FUS3). Rob Parsley, a prominent American Christian minister, author, television host and founder of a 'The Centre for Moral Clarity', a Christian grassroots advocacy organisation, and 'Breakthrough' - a media ministry (RodParsley.TV), provides a typical example what is referred to as a televangelist: a minister who broadcasts his religious message primarily through the use of media, such as radio and television. Parsley attacked 'the establishment' for calling Trump supporters 'deplorables and smelly Walmart shoppers, clinging to your gun and toting a Bible' (FUS3). Indeed, this phrase was a response to the way Hillary Clinton described a subset of Trump supporters back in 2016 (*'a basket of deplorables'*), exemplifying the anti-popular character of the elite discourse on the one hand and the anti-elitist discourse in the Trump camp on the other hand. The preachers declared a war of *ideas* and *values* and *ideology* between the two Americas, reflecting on the Bannonian civilisationist diagnosis for the declining empire. The call to 'fight for our nation' (FUS3) resonates with the Trump's prognostic discourse that seeks to restore the Judeo-Christian values in order to 'Make America Great Again' – from an evangelical point of view.

As with Trump's frames, the Evangelical discursive repertoires were highly politicised and polarising. 'There is no Right or Left. There is Right and Wrong', Parsley argued moralising the political narrative of the Christian right and pointing at the political left that was defined as the carrier of un-American values. In pushing for increased polarisation, Parsley juxtaposed the evangelical worldview to that of 'the enemy'. On the one camp he placed Christianity and on the other hand secularism. He pitted the biblical values that Trump and his movement represents against those of Marxism, anarchism and socialism that the Democrats represented (F3). His discourse – *a polemic* – was highly politicised.

The preachers referred a lot to themselves. They told personal tales; of the places they grew up in middle America; of their slow and hard path to 'success'; and their personal

connections to the President. Their narratives revealed a sense of commonness – to the average American. Their personal character, the hardships and the true American values shared with the forgotten people of 'flyover country'. Even if the faithful Christians attending the Solid Rock Church service had no personal relationship with the President, the preachers – his representatives – acted as intermediaries channelling his message and creating a bond with him. They reminded repeatedly, that 'God can do big things to little people' (F1) – pointing, perhaps, to a religious subtype of populism (see also FitzGerald 2017, chapter 12).

As a black man, Bishop Harry Johnson, used tropes that resonated with the African American history and the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. He brought up the 'freedom versus slavery' divide, not to refer to race relations and the suppression of the black community by white Americans but, to denounce the 'slavery' that decadent liberalism imposed upon America, according to the evangelical narrative, and call for a revolution. In exposing a populist *parrhesia*[74] of a subaltern subject that speaks the truth to power, the Bishop 'wondered' whether the people should 'sit in the back of the bus?' (F1). His response - *'I will sit where I pick'* – not only reinforces the crude *parrhesia* but functions as an allusion of the Civil Rights Movement, and Rosa Parks, which aims to obscure the racist character of Trump's discourse. Moreover, the theatrical style of preaching was reminiscent of Trump's rallies – forging a direct relationship between the people and the preacher and the popular language used.

This highly politicised rhetoric articulated by religious groups and leaders indicates how 'the desire for sovereignty is also expressed in the return of religion' (Newman 2019:99). The contemporary evangelical movement in the U.S.A plays this role. Yet, at the Evangelicals for Trump rally, it was as if the (nominal) line between 'the theological' and 'the political' no

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[74] An ancient Greek word, *parrhesia*, was used by Michel Foucault to highlight the act of standing and speaking up.

longer existed. In Newman's take, 'the political containment of religion, which was the great achievement of secular modernity, is no longer operative – which is why religious intensity now spills out beyond the defined boundaries of the state and intersects with politics and movements of all kinds, in a much more unmediated and unstable way' (Newman 2019:99).

Pastor Franz Gerber of Praise Chapel Community church in Crandon, Wisconsin troubled with this fanaticism. He thinks that, as a pastor, he has a responsibility for/over the congregation he is 'shepherding'. They often 'idolise Trump more than they worship Jesus', he explained. 'Many individuals, followers of Jesus, put so much of their effort and hope on Trump'. 'He is quite brash. He is quite bold. Many Christians like that' (US26). The pastor's words are in harmony with Lakoff's framework of the strict father morality: a paternal model that protects, disciplines and controls the family against the morally corrupt way of life (often advocated by 'the decadent postmodern urbanites').

At the 'Evangelicals for Trump' event held in the suburbs of Cincinnati, I witnessed with my own eyes what Gerber meant. The religious hymns addressed 'to Him' (the Lord, supposedly) executed by a live band in spirit of contemporary music created an atmosphere of *mystagogical catechesis*; ecstatic bodies in movement, dancing, with hands raised in the air; eyes shut, weeping. The emotionally charged atmosphere at the Solid Rock Church reflects on the different forms of community participation that through affect generate a sense of belonging. This reminds one that even 'religion provides a point of collective identification, a symbolic figure of authority for people to rally around' (Newman 2019:99). At times I was not even sure which was 'him' that they were praying to – *the Lord or Trump?* I posed this question to Melanie who described herself 'very religious' and was present at the service: Do you think Evangelicals replaced Jesus for Trump? 'Oh my God!', she responded, 'this is a problem. He is not a Jesus figure. It is scary' (US23). Clearly she had never made the association I made in her own mind.

The ecstatic Evangelical ritual highlights how corporeal energies contributed to the construction of a collective 'we' revolving around the figure of 'the leader'. Ernesto Laclau's words are instructive: The 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 2005:217).

6.4. Conclusion

This chapter analysed Donald Trump's populism in power employing a discursive and sociocultural perspective. Having defined populism as a people-centric and anti-elitist discourse that constructs a collective identity, 'the people', through affective investment, the chapter unfolded in two main parts dedicated on the supply and demand side of political discourse. The first part focused on the political discourse articulated by the president articulated in the forms of rhetoric, visual data, as well as Trump's own habitus.

During his presidency, Trump maintained high degrees of populist discourse. His rhetoric juxtaposed 'the people', defined as the common Americans, against 'the establishment – an elite, represented in the Democratic as well as the Republican party, the liberal media outlets and 'the radical left'. His *habitus* presented profound qualities of the socio-cultural low resonating better with the common person than that of the proper, polished and established politician. Importantly, beyond the vertical (populist) antagonism pitting those at the bottom of society against those at the top, a horizontal relation of inclusion/exclusion was also evident. 'The nation' served as a key signifier in the president's discourse revealing strong nationalist elements co-articulated along with populism. More often than not, Trump's 'nationalism' extended beyond typical conservative 'God-loving' patriotism. Trump's *white* nationalism was

ethnically exclusive and characterised by bigotry, hatred, and conspiracy. At the same time, the increasingly polarising anti-leftist repertoires that brought back the old fashioned anti-communist narratives to the fore of the public debate situate Trump's discourse to the right of the conservative right.

The second part of the chapter, gave voice Trump's followers attempting to grasped the affective narratives generated by 'the people' themselves. Trump's 'movement' is not monolithic but it is rather constituted by an array of diverse groups that have little to share among them apart of the love with their leader. Yet, despite this heterogeneity, common frames and patterns in terms of beliefs were evident in Trump supporters' narratives. It is needless to say that the narratives of the base resonated well with the discourse of the leader. Trump followers have hostility against 'the establishment' – defined as the urban elites of the two coasts, the politicians in Washington be it Democrats or Republicans, the media outlets, and the left. They put the blame on 'the establishment' for the increasing polarisation in the U.S. and not on the president. Even more, Trump's inability to produce policy outcomes is blamed on the war that 'Washington politicians' launched against him. On the contrary, Trump's polarised communication is justified by the supporters. In a similar manner they refute accusations that Trump is racist, nationalist or authoritarian as liberal commentators argue. On the contrary, through a subversive narrative, the Trumpian voter challenges the liberal hegemonic discourse on equality, race, gender and human rights arguing that it is the left that assaults democracy and American values leading the country to decay. These paradoxes are central the relationship between Trump supporters and Trump himself as much as they are central in all relationships of political identification. This reinforces the argument that collective identification cannot be grasped through a rationalistic perspective that seeks continuity and discontinuity between 'policy outcomes' and 'public opinion'. A case in point is that of the Evangelicals. Despite Trump's extravagant and promiscuous lifestyle that reveal

a rather un-Christian way of life, the Christian right is undeniably one of the most of the most energised groups devoted to the re-election of Donald Trump.

Chapter 7

Populists in government: comparative analysis

7.1. Introduction

This chapter brings into comparison the cases of SYRIZA and Donald Trump, and the changes they underwent in their transition from opposition to government. Key findings highlight that populist performativity did not fade once these actors took the helm of government. Rather, it continued to constitute the main mode of political communication for both Trump and SYRIZA. However, they presented distinct qualities depending on their 'host ideology' – SYRIZA articulated a pluralistic and socially oriented political narrative, while Trump propounded an exclusionary and nativist one. That populism 'survived' in government does not mean that it remained unchanged. Populist repertoires were reinvented in multiple ways – by drawing on ongoing political developments and obtaining new meanings, by intensifying (depending on time and space), by being co-articulated with non-populist elements, and by bridging with other frames. SYRIZA and Trump continued to generate and mobilise an array of affects once in government. But even in this case, they produced distinct emotions – ranging from democratic to un-democratic ones. Collective passionate identification followed distinct trajectories in government too: in the case of SYRIZA, it followed a downward route following the party's retreat from its anti-neoliberal commitments; in the case of Trump, sustained identification took an ecstatic turn, leading to the Capitol invasion in January 2021. Taking into consideration the distinct qualities embedded in Trump and SYRIZA's discursive and emotional repertoires, this chapter discusses the distinct impact varieties of populism may have on democracy. Section 7.1. looks at political communication, investigating to what extent and

how populist *frames* and *styles* changed. Section 7.2. enquires into the affective dimension of populism. Section 7.3 explores the implications distinct types of populism in government have on democracy and its institutions.

7.2. Populist performativity, in opposition and in government

As presented in Chapter 1, dominant perspectives in populism studies perceive populism's relationships with the institutions of government as paradoxical and uneasy. Scholarly accounts produced a number of hypotheses regarding populists' transition from the opposition to power. Two general types are evident. Focusing on 'outcomes', scholarship maintains that populists in government either turn mainstream and disappear (see Mény & Surel, 2002; Mudde, 2017) or turn into an authoritarian threat to the representative system (see Müller, 2016; Pappas, 2019). Focusing, on 'policy', scholarship maintains that populists can 'succeed' and 'fail' to implement policy (Canovan 1999; Albertazzi and McDonnell 2015). Arguably, such positions distract one from the analytical core of populism, diverting attention from the *form* of populism to its *contents* and *outcomes*, which are neither constitutive nor exclusive to the phenomenon. Moving beyond such an essentialist take, this research focused on populism's function to interpellate affectively invested collective identities in the name of the people and against an elite. The transformations populism undergoes, are thus to be found in the way populist actors articulate 'the people' in an antagonistic relationship to the 'elite', as well as in the affective bonds masses maintain with 'leaders'.

Against a background of normative expectations then, neither Donald Trump nor SYRIZA ceased to perform as populists in government. On the contrary, having mobilised a profoundly populist discursive repertoire, both actors remained populists to different degrees throughout their term in office. This is not a surprise. Populism is not necessarily a *strategy* that is consciously employed or abandoned, but rather something that often touches the very

ontology of a political actor.[75] Put simply, populist performativity may be 'intrinsic' to the very identity of a given political actor. Social markers, accent, the use of irony or cynicism, are part of the overall habitus of a person rather than a strategy consciously employed to attract voters.

Nevertheless, the fact that both the former Greek Prime Minister and leader of the left party SYRIZA, Alexis Tsipras, and the former U.S. President, Republican Party's Donald Trump, revealed high degrees of populism does not mean that they presented the *same* qualities with respect to their populist or non-populist components.

7.2.1. Distinct ideologies/distinct populisms

To begin with their populist component, both actors presented high degrees of *people-centrism* and *anti-elitism* — both as contenders for power and as their own nations' leaders. The analysis of 135 discursive units, comprising speech, text, videos and images, showed that both SYRIZA, mainly represented in the figure of Alexis Tsipras, and Donald Trump flaunted the socio-political low – typically associated with populist performativity (cf. Ostiguy, 2017). While both actors are evidently populist, their performing of 'the low' is not necessarily identical. Each actor maintained his own distinct characteristics.

As Chapters 3 and 4 showed, Alexis Tsipras, as most of his Ministers and MPs, maintained a 'casual' rather than 'formal' dress quote which is evident in 'conventional' styles of politics. Tsipras' consistent preference not to wear a tie is an example of a 'low' rather than a 'high' political aesthetic (see Ostiguy 2017). Tsipras' language, although not necessarily poor or simplistic but rather smart and sharp, often rendered visible the use of popular phrases,

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[75] This is not to say the opposite though: that populism *cannot* be a strategy to be employed or abandoned. This was the case with Podemos, for example. The party pursued an intense populist character in the beginning, later abandoning it. However, at the background of this radical shift in Podemos' trajectory there was a deep schism within the party. The two big tendencies within Podemos, the populists and the leftists, collided and pushed each for its own strategy: the populist and the leftist one. Thus at the background of its shift from populism, there was a deeper existential change that involved leaving behind one of its foundational flaks led by the outgoing Íñigo Errejón.

polarising tendencies, the use of irony and attempts to humiliate enemies by uncovering their scandals in the parliament. These traits – 'inappropriate' according to conventional standards – could be understood as 'bad manners'; while his consistently antagonistic rhetoric – as opposed to consensus and convergence – could be understood as a perpetuation of 'crisis' (cf. Moffit, 2016). Furthermore, Tsipras exhibits certain social traits that could place him in Ostiguy's (2017) socio-cultural low: such as his poor English skills (due to which he became subject to criticism by political elites), the fact that he lived in a highly populated working-class neighbourhood of Athens' centre where he continued to live, even as a Prime Minister.

Donald Trump's overall habitus is also well-situated in Ostiguy's (2017) socio-cultural low. As Chapters 5 and 6 showed, the American populist exposed a particular body choreography, defined by an informal style and hyperbolic hand gestures, and unrefined speaking, defined by short and incomplete sentences suffering from poor syntax and unadorned folksy vocabulary. The politically incorrect style of Trump's speech and the provocative content of his Tweets, Facebook and Instagram posts highlight his transgressive and disruptive character. Donald Trump's style of populism resonates with Max Weber's (2012) notion of charismatic leader. His 'exceptional qualities' had a disruptive function in the U.S. politics of his time, in that it challenged the hitherto dominant political and cultural norms (Schneiker 2020).

To be sure, Trump is found more on 'the low' than Tsipras. His transgressive style, politically incorrect language, and readiness to verbally assault his opponents were not shared by Tsipras - whose polarising tactics remained profoundly political rather than personal, as was the case with Trump.[76] Trump's transgressive style is relevant to his alpha-male character and

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[76] Yet, as the brief overview of SYRIZA's cabinet members showed, ministers such as Varoufakis and Polakis were definitely found 'lower' than Tsipras. This highlights that a political party is simply either populist or not populist. There are several actors involved in the party which may, as in the case of SYRIZA, embody diversified degrees of populism ranging from low to high. Tsipras certainly carried characteristics of the political low. But

his often obscene appeals to 'tradition' performed through the punishing (yet corrective) morality of 'the father' (see Lakoff, 2017). A brief overview of the distinct traits embodied in each populist's habitus placing them on the socio-cultural low, are summarised in the table below. Importantly, the fact that, having performed 'bad manners', the two actors are placed on the 'low' is not to must not reduce populism to 'anti-politics', as this downgrades the centrality of people-centrism. 'Disruptiveness' is only useful for the analysis of populism when it is 'creative' – when it constructs subjectivities (for a thorough critique see Chapter 1:28).

Table 7.1 Characteristics of 'the low'

Alexis Tsipras	Donald Trump
No tie, casual style	Awkward body language
Poor English skills	Unrefined language
Lives in working class neighbourhood	Public preference for fast food

Beyond fundamental differences with respect to their commonly shared populist component, SYRIZA and Trump's populisms rendered visible fundamental differences in the discourse they communicated. These core differences were rooted in their distinct ideological orientations. Deriving from a left-wing tradition, SYRIZA diagnosed 'economic inequality', 'neoliberal austerity' and 'political corruption' as the key problems for Greek society. As a response, the party advocated for 'democracy' and 'equality' and put forward a pluralistic and horizontal narrative. Through the discourse-analytical lens, the collective subject SYRIZA articulated was as open and fluid in that it brought into equivalence a plethora of socio-economic sectors, identities and demands. As was empirically illustrated in Chapters 3 and 4, 'the people' comprised 'the workers', 'the left', 'the pensioners', 'the youth', 'the precariat',

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Polakis, for example, was found further to the low – and specifically the socio-cultural rather than the politico-cultural low of Tsipras. Certainly, other MPs and Ministers which were not studied in this project (e.g. Health Minister Xanthos, and MP Costas Douzinas are certainly on the high – embodying zero populist characteristics).

'single mothers' 'the LGBT' community', 'the Greeks' but also 'the immigrants'. Spatially, SYRIZA's collective identity was wide, long and horizontal. Yet, the consistency of this broad alliance was evidently composed of 'usual suspects' (the radical and centre left, the economically impoverished and politically excluded) in addition to the disillusioned electorate which abandoned its traditional party identifications. In left-wing SYRIZA's populist discourse, one observes how the 'autonomy of struggles' Laclau and Mouffe (1985) theorised are 'organically' blended in the party's hegemonic project.[77] The unifying point which served as their common denominator was their opposition to an 'enemy' which was mainly defined in political and economic terms: the 'Greek' and 'international elites', 'the banks', 'the 1%', 'the troika', 'the two-party system', which was perceived as responsible for the grave socio-economic conditions that aforementioned categories experienced mutually.

Deriving from a right-wing tradition, Donald Trump diagnosed 'immigration' and the relocation of domestic industries to 'China' and 'Japan', along with a self-indulgent political establishment that was responsible for these, as the root of America's decline (see Chapter 5). Trump's peculiar narrative proposed economic protectionism in order to protect identified a 'silent majority' that experienced economic and political injustice. In order to 'Make America Great Again', Donald Trump proposed 'a mixture of positions outside of his chosen party's orthodoxy, including opposition to free trade, a call for increased corporate taxation, and sharp criticism of the Iraq War' (Lowndes, 2021:118).

As the empirical analysis of Donald Trump's discourse highlighted in Chapters 5 and 6, the signifier 'the people' he articulated was fixed *a priori*. The collective subject was already constructed, based on ethnic/nativist privileged with clearly defined membership. 'The people' mainly functioned as a transcendentally signified subject of nationalism rather than the empty

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[77] The contrast between the style of populism each actor performed points to the theoretical tension between radical democracy and representation, horizontality and verticality, autonomy and hegemony (Kim 2020b).

signifier of populism. As a radical right actor, Trump did not involve minority identities in his articulation, as in the case of its radical left counterpart. In the rare occasions that Donald Trump and his supporters involved women's or minority rights in their discourse, they juxtaposed them to 'the foreign other' ('the Mexican as a rapist', see Chapter 5). The autonomy that exists between different identities involved in the collective subject SYRIZA articulated does not exist in the case of Trump. Rather, Trump incorporated the demands by virtue of one central antagonism: the 'people' vs. 'foreigners'. For this reason, it is argued that spatially, Donald Trump's collective identity was *vertical*.

Collective identity in the case of Donald Trump was also based on an equivalential chain weaving together seemingly heterogeneous identities. In contrast to SYRIZA's 'usual suspects', the groups that Trump brought together seem to maintain a more 'incompatible' relationship among another. Trump's collective subject seemed more of a paradoxical alliance in that it brought together the 'the rich' with 'the workers', the 'protectionists' with the 'free-marketeers' and the 'conservatives', 'the Evangelical Christians' with 'the alt-right' and, towards the end of the Trump administration, with 'the Latino', 'Muslim' and 'Black' populations. In the case of Trump, the different identities that comprised 'the people' did not necessarily exist beforehand as an organised and self-conscious struggle with specific demands and aims as was the case with SYRIZA. In most cases, it was the Trump campaign itself that 'named' and 'founded' these categories through its top-down interpellation. As we will see in the next section, the chain of equivalence was mostly present at the rhetorical level, structuring a rather top-down or *direct relationship* between leader and base, while the heterogeneous groups that constituted Trump's 'base' had little interaction among each other.

Both populist actors referred to 'the nation'. Due to the historically intimate relationship 'the nation' and 'the people', certain scholars articulated populism as synonymous to nationalism (see Taguieff, 2013). Articulations of 'national-populism' however ignore the

omnipresent references to 'the nation' in any political discourse beyond populism. Due to the centrality of the nation-state in political modernity 'national issues' are increasingly common in political narratives. The nation-state is a terrain that houses cultural sediments and mobilises resources such as memory and historical legacies that mark the collective subject (Venizelos 2021). Thus, a certain degree of nation-centrism is expected in any political narrative. Nonetheless, despite the historically intimate relationship between populist and nationalist discourses, this study has argued that the two can be analytically distinguished (see Anastasiou, 2020; de Cleen & Stavrakakis, 2020).

Donald Trump operated more on the 'nationalist' side rather than the 'populist' one vis-à-vis SYRIZA. Deconstructing Donald Trump's rhetoric rendered-visible an exclusionary type of nationalism which resonated very well with the narrative of the alt-right and rendered visible white-supremacist elements. As Chapters 5 and 6 highlighted, Trump's white rage often prevailed over his populism. SYRIZA on the contrary put forward an inclusionary type of nationalism, which in the Greek context is often referred to as 'patriotism'. Although 'the left' is often perceived as incompatible with the notions of 'nationalism' and 'sovereignty', left-wing patriotism is nothing strange in the southern European and Latin American left (Custodi 2020). SYRIZA drew on the notion of the 'motherland' which was framed as an egalitarian terrain that included immigrants and refugees as part of its 'people'. SYRIZA addressed 'the Greeks' who were, however, framed as politically and economically subaltern and not nationally superior or pure. Foreign countries, such as Germany, were targeted as 'the enemy'; however not in the ethnic, but in the economic, sense of the term. These findings challenge mainstream Eurocentric perspectives on populism. In Latin America for example, 'the people' may have been "suffering", "hard working", "neglected", "despised", but they were (and are) *never* seen as "pure", whether morally, ethically, ethnically, or otherwise. Rather, they are the

damaged, the *plebs*, the un-heard and un-represented who see themselves as discriminated, exploited, or excluded from civic life' (Ostiguy et al., 2021:3).

Overall, one observes fundamental differences between the types of populism each actor articulated. These differences are evidently based on the distinct ideologies that accompanied each populism. Reflecting on the theories of populism (see Judis, 2016; Ostiguy, 2020; de Cleen & Stavrakakis, 2020), SYRIZA's left populism was dyadic: it pitted those at the bottom – defined as the excluded social majority, as politically and economically subaltern – against those at the top – defined in economic and political terms. Donald Trump's populism represented a triadic structure: it pitted those allegedly at the bottom of society – defined as commoners but at the same time as *ethnos* – whose rights and joys are being deprived by those at the top – defined by political and economic interests indeed – but also by those aliens who enter their country with the tolerance of 'the establishment'. On the table below, one can find a summary of the differences among SYRIZA and Trump's populism based on the main parameters set to investigate.

These differences point once again in the distinct architecture that describes the two populisms. It is evident that the role that the ideological dimension (left/right) plays over the populist one (people/elite) is significant. The different structure of each populism resonates well with what Casullo (2020) upward-punching and downward-punching populisms: When punching upward, the elite is mainly defined in economic and financial terms: they are the wealthy, the capitalist, the rich and powerful of the country. 'When punching downward, the elite is described as an alliance between 'high', 'leftist', 'cosmopolitan', or 'intellectual' groups (such as college professors or journalists) with 'low' religious or ethnic 'foreigners' that come from outside to threaten the unity and purity of the people' (Casullo, 2020:31).

Table 7.2   Differences in populist discourse based on ideology

		SYRIZA	**Donald Trump**
Collective identity			
	Material	Subjugated Greeks, workers, lower strata, middle classes, pensioners, youngsters, single mothers	'Industrial workers', 'hardworking' Americans, 'middle America', middle classes
	Political	the left, movements, youngsters, social majority, second generation migrants	'The common American', 'police forces', 'silent majority'
	Symbolic	Economically and politically subjugated Greeks, excluded migrants	The American nation, the white Americans, American families, American patriots
Collective other			
	Material	The 1%, the banks, the lenders	Foreign economies, 'Big pharma'
	Political	The establishment (within and outside Greece): the two party system, New Democracy, PASOK, IMF, Eurocrats, technocrats, media moguls	The political establishment (both within the Republican and the Democratic party); 'Washington'; 'Mainstream Media'; 'Experts'; 'the Radical Left'; 'Antifa'
	Symbolic	Powerful nations (e.g. Germany, Netherlands) that subjugate the Greek nation economically and politically	Mexicans, Muslims, ethnic groups;
Diagnosis			
	Material	Neoliberal austerity	Foreign industries benefited at the expense of American industries
	Political	Democratic rights and political participation are supressed	Political elites took America (culturally and politically) backwards
	Symbolic	Loss of national sovereignty	Radical left, liberals, postmodernity, cultural elites cancel culture; Mexicans framed as drug smugglers and rapists
Prognosis			
	Material	Welfare provision	Restore prosperity; halt free trade; increase taxation
	Political	Restore democracy	'transfer power from Washington, D.C., back to the people'.
	Symbolic	Restore solidarity and dignity	'Build the wall'; bring troops back home; 'Make America Great Again'

7.2.2. Degrees of populism in power

Although both SYRIZA and Trump continued to perform as populists even in government, this does not mean that their populism remained unchanged. Rather, their populist discourse in government was subject to fluctuations depending on *when* and *where* it was performed. Taking seriously the creative, flexible and even contradictory ways that discursive articulations occur suggests that populist repertoires are subject to spatio-temporal dynamics (Mazzolini 2020). As the empirical analysis highlighted, the way the fluctuations in the populist performativity of SYRIZA and Donald Trump can be thought, is in terms of *degrees of radicalisation and moderation; amplification and diffusion of frames; expansion and shortening of the equivalential chain;* and finally *frame-bridging.*

Moderation and *radicalisation* refers to the degree to which the antagonistic narratives pitting 'the people' against 'the elite' *deepen* and *soften*. This finding speaks to the burgeoning literature on the 'degrees of populism' (Deegan-Krause and Haughton 2009; Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011; Caiani and Graziano 2016; Aslanidis 2018a; Gründl 2020). Gradational changes of populism in SYRIZA and Trump's populist repertoires were dependent on the type of political arena in which they were performed (*space*), as well as in the conjuncture (*time*). For example, as the empirical analysis in Chapter 4 showed, in his address on the refugee issue at the United Nations' headquarters, Alexis Tsipras' speech was not particularly populist. Although not prohibitive, the international and formal framework and the absence of 'people from here' (see Ostiguy, 2017) does not leave room to polarise in a populist way. Instances in which Tsipras was found in the 'high' of the socio-political axis instead of his 'native' 'low' were many. As the empiricals of Chapter 4showed, the predominantly populist SYRIZA did not hesitate to adopt technocratic and managerial styles of governance – for example when dealing with foreign affairs issues.

The analysis concerning Donald Trump highlighted that the US president was found less frequently on the 'high' than SYRIZA. As quantitative studies highlighted, the degree of populism in Trump's discourse depended on factors such as whether or not he was using the teleprompter (Smith et al. 2019; Team Populism 2016). For example, his presidential debates with Hillary Clinton did not go over as particularly populist, in contrast to his major events and conferences. On the contrary, as Chapters 5 and 6 highlighted, Donald Trump rallies, in which the performer 'free-styled', employed high degrees of populism.

Periods described by intense political conflict (such as elections, referendums, scandals and disputes) rendered visible the *amplification of frames*. Not only were frames intensified vertically, as explained earlier, but they were also invigorated. Beyond the populist actors themselves, proxy organisations and institutions, newspapers and journalists, aligned movements, engaged in this amplification process, essentially endorsing and reproducing the message of the governing populists and involving themselves in the broader political antagonism between government and opposition and their proxies. In the case of SYRIZA, this was evident during the referendum, as well as towards the end of the government's term in office and specifically during the revival of the left/right axis that was structured around the signifier of 'progress' and 'democracy'. As Chapter 4 showed, citizens, political organisations and media outlets outside the party adopted and reproduced the government's discourse. In the case of Trump, amplification became evident by the reproduction of 'post-truth' narratives by grassroots participants, as this was highlighted in Chapter 6.

Populist performativity in government was subject to horizontal fluctuations defined by the enlargement or shortening of the equivalential chain and subsequently the definition of the collective 'we'. For example, as Chapter 3 showed, SYRIZA in opposition constructed a long chain of equivalence including 'the left', 'pensioners', 'unemployed', 'the youth', 'the workers', 'the middle classes' and so on, while it also invited disillusioned New Democracy

and PASOK voters. As Chapter 4 showed, after SYRIZA's capitulation to the demands of 'the troika', references to the left diminished. Towards the end of SYRIZA's term in office, the party placed its energies to attract back 'the left' and 'the progressives', while the rest of subjects that were usually articulated in SYRIZA's discourse appeared less frequently. Beyond the composition of 'the people', the definition of 'the enemy' also changed following SYRIZA's capitulation: references to 'the troika' became less frequent and the name of the enemy was almost exclusively occupied by the 'Greek political establishment'. Donald Trump also sought to expand his chain of equivalence when in office. As Chapter 6 showed, during his last year in office, he sought to appeal to the black and Hispanic population by touting how his economic achievements had reduced poverty and unemployment for these constituencies. His prison reform during his last year in office but also his 'inclusive' quest list in the 2020 State of the Union were also part of the same reasoning.

Furthermore, populist elements were *articulated with non-populist elements*. Unfolding contingent political developments provided the opportunity to construct frames which were combined with the main populist master frame. For example, as Chapter 4 showed, SYRIZA in government communicated a series of emergent frames revolving around 'patriotism', 'progressive and left-wing politics', 'the exit from the memoranda' while at times the government had even communicated 'anti-populist' and 'technocratic/institutionalist' narratives. With respect to the case of Trump in government, populist discourse was combined with increasing degrees of ideological (non-populist) elements that had strong affinities with 'conservative' but also 'alt-right' discourse. 'Nationalism' continued to be a key discourse throughout Donald Trump's governmental performance, along with 'white nationalism' and 'nativism'. After the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis – and resulting national mass protests (most peaceful), an 'anti-leftist' repertoire emerged to assume a profoundly central role, especially in the last parts of term in office. Democrats were framed as the 'radical

left' (a danger in Trump's discourse), 'crazy socialist-democrats', 'antifa' and so forth. The anti-leftist narrative intensified in the wake of the amplified Black Lives Matter movement from May 2020 until the November elections. As Chapter 6 highlighted, these non-populist and highly ideological elements frames often prevailed in Trump's myth signifying that not populism but (white) nationalism suits better to describe Trump's identity. Sometimes these rhetorical repertoires were articulated in their own right, revealing the salience (and even predominance) of ideology in these actors' discourse. Most commonly though, non-populist frames were articulated with (and attached to) the (main) populist master frame that structured political actors' narrative. The populist master frame was centrally situated in both SYRIZA and Trump's governmental narrative from the beginning until the end of their terms in office.

The process of co-articulation and combination of frames in such creative ways leads to the next type of qualitative change that populist performance in government underwent. Frames became subject to (*frame-*)*bridging*. That is, actors linked past frames with new ones, aiming to construct a consistent narrative or myth that resonates with the culture and memory of their 'people'. For example, in its fourth year in office, and upon the emergent issue of the Macedonia-naming dispute which it attempted to resolve despite militant resistance from the opposition, SYRIZA articulated a vision of democracy for the progressive 'many' against the economically privileged 'few'. Tsipras' blamed the country's 'elite' which, in his view, during the main years of the economic crisis it sought to destroy Greece economically during the economic crisis while during the current conjuncture it sought to isolate the country and act against the interests of the people. In short, Tsipras combined his old populist repertoire, which was evident even before his party assumed office, with a new issue and blamed the very same 'elite' for suppressing 'popular will'.
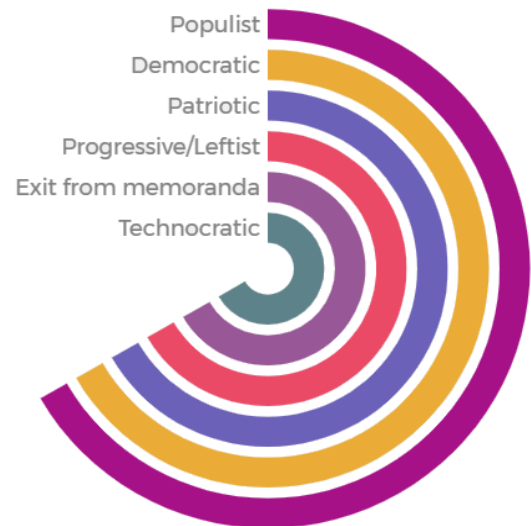
To conclude, this subsection showed that populism in government does not just abstractly 'succeed' or 'fail'. As shown above, it is reinvented in different qualitative ways and

degrees. The illustrations below demonstrate the way SYRIZA and Trump's discourse changed in the temporal continuum between opposition and government. The outer layers indicate the element in each actor's discourse that prevailed, thus frontloading the rest, which are located inwardly in the radial bar. Changes in terms of relevance in the transition from opposition to power is captured through frames' repositioning inwardly/outwardly, highlighting the lower/higher degree to which they were articulated. The illustration captures new frames as well.
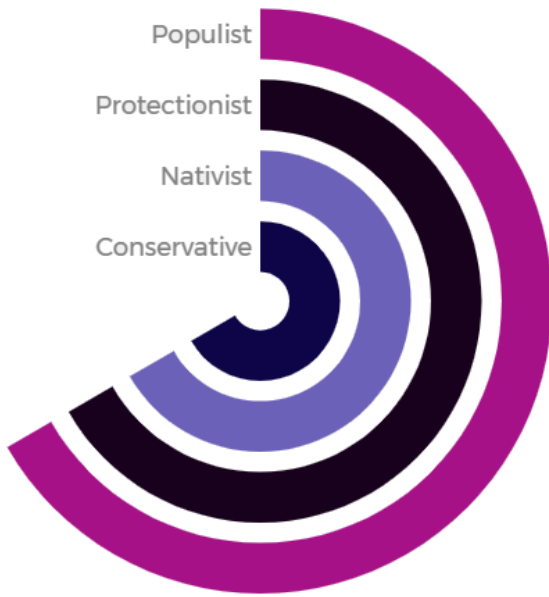

SYRIZA's frames in opposition (2012 - 2015)
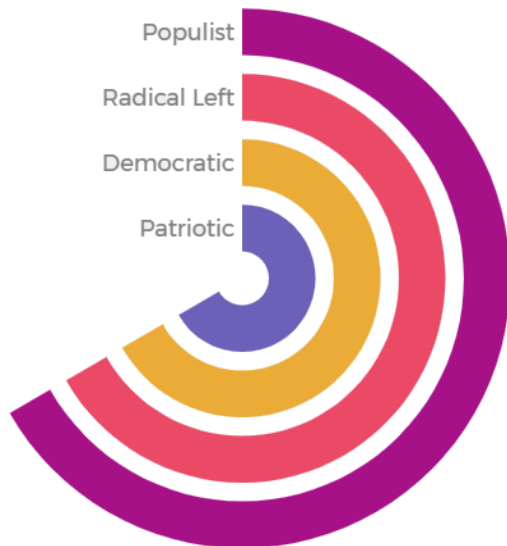
SYRIZA's frames in government (2015-2019)

Donald Trump's frames in opposition (2015-2016)

Populist
Protectionist
Nativist
Conservative

Donald Trump's frames in government (2017 -2020)

Populist
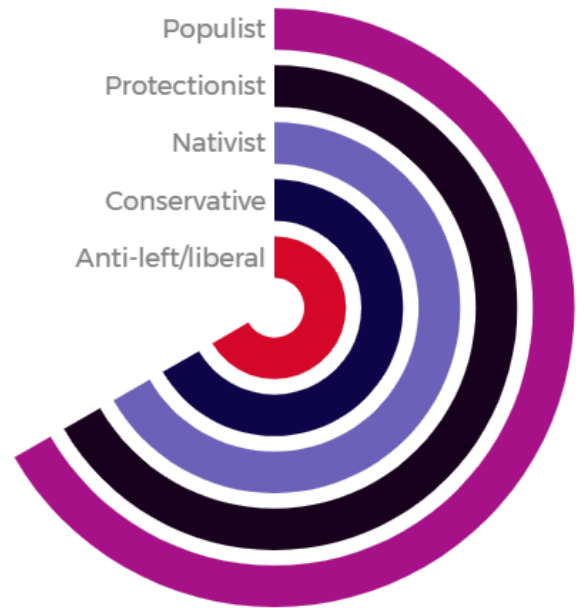Protectionist
Nativist
Conservative
Anti-left/liberal

Figure 7.1. SYRIZA and Donald Trump's main frames in opposition and government. The dominant element is projected outwards.

7.3. Affect and mobilisation

This study's central argument is that political identities such as 'the people' are affectively constituted as the function of 'naming' is not merely rhetorical but performative to this regard (Venizelos 2021). Not only is affect fundamental in subjects' experience of socio-political reality, but it is *central* in the *very construction* of those very subjectivities (Stavrakakis 1999). The conventional view maintains that populists are overly emotional – and this is of course negative. Populists are believed to tap into anxiety, unleash anger, and spread fear.

This research confirms that both Alexis Tsipras and Donald Trump generated an avalanche of emotions. They affectively mobilised the disaffected and disillusioned citizens who felt forgotten, marginalised, and underrepresented. Their anti-establishment rhetoric

tapped into sentiments of perceived 'injustice', 'frustration', 'indignation' and 'anger', turning these 'generic' feelings into resentment against 'the political elites' of their countries. However, they mobilised distinct types of emotions, depending on their ideologies and the subsequent socio-political imaginaries they distinctively put forward. As Ostiguy (2017:91) argues, 'populism carries an emotional charge, which covers the spectrum from the negative *ressentiment* of the *laissés pour compte* to the positive extreme of the fusional love with the leader'. Indeed, as the analysis of 56 interviews conducted for the purposes of this study shows, the emotions SYRIZA and Trump can be associated with range from 'joy' to 'resentment' and from 'love' to 'hatred' respectively.

SYRIZA rejuvenated political passions in Greece after a period of post-political hegemony to the extent that it resembled PASOK's 'huge mass rallies – variously referred to as human seas, floods and earthquakes' in the 1980s (Clogg 1987: 91). As Chapter 3 showed, the political enthusiasm SYRIZA reactivated carried connotations of 'political resurrection' and 'change'. The appearance of Trump also generated enthusiasm – but of a different kind (Hart 2020). When compared to established politicians, labelled as 'boring', Trump supporters interviewed in this study stated that their leader was 'amusing', 'transparent', and 'real'. But underneath this excitement, Trump was, for many, a response to the sentiment of non-representation a response to the perception that the fading moral values of America had been corrupted by the liberal elites. The figure of Trump was indeed emancipatory for the American radical right too (Neiwert 2017). It released energies related to hatred.

Drawing on the schematic representation of the distinct typologies of collective identities articulated by each actor, SYRIZA's 'people' were sustained through a *horizontal solidarity* among differential movements, struggles, identities and demands, forged by commonly lived organisational and political experiences that developed a sense of affective community. As it was empirically illustrated in Chapter 3, social movements cooperated with

each other. Most activists were not active in one single-issue social movement alone but rather in the majority of movements. They engaged with other struggles' particular demands (e.g. to 'save the environment', 'block mass layoffs' of public sector workers) and linked them with broader demands (e.g. for 'democracy' and 'regime change' etc.). The multi-directional (horizontal and vertical) interactions between struggles and the party are also presented in figure 29 below. The depth of the crisis mobilised unincorporated sectors of society too. A characteristic example provided in Chapter 3 is that of the mobilisation around democracy. Upon the announcement of the forced closure of the public broadcasting channel ERT, movements and non-organised citizens headed outside ERT's HQ in order to 'defend democracy'. This was one of the many examples in which differential elements entered into a relationship of equivalence transforming 'autonomous' sectors rooted in different struggles (or no struggles) into 'a people'.
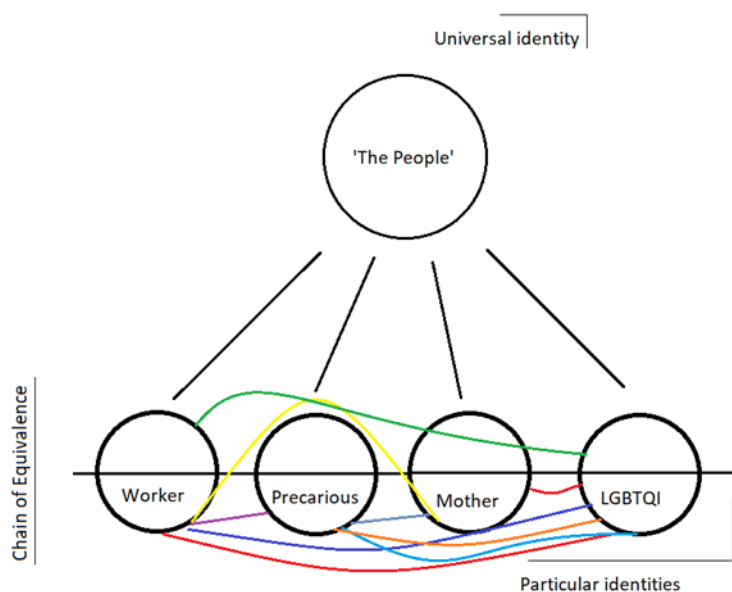

Figure 7.2: Collective identity in the case of SYRIZA shows a horizontal solidarity among articulated identities and a self-understanding of these identities as 'the people'. Figure adopted from Laclau (2005:130-131)

This finding demonstrates practically how 'the equivalential process' in constructing 'the people', as theorised by Laclau and Mouffe, is key in formation of political subjectivity. SYRIZA's function was pivotal in unifying (even in a partial and critical manner) these demands and creating a sense of belonging in constructing an 'us' among all those struggles against 'an enemy', found in the Samaras government. The name of SYRIZA served as a catalyst in the construction of this popular front shows that a significant degree of verticality was necessary to unify the heterogeneous struggles.

The collective identity interpellated by Donald Trump maintained a *vertical* internal structure. In contrast to the case of SYRIZA, groups and demands in the case of Trump did not present such strong affinities among each other, and did not pre-exist as politically conscious constituencies with traditional allies. Identification with Trump rested on a vertical and direct relationship between base and leader. through which Trump conjured 'the people'. This became evident in the conversation with Melanie, a field organiser for the 'TRUMP 2020' campaign in Cincinnati, Ohio, presented in Chapter 6. Although Melanie held a relatively central position in the 'Trump movement', she was unaware of any other social groups or organisations that supported Trump. She was unaware that a wing of Trump supporters comprised militant alt-right activists, profoundly xenophobic groups, neo-Nazi grassroots and cults that were prone to conspiracy theories. She never saw a connection between, and in fact did not distinguish, her involvement in the local 'TRUMP 2020' branch with her presence at the 'Evangelicals for Trump' events that night. As a good woman of faith, she saw her presence in Trump's rally as a natural response to the morally downward trajectory America followed.
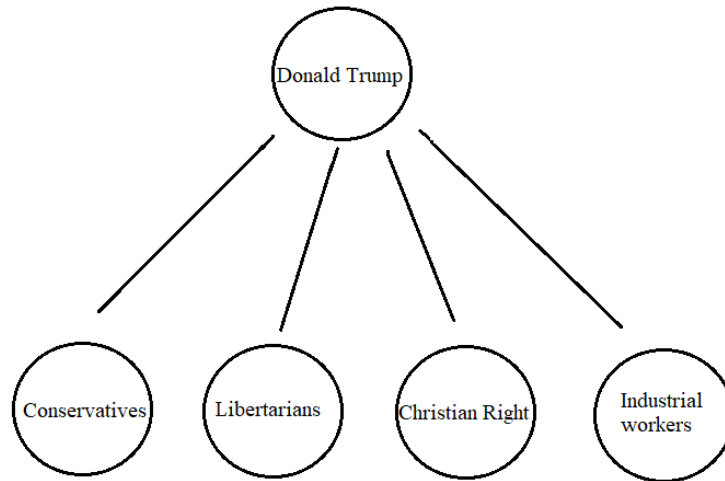
Figure 7.3: Collective identity in the case of Donald Trump highlights a direct (top-down/bottom up) relationship between different groups and the leader but not necessarily among those groups themselves. Figure adopted from Laclau (2005:130-131).

Trump's scandalous character turned rupture into rapture (Wagner-Pacifici and Tavory 2019). It mobilised all those Americans who felt abandoned and forgotten by the political elites (Bradlee 2018), and gave 'meaning' to popular frustration by channelling it through an ecstatic type of love towards 'the leader' into collective energy. It turned 'liquid' emotions into resentful affects and emancipated rage culminating in the Capitol invasion in January 2021. While critiques framed Trump as a dangerous ignorant, his supporters conceived him as a potent and transparent leader. Trump assumed the role of 'strict Father' who 'promised' to discipline the morally corrupt America that due to postmodernism, globalisation, and triumphalist liberal values has diverged from its core values (cf. Lakoff, 1996). His flamboyant, promiscuous, rude, and politically incorrect manners which flaunted the socio-political 'low' were pivotal in energising the disaffected subjects who felt alienated and disillusioned by mainstream politicians.

7.3.1. Distinct populisms/distinct affects

Despite their commonly shared 'ability' to turn emotions into political mobilisation, two actors articulated presents sharp qualitative differences. As Chapter 3 showed, popular discontent in Greece was directed towards 'the top of society'. The political and economic class was identified as a key cause of economic injustice and social deprivation. Importantly, the vision SYRIZA articulated in order to reverse this situation was structured around signifiers such as 'hope' and 'change'. In addition to 'anger', SYRIZA in government, generated emotions such as 'joy' and 'pride'. As Chapter 5 showed, peoples' morale was elevated during SYRIZA's first months in office. Even if most moves that the government made were symbolic in nature the dignity of the people was restored. The 'referendum days' were characterised by a euphoric and ecstatic atmosphere in which the feeling of 'joy' prevailed. Activists and common citizens participated in one way or another in the campaign against the 'will of the EU'. Some experienced the referendum as the heyday of class struggle and believed that the route of history was about to change. This renders visible a 'forward-looking' (María Esperanza Casullo 2020) political imaginary in which signifiers such as 'democracy', 'social justice', and 'equality' assume central role (Tambakaki 2019). Such ethical and emotive characteristics can be understood as part of 'the left' and 'inclusionary populisms'.

Trump's narrative on the contrary, tapped into sentiments such as 'anxiety' and 'nostalgia', reinforcing feelings of 'fear' and 'hatred'. As Chapters 5 and 6 exposed, the direction of Trump's populism is, thus, backwards-looking (María Esperanza Casullo 2020): its ethical and emotive characteristics are part of the conservative repertoire and suggest a 'closed' affective and societal imaginary. Donald Trump's slogans 'America First' and 'Make America Great Again' reproduced a nostalgic narrative which looked backwards, promising to

restore America's golden age.[78] From a psychoanalytic point of view, the mourning for the end of 'the empire' and the loss of 'the American dream' point to a civilizational inwardness. Nostalgia is a signal for closure. Longing for the past (that never existed), the myth of wounded narcissism (of an ego that never was) create a sense of a loss object. Jealousy of the (foreign) 'other', who has the object that belongs to us generates resentment and (nationalist) violence (L'Heuillet 2020). Following theory then, the emotions Donald Trump released were primarily anti-democratic as they were rooted in idealisation (see also Chapter 1:34).

Table 7.3   Typology of emotions

	SYRIZA	Donald Trump
Direction	Forward-looking	Backward-looking
Types of Emotions	Hope, love, solidarity	Nostalgia, hatred
Political implications	Democratic affects (sublimation)	Anti-democratic affects (idealisation)

7.3.2. Upward and downward identifications

More often than not, emotions are analysed from the side of the political actor and this perpetuates artificial hierarchy between leaders and base. While political actors play a vital role in mobilising emotions through their performative repertoires it would be a mistake to neglect 'the people' from the equation. Emotions are not just generat*ed* from above. 'The people' also have agency to act, desire and engage in collective rituals. Thus, this thesis studied the peoples'

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[78] To be sure, socialist fantasy may also envision the return to an original state/a state that is supposed to be. For example, in his text on alienation, Marx speaks of 'a true nature', in which workers should be in control of the means of production – but they are not because capitalism is dominant. Many contemporary Marxist groups inspired by this fight to convince the workers of what is their true nature.

affects through a quasi-anthropological lens and engaged with the emotions embedded in the populisms under consideration. The empirical analysis suggests that the trajectories affectual identification followed in the case of SYRIZA and Trump were distinct.

Beginning from the Greek case, although the SYRIZA government continued to employ populist tropes as its main rhetorical canon, identification (from the side of the people towards the government) followed a downward route. The SYRIZA government attempted to reinvent its discourse and reframe political reality in Greece, consistently unleashing polemics against the 'rotten establishment' and placing 'the people' at the core of its discourse. But the euphoric identification observed in the period 2012 – 2015 analysed in Chapter 3, as well as in the party's first period in power, analysed in Chapter 4, was radically interrupted upon SYRIZA's capitulation. As illustrated in Chapter 4, the trajectory that the negotiation with 'the troika' took, culminating in a bitter deal for another austerity package, functioned as a catalyst in the transformation of 'hope' and 'joy' into 'disappointment', 'sorrow' and 'anger'. The 'political ecstasy' evident in the 'days of the referendum' in July 2015 curdled into alienation. SYRIZA's capitulation was a traumatic event for Greeks, especially for the radical left components of 'the people' within and outside the party. This shows that the continuity/discontinuity of populist *identification* in government is not subject to (populist) performativity *per se*. External contingent events interfere even with the most convincing political myths. SYRIZA was defeated by 'the old establishment' in the 2019 elections as New Democracy returned to power. However, it is important to acknowledge that the percentage SYRIZA secured (31.53%), was only marginally lower (4.8%) than the one the party gained in 2015 when it achieved power. Importantly, although this percentage can be considered as impressive considering the party's 'backflip', the *depth* of identification cannot be equated with electoral percentages.

Evidently, SYRIZA's abandonment of its anti-neoliberal commitment was critical in the downward trajectory euphoric identification took. However, following the conceptual distinction between the 'ideological/programmatic' and 'populist' components, it needs to be highlighted that if there is something that was eroded in SYRIZA's identity is primarily its 'radical left' character. Whether this is rooted in its populist strategy is a matter of interpretation.

Unlike in the case of SYRIZA, passionate identification did not fade out in the case of Donald Trump. Even in defeat about 72 popular million votes – the most in the history of a sitting president – which translates into 10 million votes more from the 2016 election (Fessenden, Gamio, and Rich 2020; Impelli 2020). Despite the fact that Trump had not accomplished much of what he promised a significant number of his supporters remained loyal to him until the end. Indeed, several sectors of the working class – especially the construction industry and farming sectors – gradually distanced themselves from Trump. However, conservative strongholds such as grassroots nationalists, the wealthy, and the overwhelming majority of the Republican establishment remained loyal to Trump. The climax of this driving libidinal force exemplifying the 'unconditional love' for Trump is rendered-visible in the Capitol invasion in January 2021: perhaps the *swan song* of a 'movement' unable to accept defeat.

A case in point with respect to the consistently euphoric identification with Trump was the Evangelical movement overviewed empirically in Chapters 5 and 6. In *Civilisation and its Discontents*. Freud (1962 [1930]) maintained that faith groups offer a sense of 'eternity' – 'a feeling as of something limitless, unbounded – as it were, ''oceanic''' (:19). Faith organisations are tied to a feeling of grief, and people accede them in that they promise to restore the loss and protect the ego from the external world by offering a form of limitless narcissism as if the

subject is one with the external world as a whole.[79] This is what Freud calls an 'oceanic feeling' – a feeling of eternity as of something limitless, unbounded'. The evangelicals' event in Cincinnati, Ohio revealed a similar experience, with bodies coming together, penetrated by music, electrified by dance, and charged by rapturous oration. In this ritual, 'Evangelicals for Trump' were mesmerised by the vernacular populist preaching of their religious leaders who unleashed polemics against the postmodern turn that the politically correct left has been forcefully imposing on America. The line between 'the religious' and 'the political' was blurred. But does it matter? As Newman (2019:99) 'the desire for sovereignty is also expressed in the return of religion'. Judith Butler's psychoanalytic take on performativity maintains that '[t]o be ec-static means, literally, to be outside oneself, and thus can have several meanings: to be transported *beyond oneself* by a passion, but also to be beside oneself with rage or grief (Butler, 2006: 24 *emphasis in original*). However, the Evangelical event is not a proof of brainwashing or manipulation, but rather a community building practice. Anthropologist Victor Turner (1995) acknowledged the agency of acts of everyday life such as rites in effecting social change; while Roberto Esposito, who argued that community is anything but a collective bond that exists *a priori*, maintains that community is experienced in a sense of opening 'that turns individuals inside *out*, freeing them *to* their exteriority' (Esposito, 2013; emphasis added). In this sense, collective practices, such as the Evangelical service, sustained passionate identifications towards Trump despite his numerous failures to deliver policy and keep his

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[79] In Freud's words, the example of religious energy is compared with an infant's relationship with its father. In Freud's own words: 'I cannot think of any need in childhood as strong as the need for a father's protection. Thus the part played by the oceanic feeling, which might seek something like the restoration of limitless narcissism is ousted from a place in the foreground. The origin of the religious attitude can be traced back in clear outlines as far as the feeling of infantile helplessness. There may be something further behind that but for the present it is wrapped in obscurity (Freud, 1962: 19). In her work on mourning, Judith Butler (2006) draws on the political dimension of mourning indicating how the causes of loss (which causes mourning e.g. AIDS, war, poverty) can be political. Mourning then is not necessarily a private matter. Rather, considering that bodies are socially and politically constituted ('gay', 'woman', 'refugee') and loss can be related to the dispossession of a place or community, one could expect that mourning can be collective, social and political.

promises. The 'paradox of identity' highlights that affect is often a more potent drive in social and political practices than reason. The invasion of Capitol by parochial Trump elements who protested Biden's 'election fraud' in January 2021 highlights that.

Table 7.4   Trajectories of identification

	SYRIZA	Donald Trump
	Downward	Sustained/upward

7.4. Populism and democracy

Taking into consideration the findings of the previous sections, pointing to increasingly distinct types of discourses, collective identities and emotions embedded in the left and right populisms of SYRIZA and Trump, enables one to examine populisms' distinct implications for democracy. Normative debates about the relationship between populism and democracy abound.[80] Given the axiomatically negative connotation of populism – particularly in Europe – the question whether populism is good or bad for democracy is more often inclined towards the latter option. With such a point of departure, the expectations regarding the implications populism has on democracy *once in government* may only be negative.

In line with Mudde & Kaltwasser (2012), this study highlights that populism may be both a threat and a corrective for democracy. Democratic implications are not necessarily dependent on the populist qualities of a political actor but rather on the core ideological features that accompany its populism (De Cleen et al. 2021; Galanopoulos and Venizelos 2021). The

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[80] Here I use the term democracy in the broader sense. I acknowledge that most discussions refer to liberal democracy (which often take labels such as 'representative democracy', 'constitutional democracy', 'pluralistic democracy' and so on). Yet, I avoid naming 'which model of democracy' with which I am concerned because (1) relevant definitions are attached to normative judgments and (2) models of democracy are ideal-types that are rarely implemented exactly as they are thought. So even if we speak about 'liberal democracy', disputes about how close to that definition each case under study is may result to endless disagreements.

relationship between populism and democracy appears more complicated. In what follows, normative concerns regarding populism's relationship with democracy and its institutions are brought in light of the findings occurred from the empirical analysis of Donald Trump and SYRIZA's populisms.

7.4.1. A threat to representation?

Taggart (2002: 66) argued that 'populism is hostile to representative politics' and populist leaders are believed to claim that 'they*, and only they'* can authentically represent the people (Müller, 2016: 20) rendering representative institutions and notions of separation of powers as obsolete (Chryssogelos, 2018: 91). For this reason, populism is commonly framed as 'illiberal' (Pappas, 2019)**,** as it is perceived to pursue 'unistitutionalised support' (Weyland 2001) and establish a direct relationship with voters. This is an anathema for liberals who believe that populism circumvents 'intermediary associations like parties and traditional media' (Urbinati, 2019: 6.10). Mudde & Kaltwasser (2012:17) argued that 'populism is based on the primacy of the political, which means that any other institutional centre of power, including the judiciary, is believed to be secondary. After all, ''the general will of the people'' cannot be limited by anything, not even constitutional protections, that is, *vox populi, vox dei'*. Similarly, Worsley (1969) stated that populists distort social mechanisms and depart from the rule of law.

In the case of SYRIZA though, this argument does not seem to hold true. Indeed, when in government, the party unleashed attacks on the 'political and media establishment' for its involvement the local and global scale scandals (e.g. the Novartis pharmaceutical scandal, the TV licenses scandal and even the economic crisis itself). The populist government moved from rhetoric to action and established the 'truth commission? on public debt' in order to determine which political parties were involved. However, this took place under constitutional strictures. As Chapter 4 showed, the government took all these issues to the parliament for debate. It

established intra-party committees to investigate corruption and acted within the framework of the Greek law. The TV licensing competition was eventually judged unconstitutional, and therefore cancelled – but the SYRIZA government did not protest this decision. This acceptance challenges many of the theoretical accounts, which suggest that populists *by definition* bypass juridical decisions. Provocatively enough, as Chapter 4 showed, disillusioned supporters claimed that SYRIZA's failure was rooted in its co-optation by established values which turned the 'radical left party' into a liberal and mainstream formation that was unable to challenge the *status quo*.

The right-wing U.S. populist was indeed far less respectful to the institutions. As the *Washington Post* wrote, 'Trump is a systemic stress test' (Krauthammer 2017). Towards the end of his administration Trump alleged voter fraud, spreading mistrust of elections and further undermining democratic legitimacy in the U.S. His attacks on the courts and many other federal agencies overwhelmed and defied checks and balances. Many of his moves were essentially anti-liberal in terms of political values and orientation. However, many of his pre-electoral promises, such as to 'build the wall', were blocked by the Senate, while federal courts blocked Trump's travel ban. In the words of Lowndes (2021:118), 'the US presidency is an office that is both enormously powerful and enormously constrained'. This highlights that the impact populists (even of a quasi-authoritarian type, like Trump) may have on liberal institutions not straightforward as institutions may resist.

Over time, however, the Trump administration was able suborn institutions to the degree that they actually empowered him (Johnson 2020). Trump used the institutions as a vehicle to increase his hegemony. He politicised federal bureaucracy by installing loyalists (including established conservatives) who did not agree with the historic or intended missions of various agencies to key positions (Morgan 2019). The 'US Chamber of Commerce has undergone a massive expansion, moved far to the right, and become an increasingly integrated

part of the Republican Party network' (Pierson, 2017:110). In his four years in office, Trump appointed more than 200 judges to the federal bench (more than number Obama appointed in eight years). He also appointed 54 appellate-level federal judges (just one less than the number Obama appointed in eight years) (Gramlich 2021). This has resulted in flipping the balance in favour of the right. However, this does not mean that Trump managed to completely destroy the institutions in the end. Ironically, he acted within the broad powers provided to him to staff the executive – and judiciary (both with the role of the obedient GOP in the Senate). In this sense, the Trump was empowered by the institutions (Johnson 2020).

Drawing from the empirical analysis of SYRIZA and Donald Trump, one observes that the relationship between populism and the institutions of representation is not linear, but far more complex. On the left of the spectrum, SYRIZA did *not* pose an illiberal threat to the institutions (even if liberal partisans argued it did).[81] On the contrary, it played by the book and when the constitution limited the government, it abided by the rules. On the right of the spectrum, the far more aggressive Trump inflicted damage upon the liberal representative system of American democracy. However, Donald Trump often operated within the very institutional framework by taking advantage of the power it offered to him. In this sense, it was the institutions that allowed Trump the space to produce illiberal policies.

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[81] Although SYRIZA has been casually framed as illiberal or a threat to representative institutions by mainstream newspapers/journals such as *The Financial Times*, as well as by scholars who are sceptical about populism, such as Pappas, Mudde and Chryssogelos, one needs to apply a comparative perspective and study many of the actions of New Democracy – nominally defined as a liberal party – that assumed power after defeating SYRIZA in the summer of 2019. New Democracy deployed police forces to arrest 'illegal migrants' in the streets of Athens in its very first weeks in office. It arrested minors for watching 'The Joker' in cinemas around the country. Due to contentious mobilisation by migrants trying to cross to Greece through its northern border the New Democracy government deployed the army which fired upon unarmed citizens and closed its borders with Turkey (an action which goes against European accords about freedom of movement and it often attributed to the illiberal populist Orbán and other Visegrád authoritarians), while it also suspended the asylum application process as a response. It is also worth examining the question of 'freedoms and rights' in light of the coronavirus pandemic. Governments that are generally considered liberal (and even anti-populist) have imposed restrictions on rights and freedoms that are considered 'core' to liberalism. This is not to judge whether restrictions on movement and extra-constitutional decrees were necessary or not, but rather to point-out that such actions (necessary or not) contradict fundamental liberal rights (Galanopoulos and Venizelos 2021).

Populism is not necessarily an enemy of representation. Laclau (2005) argues that populism is a form of representation *par excellence*. Drawing from the constructivist conceptual armature, representation is not understood as the reflection of already existing interests and identities but rather as 'a performative act that brings into being what it purports to represent (Thomassen, 2019:3). In this sense, Tormey (2021) argues that populism fully embraces fully the logic of representation in a way that other political discourses reject. For instance, although liberal democracy advocates *for* representation, its hybrid variants evident in the technocratic era often exclude citizens from political participation, transforming itself to elitist version of democracy. On the contrary, populism claims to represent the unrepresented bringing voice to 'the people' and restoring popular sovereignty suppressed by self-indulged elites. The evident tension between populism and the representative system (*friends or foes?*) redirects us back to the discussion about post-democracy. As Biglieri & Perelló, (2019:331) put it, 'democracy without populism would become a pure institutional procedure, such an elitist form of government would eventually meet its own destruction through populism'.

Nevertheless, Moffitt (2016:96) argues that populism is never just a 'direct' or 'unmediated' phenomenon that occurs only between the populist leadership and 'the people'. Rather, 'populist representations rely on a complex process of mediated claim-making' which involves 'leaders, audiences, constituencies and media'. Contemporary populists use multiple vehicles that are strictly defined as means of mediation in order to diffuse their message (Venizelos 2020); thus, framing populism as an unmediated process, however defined, causes terminological vagueness (Moffitt, 2016:100-104). Despite the productive relationship between populism and representation highlighted above, populism remains a model of representation, as opposed to one of direct participation, as it professes to be. Most commonly, although not exclusively, populism limits itself to 'representing the people', rather than actually

stepping down in order to allow them to take power in their own hands. This was the case in both Greece and the United States.

7.4.2. On the alleged homogeneity of 'the people'

A second major liberal concern that will be addressed drawing on the empirical analysis of the Greek and American case, is the allegedly anti-pluralist nature of populism. In their seminal edited volume, Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser (2012:17) argued that, 'as an essentially monist ideology that believes in the existence of a ''general will of the people'', populism is hostile towards pluralism and the protection of minorities'. This definition of populism as the exact opposite of pluralism (and therefore of democracy), is more often the starting point for any discussion about populism (Stavrakakis and Jäger 2017). Müller (2016:81), for example, argued that populism 'fundamentally rejects the notions of pluralism' while Worsley (1969) maintained that populism 'dislikes factionalism'. Liberal democratic theory maintains that populism contradicts (liberal) democracy's fundamental position in that it rejects the expression of multiple voices and – through its dualistic antagonism pitting 'the people' against 'the elites' – it also rejects the basic segmentation of society (Chryssogelos, 2018:91). In Pappas' (2015) words, populism 'fail(s) to abide by the three most fundamental principles of political liberalism, namely, the acknowledgement of multiple divisions in society; the need to try reconciling such divisions via negotiated agreements and political moderation; and the commitment to the rule of law and the protection of all minority rights'. These concerns are echoed in the core assumptions of the highly influential and wide-spread 'ideational camp' which maintains that populists view 'the people' as a homogenous entity (see Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). Müller (2016:3) for example, argued that 'populists do not claim ''we are the 99%''. What they imply instead is ''We are the 100%''.

As illustrated throughout this study, such arguments are not substantiated neither at the theoretical nor at the empirical level. Laclau and Mouffe, whose claim that collective identity rests on 'the unity of the people' has been heavily criticised, stress that it is because of the very fragmentation of society that a *relative* stability is needed in order for the collective subject to emerge (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985; Laclau, 1990; see also Thomassen, 2019a). The idea of the single, homogenous, authentic people is a fantasy, Müller, (2016:3) argues. But it is precisely because the subject-as-a-whole is a fantasy that multiple identifications emerge out of its partial filling. The void of power does not suggest permanent inactivity but dynamics of temporal fixation that gives rise to the body politic.[82]

Zooming into the cases of SYRIZA and Trump, the picture seems to contradict the above-mentioned normative accounts. On the left of the spectrum, SYRIZA's long chain of equivalence not only stands in contrast, but it shows how egalitarian politics fits well with populism. Even more strikingly, Chapter 3 showed that the inclusion of 'refugees' and 'migrants' in the party's definition of 'the people' was a consistent component both its campaigning and governmental discourse.[83] Thus, '[a]lthough populism is [often] presented as incompatible with pluralism, the truth is that left-wing populism, in general, advocates for plurality and diversity in society, as the left has usually done' (Agustín, 2020:11).

The empirical analysis presented in Chapters 5 and 6 suggests that even in Donald Trump's nativist and exclusionary discourse (see Mudde, 2018), 'the people' were not presented as a monolithic bloc. His 'paradoxical alliance' brought together 'rich' and 'poor',

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[82] This process of unity is not exclusive to populism. 'Working class' identity, 'the Greek' and 'American' people, even 'democratic citizens' (who are united against the danger of populism, for example) are, as all collective identities, products of temporal unification which covers over the heterogeneity of the social (impossibility of fullness; see Chapter 1).

[83] Of course, SYRIZA is not the sole case of pluralistic populism. An avalanche of left populist parties which inclusionary characteristics are available to us. See for example, Podemos in Spain, the Jeremy Corbyn leadership in the UK, as well as the head of the plurinational State of Bolivia, Evo Morales and the Democratic nominee Bernie Sanders (see Katsambekis & Kioupkiolis, 2019).

the evangelical Christian right and their pro-life movement with libertarians and sectors holding anti-establishment sentiments and – in some cases – members and segments of the Latino, Black and Muslim populations. This suggest that even the 'Trumpian' collective subject was heterogeneous despite its predominantly white, male, and nativist character. One needs not to forget the foundations of American society, which is theoretically built on 'diversity' (*e pluribus unum*). Thus, although in mainstream nationalist discourses one observes a demarcation between 'Americans' and 'others', the former are (supposedly) constructed as already pluralistic (as they are consisted of descendants of immigrants who came from Europe in the previous centuries, black people who are not slaves anymore, hardworking immigrants who 'enter the country legally' etc.).

In this respect, the existence of groups such as 'Latinos for Trump' or 'Black Voices for Trump' is not strange.[84] Interviews with first- and second-generation migrants, and enthusiastic Trump supporters, (extracts from which were cited in Chapters 5 and 6) further prove this point, while at the same time highlight the complex nature of political identification.[85] Despite having arrived from regions verbally attacked by Trump (e.g. 'Muslim-majority' and 'Latin American' countries),[86] these interviewees did not see any paradox or contradiction in supporting Trump. Such 'contradictions' extended beyond 'race' and touched upon 'sex and gender'. Gay interviewees not only saw no contradiction in

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[84] Of course, these groups/constituencies were not a majority in Trump's collective subject. It is acknowledged that the role they played in electing and supporting Trump is not equal to that of the Christian right, nativist right and the free marketeers, for instance.

[85] This is not to suggest that Trump's racist discourse did not pose a problem for the majority of immigrants and ethnic minorities. The aim is rather to highlight this 'paradox' in a fashion that contributes to this research by showcasing the complex nature underlying political identification.

[86] In this respect, it is also interesting to examine the psychoanalytic notion referred to as 'identification with the aggressor'. Socially excluded subjects, social groups who are often attacked both institutionally and physically by hegemonic policies or extremist groups may often internalize this aggression and turn it back. This is often the case when subjects excluded due to their 'identity' attempt to 'erase' their identity in order to be accepted in the mainstream identity of the society they are 'hosted' (cf. Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973).

supporting Trump but they perceived Democrats' 'atheist' tendency as corrosive of American values.

Political identification cannot be reduced to the alignment of interests. Reason is secondary in collective identification processes. What is often neglected from socio-political analysis is the performative function of conflicting sides in their hegemonic struggle for 'common sense'. As Chapter 6 highlighted, Trump supporters who participated in this research did not think that their leader was racist, authoritarian and anti-pluralist. Müller (2016:3) argues that 'democracy requires pluralism and the recognition that we need to find fair terms of living together as free, equal but also irreducibly diverse citizens'. But as Chapters 5 and 6 showed this was also the perception of Trumpian voters. In their (subversive) understanding 'freedom' (to offend), 'equality' (or dominance?) and 'democracy' were taken away by the political elites and their leader was committed to restoring them.

7.4.3. Polarisation and anti-populism

A third issue seen as corrosive for democracy that liberal accounts put forward, is the antagonistic nature of populism which rests on an allegedly moralistic understanding of social and political affairs. Most mainstream perspectives reproduce Mudde's view that populism is essentially Manichean, since it frames social conflict as a struggle between 'good' and 'evil' ('the pure people' and the 'corrupt elite'), in which there are only 'friends and foes' (2004:544).[87] Our empirical analysis confirms that both SYRIZA and Donald Trump performed endured antagonism against 'the political elites'. Chapters 3 and 5 showed, as contenders for power SYRIZA and Trump, re-politicised their inert political societies on the basis of populist polarisation. But even in government, polarisation constituted the norm rather

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[87] This definition's framing of the people as 'pure' (and homogeneous) has been heavily criticised for its affinities with the notion of nationalism (Ostiguy 2017). This issue has been addressed elsewhere in this study.

than the exception in their respective political repertoires (see Chapters 4 and 6). Both populists employed tropes that dichotomised the socio-political space, posing political dilemmas for the future of their countries. SYRIZA claimed that its either it or 'the return to medieval times', 'progress' or 'stagnation'; Donald Trump warned that 'crazy radical left Democrats' will continue to corrupt American values. In the case of Donald Trump, especially, one observes a paradigmatic case of a *campaigner in government*. Having held 134 rallies while in office, Donald Trump governed as if he was in opposition through permanent campaigning.[88]

Conventionally, 'polarisation' –often defined as the opposite of convergence (Sani and Sartori 1983) – is associated with democratic backsliding (Valenzuela 1978; Hawkins et al. 2019).[89] Contemporary democratic theory however, argues that political conflict may instead lie at the core of democratic politics (Rancière 1999b; Mouffe 2000, 2005b; Schmitt 2007).[90] 'Bottom-up' contentious politics – challenging their elites – enhance participation (Della Porta, 2013; 2015). Thus, building on such a perspective, it is argued that it is those who view the-perfect-society-to-come as 'harmonious' and without *disagreement* that entertain the possibilities of an undemocratic society.

Populist rupture cannot be studied out of context. Populist antagonism should be examined in relation to the *absence of political contestation* manifested by the convergence in the political centre in the three preceding post-democratic decades (Crouch 2004; Ali 2018). In this sense populism is understood 'the return of the political' (Mouffe 2005b) in post-political times and populist affects are understood against the background of 'affective soberness'

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[88] It needs to be stressed though that constant campaigning is not necessarily a feature restricted to populism and Trump. From Bill Clinton onwards, scholars observed that presidents sought to keep their public opinion ratings high. Thus they constantly campaigned. Frequent travels, public speeches, press conferences on small issues, political advertisements, and constant polling were some of their tactics (Lowndes 2021).

[89] Interestingly enough *'The ideational Approach to Populism'* handbook is dedicated, as its first pages reveal, 'to those who strive for democracy and resist polarization' (Hawkins et al. 2019).

[90] In Chantal Mouffe's (2000; 2005) account, the 'other', is not an enemy to be to be destroyed or eliminated but an adversary whose ideas are to be fought but right to defend those ideas will never be put into question.

embedded in managerial politics (Gebhardt 2019). For these reasons, Trump's supporters appeared fascinated their leader's transgressive style – as Chapters 5 and 6 showed, they found it 'entertaining' and 'fresh' against the 'boring' politics-as-usual. Similarly, by antagonising 'technocrats' and 'established politicians', SYRIZA was perceived to be revitalising Greek politics and offering its own vision of democratic accountability (see Chapters 3 and 4).

This relationality is crucial. Populist polarisation should be examined in terms of its dynamic – *interactive* – relationship with anti-populist polarisation. As Stavrakakis & Katsambekis (2019:3) put it, 'it is never only one political force that is engaged in the aforementioned process. In fact, for every populist actor asserting its presence, there are other anti-populist actors antagonising it'. As the empirical analysis highlighted, in both Greece and the US, SYRIZA and Donald Trump, became subjects to anti-populist attacks framing them as ignorant, irresponsible, dangerous and so on. The Greek and European political elites campaigned to block the ascendance of SYRIZA to power in 2015 and sought to influence popular vote in favour of 'YES' in the referendum. The anti-populist camp 'warned' of potential consequences of supporting SYRIZA, Politicians and journalists maintained that 'Greece will turn into Venezuela' or will be 'kicked out of the EU' (Boukala and Dimitrakopoulou 2017). As Chapters 3 and 4 demonstrated, both SYRIZA and 'the people' perceived these actions as attacks on the 'popular will'. A similar discursive struggle was also visible in the US. As Chapters 5 and 6 showed, while on the one hand, 'the Trumpian side' exemplified its hatred for the political elites, on the other hand, those perceived to be part of the elite, such as Hillary Clinton, referred to many Trump supporters as ignorant masses and deplorable. Pundits warned Americans about the 'evil' Trump and the harm he could cause, not only to their country but the whole global order. Evidently, moralistic polarisation is not a quality that is intrinsic to populism alone, but also anti-populism (Stavrakakis and Jäger 2017). Even Richard Hofstadter, the predominantly anti-populist historian, warned that '[i]f populist

rhetoric, cited in isolation, sounds melodramatic, it is important to remember that an equally inflammatory rhetoric prevailed on the other side, in which the populists were portrayed as being at best deluded bumpkins and at worst primitives, demagogues, anarchists, and socialists' (Hofstadter 1969:19). Neglecting such a dynamic and relationally constructed relationship between populism and anti-populism, has profound scientific and political implications. In overemphasising the impact populism has on (liberal) democracy, the role of technocratic and elitist politics is downplayed (Bertsou and Caramani 2020; De Cleen et al. 2021).

In concluding this section, it is evident that the relationship between populism in government and democracy is ambivalent and complex. The empirical findings emerged from the study of Donald Trump and SYRIZA seem not to fully confirm the central, liberal-democratic, concerns viewing populism *per se* as the main threat to modern democracy. The picture is rather far more complex. The distinct typologies of populism represented in the case of SYRIZA and Trump, articulating socio-political imaginaries ranging from egalitarian to authoritarian socio-political imaginaries, have distinct effects on democracy. Populism is (by definition) nether democratic nor anti-democratic. Although often denied, populism is certainly compatible with democracy (Worsley 1969). Furthermore, 'populism' does not suffice to explain the impact a given actor has on democracy in that its *ideology* plays a significant role in this (De Cleen et al. 2021; Galanopoulos and Venizelos 2021).

7.5. Conclusion

This chapter has brought into comparative perspective the results emerging from the empirical analysis of populist SYRIZA and Donald Trump's transitions from the opposition to power. Section 7.1. focused on populist performativity, specifically upon the ways SYRIZA and Donald Trump articulated their messages both in terms of 'rhetoric' and 'style'. Against a background of scholarly accounts maintaining that populism 'fades out' or 'moderates' once in power, populism *continued* to be the main register of communication for both SYRIZA and

Donald Trump. This does not mean, however, that their populism remained unchanged. As demonstrated, populist narrative was reinvented in multiple ways. First, their populist discourse was subject to degrees of moderation/intensification depending on time and space – that is, the political ecosystem, but also the arena in which populist actors performed. Second, in both cases, populist tropes were co-articulated with non-populist frames (e.g. leftist/nativist, and sometimes anti-populist) which often prevailed). Both SYRIZA and Trump lengthened and shortened their equivalential chains, sustaining their populist discourse as required.

The fact that both actors shared a populist core in their performative repertoire does not mean that they were mirror images of one another. Rather, they demonstrated fundamental philosophical differences. The deconstruction of political discourse in the two ideologically antithetical cases, highlights fundamental differences in terms of the socio-political imaginary to which they subscribe, the issues they identify, and the solutions and propose.

Similarly, as section 7.2 demonstrated, the emotions that each populist generated varied, ranging from joy to love and anger to hatred. Populist performativity however, is not a guarantee for successful and sustained identifications between 'the people' and their populist leaders. Identification followed distinct trajectories in the two cases. SYRIZA's capitulation to the demands of the troika functioned as a critical juncture in terms of 'the people's' affective attachment towards it. Joy, pride, enthusiasm turned into disappointment, disillusionment and sorrow after SYRIZA's retreat from its anti-neoliberal commitment.

This was not the case with Trump though. Although the American populist accomplished little in terms of policy and promises, sectors of his grassroots supporters remained loyal until the end and even amplified their euphoric affective attachment to him. Despite the fact that both populists in government lost the elections to their competitors, they

received significant support from the electorate. Yet, as it was argued throughout this study, numbers do not suffice to explain emotional identification.

The analysis of discourse and affect in the case of left and right populists in government challenges normatively loaded theorisations which collapse an avalanche of typologically diverse phenomena under the rubric of populism – framing them axiomatically, and with obscure criteria, as a threat to democracy. Most often than not, populism is defined as irrational and overly emotional; as a monist and homogenising ideology; a threat to pluralism, representation and democracy. But, as section 7.3 maintained, the relationship between populism and democracy is far more complex. Put simply, Donald Trump's nativist and regressive traits presented more of a threat to democracy than SYRIZA's egalitarian agenda. Thus, in order to explain the implications of populism in power on democracy, one needs to go beyond populism and focus on the *ideology* that accompanies it. Populism alone does not suffice to explain anything beyond the construction of collective identifications. Anti-populist forces and policies also play a role in creating an environment in which populism can gain traction. In the case of Trump, institutions repeatedly blocked, as well sometimes empowered, Trump's authoritarian impulses, agenda, and policies.

Conclusion

If years ago the notion of populism was framed as a 'scandal' (Stavrakakis 2017), 'a moment' (Mouffe 2018), or 'a spectre haunting world-politics' (Ionescu and Gellner 1969), today it is well situated in public, political, and scientific discussions. Populist actors no longer constitute parochial and rare instances mostly confined to the opposition of the political mainstream. They are increasingly becoming key players in political systems around the globe. Even more, left-wing and right-wing populists, such as SYRIZA in Greece and Donald Trump in the US, have assumed control of government. This development has understandably raised concerns as to what happens once populists move from the opposition to power. This research sought to address this research gap by drawing upon the literatures of populism, post-foundational discourse theory, emotions, and social movements and driven by the motivation to bring into dialogue theoretical and conceptual insights and as well as direct empirical research

I. Overview

As argued extensively in Chapter 1, dominant perspectives in populism studies perceive populism's relationships with the institutions of government as paradoxical and uneasy. Scholarly accounts have indeed produced a number of hypotheses regarding populists' transition from opposition to power. Respectively, one can identify two overarching approaches that are evident in the literature on populism. Focusing on 'outcomes', a substantial part of the scholarship maintains that populists *cannot* remain populist when entering government: they either turn mainstream and disappear (see Canovan, 1999; Mény & Surel, 2002; McGann & Kitschelt, 2005; Akkerman & de Lange, 2012; Mudde, 2017) or turn into an authoritarian threat to the representative system (see Urbinati, 1998; Müller, 2016; Pappas,

2019). Focusing, on 'policy', another part of the scholarship maintains that populists can indeed remain populist in government, with the implication being that then all becomes a question of determining whether they have 'succeeded' or 'failed' in implementing their distinct policy (see Canovan, 1999; Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2015; Bartha et al., 2020). This study has argued that populism is defined by neither the type nor the quality of the policies it puts forward, nor by its capacity to implement them. Nor can it be defined by the impact it has on democratic institutions. When framed as intrinsic to populism, such associations become normalised and eventually distract one from the analytical core of the concept shifting attention from the *form* of populism to its *contents* and *outcomes*, which may be rooted in the axiomatically pejorative content that most discussions about populism have.

This research built on the assumption that populism is neither an *ideology* with inherent contents prescribing specific policies, nor a *type of regime* with specific outcomes. It should not be understood 'as the goal of politics but as the way in which political meanings are made, constituted and grounded' (Palonen, 2020:56). Thus, its trajectory in power cannot be predetermined. Advancing an Essex School-inspired perspective, this research focused on populism's performative function to 'construct what it purports to represent', that is 'the people' (Thomassen, 2019:3; see also Ostiguy et al., 2021). The transformations populism undergoes once it moves to power are thus to be found in the way populist actors articulate 'the people' as being locked in an antagonistic relationship to the 'elite', forging affective libidinal energies and bonds between masses and 'leaders'.

Aiming to explore how and in what ways populists change once in power, this study focused on two paradigmatic cases of populism in contemporary times, SYRIZA in Greece and Donald Trump in the US. This research thus contributes to the scant, though growing cross-regional and cross-ideological comparative literature on populism (see Mouzelis, 1986; Huber & Schimpf, 2017; Ivaldi et al., 2017; Padoan, 2021). As Chapter 2 outlines, despite their

profound differences with respect to ideology, organisation and national-institutional framework, SYRIZA and Donald Trump achieved power against experts' predictions. Being part of long and rich histories of episodically reactivated populisms in the two countries (see Lyrintzis, 1987; Kazin, 1995 among others), their administrations survived for full terms in office, challenging normative expectations that see populism failing in power. Against the backdrop of proto-populist discontent, Tsipras and Trump's leaderships capitalised upon the leaderless movements and homeless albeit profound social unrest to provide representation to the unrepresented (Gerbaudo 2017; Grattan 2016; Katsambekis 2016; Mouffe 2018). Both Alexis Tsipras and Donald Trump's populist leaderships emerged within their non- or even anti-populist political parties. Neither SYRIZA's leftist fractions nor the GOP entertained the possibility of employing populism as a political strategy at the given conjunctures. Trump's case was perhaps more sharp as the candidate entered from the back door to take over the GOP. In other words, 'populists' within each party constituted one 'fraction' among the many. This asymmetry of internal organisational repertoires impeded political scientists from applying comparisons in the past. Yet, the variety of organisational structures only reinforces the argument that populism cannot be defined by a party's internal architecture (e.g. unmediated/direct, de-centralised/leader-centric party), but rather by the supply of people-centric and anti-elitist performativity.

Both Greek and American populists targeted their parties' traditional voters while simultaneously attracted voters who would have never voted the ideology that either SYRIZA or Trump advocated for. In this respect, Saward's (2010) distinction between 'constituencies' and 'audiences' can be useful to explain the function of populism to expand beyond its own constituencies. As clarified by Moffitt (2016:106), 'constituencies are those whom the representative claim to speak *for*, while audiences are those whom the representative addresses the claim *to'*. An audience is bigger than a constituency. Successful populist mobilisations

expand their appeal by framing their visions as universal common sense. The challenge is indeed to combine both successfully without leaving behind key characteristics.

This study relied on mixed-methods, including discourse analysis, visual content analysis, in-depth interviews, and ethnographic research. As the second part of Chapter 2 outlines, in order to grasp people-centrism and anti-elitism, this research considered 66 speeches delivered by Tsipras and Trump, 69 items of campaign data, ranging from posters and video spots to everyday Tweets, Facebook and Instagram posts. In order to grasp the affective side, this research drew on field research conducted in Greece (2018-2019) and the U.S. (2019-2020), including 56 interviews with activists, organisers and politicians, as well as ethnographic-style research enabled through participation in rallies and protests conducted in Greece and the U.S.

Chapter 3 focused on SYRIZA's discourse, as well as at the emotions embedded in the popular identification with the party during the period between 2012 – 2015, in which the party served as the main force of opposition in Greece. The analysis of the case of SYRIZA contradicts conventional theorisations, which stereotypically associate populism with anti-democratic and xenophobic politics. 'The people' were not framed as 'homogenous' or 'monist' (see Mudde, 2004; Müller, 2016) but rather heterogeneous and pluralistic (see also Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2014); even more so, 'the people' were not framed as 'pure' but rather as 'excluded', 'marginalised', 'exhausted'- and at the same time 'resisting'. This shows that 'the people' in SYRIZA's left populist discourse took the status of a *politically* rather than an *ethnically* subjugated subject. The party identified 'neoliberalism' and 'corruption' as the root cause for Greece's social malaise – proposing a progressive vision of democracy as a remedy. Similarly, the affective repertoires embedded in the peoples' collective passions were not founded on hatred and rage, as sceptics of 'political emotions' would suggest, but rather in

a sense of hope for democratic change bound by solidarity, which also includes 'the foreign other' in the collective 'we'.

Chapter 4 focused on SYRIZA in government. Against conventional wisdom and normative expectations, the populist party remained, to a relative degree, populist even in government. As the analysis showed, populism continued to be the main discursive repertoire for the SYRIZA government; however, this chapter also showed that its populism did not remain unchanged. Rather, it was articulated along with other non-populist frames, including 'patriotic articulations' and a re-emergent 'leftist narrative' that essentially revived the discursive antagonism between left and right. This found space with Greece's professed exit from the monitoring programs and a respective frame that professed Greece's 'exit from the memoranda'. A 'technocratic frame', which often contradicted SYRIZA's populism, also was part of SYRIZA's discourse in government.

The legacy of the SYRIZA-led government is marked by its rupture with and eventual capitulation to 'the European establishment'. The bitter defeat by 'the European establishment' stigmatised the party, which retreated from its principal promise to cancel austerity. SYRIZA fought to deliver social policy within a politically and economically restrictive framework. It offered free healthcare to two million uninsured people, free meals to school children and a minimum solidarity income for the poor, curtailed family home repossessions, and a restructuring of non-serviced loans (Douzinas 2017; Katsambekis 2019; Tambakaki 2019). While the SYRIZA government maintained its populist character, its capitulation functioned as a critical juncture in terms of the dynamics and potentials of passionate popular identification. The politics of passion that were evident in 2012 and the 2015 referendum eroded after the party's 'flip'.

On the other side of the Atlantic, Donald Trump maintained his own distinctive stylistic qualities. His transgressive figure flaunted the socio-political low (Ostiguy and Roberts 2016). By transgression, this study does not refer to Trump's racist, misogynist and authoritarian remarks in order to define his performativity in government as 'populist', but rather to the social markers embedded in Donald Trump's very identity – such as his unrefined vocabulary, ignorance of political matters, and his preference for fast food, among (many) other things, that Donald Trump communicated openly to the public. These characteristics of Trump's personality, which were extensively analysed in Chapters 5 and 6, with the use primary material collected in the forms of speeches, videos and social media content resonated more with 'the common citizen' than the characteristics of average politicians. As the analysis 'the peoples'' own affectual narratives showed, Donald Trump's attractiveness, both as a contender for power before the 2016 elections as well as a President of the United States later, relied, to a great degree, on this disruptive and 'uncommon' political style. Considering that populist characteristics seemed to be rooted into the very 'flesh and bones' of populist actors – who either strategically choose to amplify this quality of theirs for purposes of popularity or are just not very aware of it – one should wonder whether 'populist identity' can easily be abandoned once political actors move from the opposition to government.

Similar to the left-populist SYRIZA, the right-populist Donald Trump's discourse was articulated with a plethora of non-populist, ideological elements. As Chapter 5 showed, Donald Trump's campaign discourse involved, in addition to populism, profound degrees of protectionist, nativist, and traditionally conservative elements. These qualities, Chapter 6 illustrated, remained a stable part of Trump's narrative once he arrived in the White House. Yet, following the Black Lives Matter protests towards the end of his administration, one could observe the inclusion of increased anti-leftist elements resembling Nixon's vintage US anti-communism of the Cold War. In comparison to SYRIZA, Donald Trump's discourse

underwent fewer qualitative changes in terms of the frames it incorporated. However, his transgressive performativity remained stably on 'the low', compared to Tsipras' fluctuations.

In contrast to the case of SYRIZA, Trump maintained, despite a litany of profound contradictions, strong affective bonds with his base – and especially the grassroots and the radical right components of 'the people'. As Chapter 6 highlighted, groups such as the evangelical right maintained a strong identification with Donald Trump, despite his lifestyle, which betrays a paradoxical relationship with Christian ethics: he lived an extravagant life, he was married three times, he was unfaithful. Donald Trump was a rich urbanite who was supported by workers and farmers from the rustbelt and the 'heartland'. Despite a series of failures to deliver on policy, Trump supporters stormed in the Capitol in January 2021 to protest alleged electoral fraud leading to Biden's November 2020 victory. This 'paradox' is relevant to the relativising function that 'culture wars' had in subverting hegemonic norms (see Scatamburlo-D'Annibale, 2019) – thought to be imposed by the cosmopolitan liberal elites and so on. In this respect, Donald Trump's discourse in government had more counter-hegemonic dynamic than that of Tsipras'.

The comparative analysis developed in Chapter 7 highlights that, although SYRIZA and Donald Trump are commonly labelled populist, they embody their own distinct characteristics – both in terms of the ideologies that accompanied their populism as well as in terms of the very style of populism each performed. As the comparative analysis that unfolded in Chapter 7 highlighted, in the case of SYRIZA, one observes an open-ended chain of equivalence which maintained relationships of solidarity among the groups that constituted 'the people' which best resonates with Laclau & Mouffe's (2014 [1985]: 139,181) earlier theories on radical democracy; in the case of Trump, identification rested on a *deep vertical relationship* between leader and base which rests on the former's transgressive qualities (which resonates

best with Laclau's [2005:18] later theorisation of populism, which puts emphasis on the vertical/performative dimension of representation).

SYRIZA and Trump identified distinct issues as problems for 'the people' and articulated distinct visions in their name; they produced distinct meanings for democracy which had distinct effects on the institutions. On the one hand, Tsipras not only did not pose a threat to representative democracy but used its institutional channels to regulate 'the corrupt political establishment'. Due to his failure to collide with the 'system', Tsipras, who was previously labelled as a radical, he was criticised for being a moderate, a liberal, or a reformist actor in government. On the other hand, Trump overwhelmed checks and balances. However, his assault on the institutions was dulled by various branches and levels of government, such as the judiciary, but also from state governments, as well as resistance from within the federal bureaucracy. This highlights that even in cases of authoritarian variants of populism, in polities in which liberal democracy has not yet been corroded, institutions may prove much more resilient in their resistance to authoritarian populists (Norris 2019; Johnson 2020).

Despite having continued to employ their populist rhetorical canon, the two actors' ability to mobilise affectively their 'people' followed distinct trajectories. In the case of SYRIZA, the party's abandonment of its anti-neoliberal commitment heralded by a downward trajectory in terms of the strength and salience of popular identification with it. While the relatively high electoral results the party secured in the 2019 elections may not reflect the degree of *de*-identification, it is evident that the passion with which 'the people', and especially its radical left components, related to SYRIZA has weakened. This highlights that events and developments that are not controlled by populists. Its 'capitulation' to the demands of the troika, the (re)emergence of an appealing right-wing nationalism in light of the Macedonian question, etc. (see Chapter 4) – may affect the effectiveness of populist strategy, as persistent populist performativity does not suffice to enact affective investment (Venizelos 2021).

Despite having attempted to incorporate 'the underdog' in the social, political and economic sphere through inclusionary policy, the left party was not rewarded; its social measures turned out to be 'too little too late' (Venizelos and Stavrakakis 2020). Arguably this is related to the 'rationalistic', technocratic and managerial way that Tsipras' governing party communicated its perceived success against the background of its previously dominant affective populist style when still in opposition (see Chapter 4).

In the case of Trump, on the contrary, one encounters, perhaps, an opposing reality. Trump's achievements' records score low too. He failed to 'build the wall' – his flagship campaigning promise. His policy proposals were characterised as (ideologically) inconsistent (Norris and Inglehart 2019). His discourse was described as incoherent (Schneiker 2020). His handling of the COVID-19 outbreak which cost the lives of nearly half a million American citizens in his term was catastrophic.[91] Against this background, though, he maintained relatively high degrees of approval, even by traditional conservatives in the Republican Party who initially opposed his candidacy. Against a record of disastrous governance, grassroots supporters mobilised on the streets storming into the Capitol in January 2021, demonstrating high degrees of emancipated hatred and affective identification with Donald Trump.

II. Contributions, limitations and avenues to future research

What do these findings tell us? What contributions do they make to the literature and the broader public discussion on populism? The first contribution that this study made is that it adds to the proliferating, yet still thin, literature on populism in government. Until recently, literature considered populists in parliament, at local governing bodies, or minor partners in national governing coalitions to be 'populists in power'. This research examined populists governing at the *national level*, governing outright or leading coalitions.

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[91] This was the figure on inauguration day.

Second, conceptualising populism through the discursive-affective lens, enables one to move beyond the restrictive frameworks that determine populism's fate in government as a matter of 'success' or 'failure', 'mainstreaming' or 'turning authoritarian'. Rather, it views populism as a matter of degree (Aslanidis 2015; Caiani and Graziano 2019). Adopting such a 'flexible yet rigorous conceptual and theoretical apparatus' (Stavrakakis, 2013:28), this study showed that populist repertoires were intensified or weakened depending, first, on *space* – that is, the type of political arena in which they were articulated (formal or informal) – and, second, on *time* – based on contingent political developments and events that emerge – creating or even forcing discursive opportunities for various types of repertoire transformations.

However, is discursive 'framing' enough to secure populist hegemony? Theorised through the lens of affect (Glynos and Stavrakakis 2008; Cossarini and Vallespín 2019; Eklundh 2019), populism in power is not to be understood as the end point of this particular strategy aiming to capture the state. Rather, it is a starting point for new salient identifications between 'the people' and the populists, grounded on counter-hegemonic social and political narratives in the name of popular sovereignty. Populist hegemony requires constant reactivation of political passions and conflict over time. Political mobilisation and energisation of affects are key in maintaining, or even reinventing, the construction of a collective 'we', through antagonistic opposition to an illegitimate elite. By incorporating 'the politics of passion' into the analysis of populism in power, this research further contributed to the literature by reinforcing the link between mainstream populism studies and the overlooked theme of emotions.

Fourth, drawing upon its empirical findings, this research highlights that not all populisms are the same. Despite their commonly shared label as 'populists', Tsipras and Trump's distinct ideologies played a pivotal role in the impact they had on democratic institutions and society. As the extensive empirical analysis that unfolds in Chapters 3 – 6

demonstrated, their discourse, their definitions of 'the people' and 'the elite', their diagnosis of the social, political and economic issues that were at stake as well as the solutions they proposed were profoundly influenced by their ideology. In other words, the policies they pushed for, the visions they articulated and the affects they mobilised did not come from populism itself. Populist parties or politicians are never merely 'populist'; their ideological component should always be taken into account' (Galanopoulos & Venizelos, 2021:18). As such, the populist dimension of any given actor does not suffice to explain the type of politics they seek to implement. Conventional public wisdom buries under the rubric of 'populism' an avalanche of heterogeneous phenomena, ranging from progressive and democratic to xenophobic and grotesque projects (Stavrakakis 2017; Stavrakakis and Jäger 2017). The results of this study, highlighting the profound differences between left-wing and right-wing populists, suggest though that future research should distinguish the varieties and typologies of populism, rather than dismissing populism as a whole.

Decades of anti-populist theorisation have reduced populists to an anti-democratic threat to democracy, while questioning their very capacity to govern. By instead focusing on political actors' discourse – which is what affectively mobilises 'the people' and what prompts scientists to define political actors as populists after all – one can focus on the real content of their rhetoric and, consequently, the real social and political vision they have. This research's findings challenge conventional knowledge about populists in government. Importantly, they highlight the necessity to rethink not only the notion of populism itself, but also the way it is reproduced in academic, journalistic and expert discussions. Despite political scientists' persistent efforts to fix the meaning of populism through the so-called consensus over its operational definition, a normative remainder will always influence the way populism is talked *about*. As Bourdieu (1990:150) argued, the meanings of 'the people' 'popular' and 'populism' are foremost articulated in the struggle between intellectuals. Thus, 'the debate over the

meaning of populism turns out to be a debate about the interpretation of democracy' (Urbinati 1998: 116).

Anti-populism constitutes the point of departure for most current commentary and discourse about populism. As Peter C Baker (2019) put it, the way 'populism' is connoted resembles 'something from a horror film: an alien bacterium that has somehow slipped through democracy's defences – aided, perhaps, by Steve Bannon or some other wily agent of mass manipulation – and is now poisoning political life, creating new ranks of populist voters among us'. Discourse theorists have forcefully argued, 'we must also turn our attention towards how the term is used, by whom and why, and with what performative effects' (de Cleen, Glynos, and Mondon 2018: 3). As Stavrakakis (2017:4) argues, 'language is never innocent [...] it naturalises significations and reifies into supposedly neutral objectivity crystallizations of historically-dependent power relations'. The uncritical use and abuse of the notion of populism, and above all its pejorative framing, may only generate negative expectations with respect to populism in power. At the same time, it undermines the role anti-populist forces play in polarisation and overlooks the impact elitist politics have on democracy (Bertsou & Caramani, 2020; see also Chapter 7). Finally, it euphemistically disguises outright racist, chauvinist, xenophobic and even neo-fascist phenomena (Stavrakakis 2013). Understanding populism through the nexus of discourse, affect and performativity – as a particular political logic that constructs collective identities in the name of 'the people' and against 'the elite', empty of any essence and subject to socio-cultural characteristics and manifestations – offers a flexible method to study populism's ambiguous and multifaceted relationship with democracy and the impact distinct populist typologies may have on the institutions of representation when populists assume power. Considering these intricacies, future research should to adopt a reflexive perspective when reflecting on the political implications of populism, insulated from the normatively charged definitions that are uncritically reproduced in the public sphere.

While this research has proposed a renewed perspective for the analysis of populism in power through the lens of discourse and affect, it does not resolve its intrinsic contradictions. Obviously, as Stavrakakis (2020:5) put it, 'populist projects are not panaceas'. Although this research has argued *against* the so-called policy- and outcome-driven approaches, the different possibilities that they describe are not to be refuted. Like the majority of non- and anti-populist political actors, populists too may both succeed or fall short of their promises to implement fiscal and social policy, either progressive or conservative. Populists in government, like many other 'political families', may engage in corruption, intimidation of political adversaries and the media, and they may as well turn authoritarian. Populism in government is the name of contradiction as it occupies simultaneously two (conceptually) opposing poles (Ostiguy 2015) – the populist and the institutionalist (Laclau 1977). The event of assuming power may prove traumatic for populists who brand themselves as real anti-establishment forces. At the level of identification, hegemony will always necessarily fail – as hypostatising 'the people' is ultimately impossible, to begin with. The very terrain of impossibility and openness that enables the *dis*-articulation of previous hegemony and the re-articulation of new imaginaries remains the ultimate political horizon not only for oppositional but also governmental projects as well (Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Laclau 1990). Affective bonds may weaken and the loss of enthusiasm may undermine the populist project. At the same time, populist hegemonies will always be challenged by counter-hegemonic articulations contesting for the space of power.

These intricacies of populism point to its internal limitations. Now that populist politics seem to have captured the mainstream, and more populist governments are likely to follow around the globe, new questions emerge in the post-pandemic landscape. The example of Donald Trump raises the question whether the paradigm put forward by the former US president, and was backed by new conservatism and the alt-right internationally is an omen of the fascism of the 21st century (see Badiou, 2019; Traverso, 2019; Hermansson et al., 2020). If

the answer is positive, experts should be wary in framing the new resurgent right as 'populist'. Such a euphemism downgrades its potential dangers and legitimises them in the public sphere. At the same time, politicians should identify the drivers behind popular support for such movements and tackle questions of inequality and exclusion.

On the other side of the spectrum, the case of SYRIZA begs the question whether left populism can bring about societal change. What is the future of left politics and populism in the aftermath of the SYRIZA experience (Venizelos & Stavrakakis, *in press*)? How can populists enter effectively the path of institutionalisation without losing contact with their base? Can they build mechanisms and structures that could enable them to construct societal hegemonies needing not to rely solely on elections? Emergent studies have already started addressing several of these questions (see Mazzolini & Borriello, 2021; Prentoulis, 2021). Future explorations wishing to expand the research agenda of populism in government are required to extent their vision beyond the classical *loci* of 'populism studies' and political parties' literature, moving away from the constraining conceptualisation of populism as a strategy to capture power. Social movements literature may shed some light regarding populists processes of deepening societal linkages; while republican and constitutional thought that emerged from the privileged observatory of Latin America may enhance the understanding of the relationship between populism and institutions of governance (Carlés Aboy 2010; Rinesi 2015; Vergara 2020; Biglieri and Cadahia 2021).

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Appendices

Appendix A
Leaders' speeches, party manifestos, official announcements

Chapter 3

SYR.1. SYRIZA's central electoral rally, OMONOIA square (14/6/12), Source Type: Video, Origin https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ytB7z1zExYY&t=2s, accessed online 12/7/17

SYR.2. SYRIZA's central electoral rally, OMONOIA square (3/5/12), Source Type: Video, Origin https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=orU4t2yPgzg, accessed online 12/6/19

SYR.3. SYRIZA's electoral rally in Thessaloniki (20/1/15) Source Type: Video, Origin https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qaRx0vHcR3k, accessed online 12/6/19

SYR.4. Alexis Tsipras on SKY TV (21/5/14), Source Type: Video, Origin https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N-HEbY4Enoc, accessed online 19/8/19

SYR.5. Thessaloniki Programme (13/9/14), Source Type: Text, Origin https://www.syriza.gr/article/SYRIZA---THE-THESSALONIKI-PROGRAMME.html, accessed online 12/5/17

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SYR.9. SYRIZA's second congress (13/8/16), Source Type: Video, Origin https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iVWJYkTLl_g accessed online 18/11/20

SYR.10. SYRIZA's Programmatic Statements (8/2/15), Source Type: Video, Origin https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2wdQ_CFn_KI, accessed online 18/11/20

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SYR.13. Alexis Tsipras resigns (20/8/15), Source: YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PRsfIR04NQs, accessed online 9/9/20

SYR.14. Alexis Tsipras' interview at Greek EXPO (9/9/18), Source: YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QqUCGmj8hH0, (9/9/20)

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SYR.17. Nikos Pappas on media and corruption (20/4/16), Source: YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xFhZQfanZck, accessed online 18/11/20

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SYR.29. Yannis Dragasakis: forceful maturation (10/12/12), Source type: Text, origin: https://dragasakis.gr/sinentefxi-stin-efimerida-vima-den-theloume-kommata-mesa-sto-komma/, accessed online 4/1/21

Chapter 5

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TRUMP.3. Donald Trump's rally in Grand Rapids, Michigan (8/11/16), Source Type: Video, Origin, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LQdwG1xf5dg, accessed online 1/7/20

TRUMP.4. Donald Trump rally, Charleston, West Virginia (5/5/16), Source Type: Video, Origin, https://www.c-span.org/video/?409094-1/donald-trump-addresses-supporters-charleston-west-virginia, accessed online 1/7/20

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TRUMP.16 'I could shoot somebody and not lose voters (23/1/16), Source Type: Video, Origin https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iTACH1eVIaA, accessed online 5/7/20

TRUMP.17. 'I love women that faint when I speak', Trump rally in South Carolina (20/10/15), Source Type: Video, Origin, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ErwDx5xz5Q, accessed online 5/6/20

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TRUMP.18. Donald Trump's Inauguration Speech (20/1/17), Source Type: Video, Origin, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sRBsJNdK1t0, accessed 20/1/17

TRUMP.19. Donald Trump rally in New Jersey (28/1/20), Source Type: Video, Origin https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n4sd-uFLBeE, accessed online 28/1/20

TRUMP.20. 4th of July 2020 Address in Mount Rushmore (4/7/20), Source Type: Video, Origin, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z61WalX3m_k, accessed online (4/7/20)

TRUMP.21. 'How do you stop these people?' (29/5/19), Source Type: Video, Origin https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yMCkzCJHfcU, accessed online 11/8/20

 TRUMP.22. Donald Trump's statement amid George Floyd protests (1/6/20), Source Type: Text, Origin https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/statement-by-the-president-39/, accessed online 10/8/20

TRUMP.23. Trump Rally During Impeachment Vote (18/12/20), Source Type: Video, Origin https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wFZfSLiT-Zw, accessed online 21/8/20

TRUMP.24. Trump addresses Charlottesville clashes (14/8/17), Source Type: Video, Origin https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CMQWJDVg8PA, accessed online 10/8/20

TRUMP.25 Trump defends initial remarks on Charlottesville and blames both sides (15/8/17), Source Type: Text, Origin https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/15/us/politics/trump-press-conference-charlottesville.html, accessed online 10/8/20

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TRUMP.28. 2020 State of the Union speech (5/2/20), Source Type: Video, Origin https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zNECVmfJtxc, 5/2/20

TRUMP.29. Trump's remarks to the Venezuelan-American Community (18/2/19), Source Type: Text, Origin https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-venezuelan-american-community/, accessed online 20/8/20

TRUMP.30. Trump calls Warren 'Pocahontas' in front of Navajo veterans (28/12/19). Source Type: Video, Origin https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PDsvW0kxsco, accessed online 20/8/20

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TRUMP.37. 'Trump vs. Nancy Pelosi: the most epic clashes of all time' (29/5/20), Source Type: Video, Origin https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sqhvcrOPOXE,

Appendix B
Posters, campaign spots, stickers and social media content

Chapter 3

VM.1. Either Us or Them – Syriza poster [Ή Εμείς ή Αυτοί – Αφίσα Σύριζα], Poster, https://www.syriza.gr/article/id/45305/h-emeis-h-aytoi----------mazi-mporoyme-na-toys-anatrepsoyme.html accessed online 16/7/18

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VM.13 European election poster [Fridge], Poster, https://www.syriza.gr/article/id/55877/TO-PSYGEIO-MAS-ADEIASE.html, accessed online 16/7/18

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VM.16 European election poster [Produce], Poster, https://www.syriza.gr/article/id/55876/H-PARAGWGH-MAS-SAPISE.html, accessed online 16/7/18

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VM.39. SYRIZA's electoral spot about the media (11/9/15), Source: YouTube, , accessed online https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GbXLDKoUcBE, 24/11/20

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VM.44. '#WheresHillary? Sleeping!!!!' (20/8/16) Source: Twitter, https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/766791143291916288, accessed online 15/9/20

VM.45. Clinton Russia (27/7/16) Source: Twitter, https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/758335147183788032, accessed online 15/9/20

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VM.50. Donald Trump eating McDonalds (27/5/16), Source: Instagram, https://www.instagram.com/p/BF4raEHmhag/?hl=en, accessed online 8/8/20

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VM.57. 'LIBERATE MICHIGAN!', (17/3/20), Source: Twitter, https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/125116921753105130, accessed online 21/8/20

VM.58. 'Liberate Minnesota' (17/3/20), Source: Twitter, https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/125116899406694003, accessed online 21/8/20

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VM.60. 'In reality they are not after me, they are after you'(18/12/19), Source: Twitter, https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1207508280207011841/photo/1, accessed online 18/12/19.

VM.61. 'Sleepy Joe' (27/4/20), Source: Email sent by the Trump 2020 campaigning team to its mailing list, accessed online 27/4/20

VM.62 'Law & Order!' (9/6/20), Source: Instagram, https://www.instagram.com/p/CBMvoQvhD0h/, accessed online 9/6/20

VM.63. ''My button is bigger than yours'' (3/1/18), Source: Twitter, https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/948355557022420992?lang=en, accessed online 10/8/20

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VM.65. Nancy Pelosi (5/2/20), Source: Instagram, https://www.instagram.com/p/B8McOoMBVho/, 5/2/20

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VM.67. Trump as Rocky Balboa (27/11/19), Source: Twitter, https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1199718185865535490?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1199718185865535490%7Ctwgr%5E&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.inquirer.com%2Fpolitics%2Fdonald-trump-rocky-tweet-20191127.html, accessed online 10/12/10

VM.68. Victims of Socialism (22/10/19) Source: Video/Facebook, https://www.facebook.com/GOP/videos/1308725712639882, accessed online 20/8/20

Appendix C

Interviews with governmental officials, party representatives and activists

Greece

GR1. Giorgos Archontopoulos, Leading organizer in the struggle against the privatization of worker, ran for MP with SYRIZA, Thessaloniki, October 2018

GR.2 Eleftheria Farantaki, Worker at the Greek Public Broadcaster ERT, Thessaloniki, October 2018

GR.3. Giorgos Tsirigotis, Activist with ''Save Skouries/SOS Halkidiki'', Halkidiki, October 2018

GR.4. Nikos Nikisianis, Anti-racist movement, Thessaloniki, October 2018

GR.5 Nikolas S. 'Save Skouries/SOS Halkidiki', Halkidiki, November 2018

GR.6. Alexis Benos, leading activist in the healthcare struggle/solidarity networks, ex=member of SYRIZA's central committee, Thessaloniki, November 2018

GR.7. Makis A, VIOME, Thessaloniki, November 2018

GR.8. Christos Avraamides, Social Movements Activist, Thessaloniki, November 2018

GR.9. Alexandros Litsardakis, Social Movements Activist, Thessaloniki, December 2018

GR.10. Chrysavgi, Solidarity Networks – Food struggle, Athens, December 2018

GR.11. Olga Lafazani, leading organizer in Migrants Struggle, Athens, January 2019

GR.12. Kalliopi Stamatopoulou, 'Solidarity 4 All' network, Athens, February 2019

GR.13. Giorgos, LGBTQI community activist, Athens, March 2019

GR.14. Christos Laskos, ex-member of SYRIZA's central committee, Thessaloniki, December 2018

GR.15. Demosthenis Papadatos, ex-member of SYRIZA's central committee, Thessaloniki, December 2018

GR.16. Katia, Ex-SYRIZA militant, Thessaloniki, December 2018

GR.17. Iasonas Bantios, Ex-SYRIZA militant, ran for regional elections, journalist, Thessaloniki, December 2018

GR.18. Thanos Bousis, Secretary of SYRIZA's youth branch in Thessaloniki, December 2018

GR.19. Demetra Thoma, SYRIZA organizer, ran for various positions in the regional level, Thessaloniki, December 2018

GR.20. Anonymous, Median government member, March 2019

GR.21. Nasos Ilioupoulos, Deputy Minister of Labour (2019), Athens, March 2019

GR.22. Katerina Notopoulou, Deputy Minister of the Macedonia – Thrace region, Thessaloniki, October 2018

GR.23. Lefteris Kretsos Deputy Minister of Digital Policy, Telecommunications and Information, Athens, March 2019

GR.24. Aggelos Tsekeris, Avgi's editor and former Head of the Prime Minister's Press Office and former Head of the Strategic Planning Office, March 2019

GR.25. Kostas Zouraris, Independent MP, initially worked closely with ANEL and at a later stage with SYRIZA, Athens, March 2019

GR.26. Hara Kouki, Social Scientist, Athens, October 2018

GR.27. Aggelos Evangelinides, Social Scientist, Athens, October 2018

United States

US.1. Rocco Lucente, 'Ithaca for Trump 2020', Ithaca, New York, January 2020

US.2. Mike Sigler, Republican Legistlator, Tompkins County, Ithaca, New York, January 2020

US.3. Austin Cochran, Cornell University 'College Republicans', Ithaca, New York, January 2020

US.4. Benjamin S., Cornell University 'College Republicans', Ithaca, New York, January 2020

US.5. Mark Ricetti Jr., Director of Operations, Luzerne County Historical Society, Wilkes-Barre, Luzerne County, Pennsylvania, January 2020

US.6. Isaah, local radio host, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, January 2020

US.7. Shelby A., King's College student, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, January 2020

US.8. Ethan N., King's College student, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, January 2020

US.9. Kevin, King's College student, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, January 2020

US.10. Anonymous, King's College student, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, January 2020

US.11. Anonymous, candidate for the House of Representatives, 12 District, Lackawanna County, Republican Party of Pennsylvania, Scranton Pennsylvania, January 2020

US.12. 'Veteran', candidate for the House of Representatives, 12 District, Lackawanna County, Republican Party of Pennsylvania, Scranton, January 2020

US.13. Anonymous, Lackawanna County, Republican Party of Pennsylvania, Scranton, February 2020

US.14. Anonymous, Lackawanna County, Republican Party of Pennsylvania, Scranton, February 2020

US.15. Anonymous, Lackawanna County, Republican Party of Pennsylvania, Scranton, February 2020

US.16. 'Argentine woman', Lackawanna County, Republican Party of Pennsylvania, Scranton, February 2020

US.17. 'Hardworking American', Lackawanna County, Republican Party of Pennsylvania, Scranton, February 2020

US.18. Anonymous, 'Republicans United' activist, Phoenix, Arizona, February 2020

US.19. Anonymous, 'Republicans United' activist, Phoenix, Arizona, February 2020

US.20. 'PJ', Veteran, Student, Phoenix, Arizona, February 2020

US.21. Osama Alani, 'Turning Point', 'Students for Trump' activist, Phoenix, Arizona, February 2020

US.22. Noble C. Hathaway, President of the Arizona State Rifle & Pistol Association, Arizona, February 2020

US.23 Melanie S. 'Trump 2020' Field Officer, Cincinnati Ohio, March 2020

US.24. Anonymous, 'Evangelicals for Trump', Cincinnati Ohio, March 2020

US.25 Anonymous, 'Evangelicals for Trump', Cincinnati Ohio, March 2020

US.26 Pastor Franz Gerber, Evangelical Pastor, Praise Chapel Community, Crandon Wisconsin, January 2020

US.27. Deidre Cooper, Texas Alliance for Life, Austin Texas, January 2020

US.28. Mary Lowery, Tea Party, local organizer, Kansas, January 2020

US.29. D. University professor, New York City, January 2020

Appendix D
Fieldwork Notes gathered during real-time participatory involvement in political rallies, gatherings and protests of political parties and social movements.

Greece

F.GR1. Alexis Tsipras rally around the naming-dispute deal with neighbouring formerly FYROM. Attended in Thessaloniki, December 2018

F.GR2. Public event on history society and politics: 'Historical junctures: Thessaloniki from 1912 until 1944''. A discussion that offered an alternative reading of the fundamentals of the history of Thessaloniki and Greece [https://www.amna.gr/macedonia/article/305673/Ekdilosi-apo-to-YMATh-Tomes-stin-istoria--I-Thessaloniki-apo-to-1912-sto-1944?fbclid=IwAR1TWOKsPqVcdOF8ErhbBlcwKz0BYNhJYALlZ_Tk5o18gc3959R-K2cfybE], Thessaloniki, December 2018

F.GR3. Public event with music and theatre performance: 'A night at the ministry'. A cultural event that offered a counter-hegemonic interpretation of the history of Thessaloniki through music and theatrical performance [https://www.ert.gr/ert3/mia-vradia-sto-dioikitirio-tha-systisei-stoys-thessalonikeis-to-ktirio-toy-ymath/], Thessaloniki, January 2019

F.GR4. Pamphlet 'The Golden Dawn trial' included with the SYRIZA-leaning *Efimerida ton Syntakton* 4/7/20. Collected during fieldwork in Greece,

F.GR5. Pamphlet 'The December of rage' (6/12/18) included with the SYRIZA-leaning *Efimerida ton Syntakton*. Collected during fieldwork in Greece

F.GR6 Pamphlet' The leaders of the Communist Party' (24/11/20) included with the SYRIZA-leaning *Efimerida ton Syntakton*. Collected during fieldwork in Greece

United States

F.US1. Bishop Harry Jackson, Preacher, keynote speaker at Evangelicals for Trump event, Solid Rock Chuck, Cincinnati, Ohio, March 2020

F.US2. Paula White, Televangelist, Trump's spiritual adviser, keynoted Evangelicals for Trump event, Solid Rock Chuck, Cincinnati, Ohio, March 2020

F.US3. Rod Parsley, Televangelist, keynote preacher Evangelicals for Trump event, Solid Rock Chuck, Cincinnati, Ohio, March 2020

F.US4. Laurence Bishop II, Evangelicals for Trump event, preacher at Solid Rock Chuck, Cincinnati, Ohio, March 2020

F.US5. Republican campaigning flyers and stickers, Collected from the Lackawanna Republican Headquarters in Scranton, Pennsylvania, February 2020