

Left Populism: The Challenges from Grassroots to Electoral Politics

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Almost a decade after the financial crisis of 2007-8, the European Left is still trying to articulate a new narrative that will make it relevant for the twenty-first century. The crisis revealed the inequalities embedded in the European project and the structural deficiencies of the common currency, which ultimately divide the 'Northern' countries from the 'Southern' and put in question the democratic nature of the Union. The prosperity of Germany and the elevation of its Finance Minister, Wolfgang Schäuble, to de facto pan-European finance minister devoted to imposing austerity across Europe, a failed remedy for the smaller, indebted partners such as Greece, Spain and Italy – all this dispelled any hope for a 'social' Europe. The increasing gap between the beneficiaries of globalization and neoliberalism and those 'left behind', the increasingly insecure employment market where labour rights are constantly under attack and they are treated as the concessions of a benevolent philanthropist - concessions that can be withdrawn at any time – all this divided national populations beyond the traditional class bases. Divisions between the young and the older, between those living in the metropolitan centres and those in the countryside, between the university educated and those with no qualifications, between 'citizens' and migrants, complicate the picture even further. Economic divisions and cultural divisions have now created a complex environment, fertile for extreme right-wing, regressive forces across Europe. Movements and parties with an inclusive, egalitarian agenda could be the opposition to both the ascendancy of the extreme right and to the neoliberal austerity agenda, and provide a vision of unity in Europe. Yet, they still seem unable to halt this regression, unable to traverse the grievances of those watching in horror the attack on established rights and to organise a common front across Europe.

In this environment, the division between the traditional Left and Right is being redefined according to the grain of the political culture of each country. As the Right (and far-Right) are in many countries in the process of redefining themselves as opponents of the neo-liberalism they have been vigorously imposing for over thirty years, in favour of a new 'national, interventionist conservatism' (the British Conservatives are a good example), the Left is exploring the relationship with grassroots movements and left populism. Indeed, 'movement' and 'populism' are the new catch phrases of the Left. The only problem is that, more often than not, the appropriation of these terms as a panacea for the Left comes with crude theoretical and political simplifications that undermine their usefulness. We would therefore like to problematise what are the challenges for left populism, focusing on the relationship between parties and movements and on the drawing of new antagonistic frontiers within diverse contexts across Europe today.

Time for a Populist, Left Intervention

The success of neoliberalism for the past thirty years was to a great extent possible due to what has been termed 'the post-democratic condition'. On the one hand, 'the peoples' of Europe had been excluded from democratic decision making at national and transnational level. On the other hand, the neoliberal technocracy - domestic and European – displacement of economics from the realm of politics came to its head with the 2008 crisis: a crisis that no 'expert' predicted despite revealing deep

structural problems in the banking and financial sector that was, ultimately, left intact apart from the impoverishment of huge numbers of people in Europe and abroad. The consensus over neoliberal policies and the foreclosure of any alternative – TINA: There Is No Alternative - has been safeguarded by technocratic experts interpreting the norms of economics in accordance with the neoliberal consensus even after the crisis.

The persistence of this post-democratic condition, and the particular form it takes, can be exemplified in the framing of the negotiations between Greece and the Troika (IMF, ECB, EC) in 2015 and the Brexit debates in 2016-17.

In terms of Greece, the crisis revealed the structural inequalities inscribed in the Eurozone project, which enabled the financial sector to survive unscattered, while the people of Southern Europe and, especially, Greece still suffer the results of extreme austerity, unsustainable debt and impoverishment. The recognition of the catastrophic effects of neoliberal policies are still far from recognised as such despite the clear indications. Instead, the frame of 'household' economics ('if you have borrowed too much on your credit card, you'll have to cut your expenses until you pay it off') persists as much as it did during the 2015 negotiations between the Syriza-ANEL government and the Troika as it does now, two years on. In the case of Greece, the conflation of macro- with micro-economics allowed the representation of the country as an exception, it alone responsible for its structural weakness to compete in a globalised, neoliberal economy. But the consequences of this narrative extended beyond Greece. Moral claims around issues of debt, expenditure and investment¹ continued to support the further privatisations and deregulation of domestic labour markets,² but now coupled with a return to a nationalist, regressive discourse adopted by Brexit Britain and Trump's presidency.

In Britain, during the referendum campaign, the Remain side emphasized the economic consequences of a leave result, but, more often than not, by advocating the same neoliberal principles that had alienated big parts of the population. It was met by a Leave discourse that anchored its economic arguments not in a challenge to neoliberal politics, but in the double call for further deregulation and prioritisation of the national agenda. When Dominic Cummings, a leading figure of the Leave campaign explained his post-Brexit vision, he characteristically imagined Britain 'not being bound by all the ludicrous rules of the EU, you can make yourself a centre where the people who want to lead technological revolutions come to work, because we've got huge assets there. We've got the City of London. We're free of the EU regulatory horror. We can move extremely quickly.'³ The images of the sovereign individual and the sovereign nation converged in this discourse.

The success of this discourse rested, on the one hand, on a 'common sense' understanding that less restrictions will allow unrestrained trade deals between the

¹ For a more detailed discussion on neoliberal hegemony, see Doreen Massey (2015) 'Vocabularies of the Economy', in Stuart Hall, Doreen Massey and Michael Rustin (eds.) *After Neoliberalism - The Kilburn Manifesto*, pp. 24-36, London: Lawrence and Wishart.

² Marina Prentoulis (2016) 'The Greek Crisis: Post-democratic logic in Action', in Adam Hug (ed) *Europe and the People*, pp. 29-31, London: Foreign Policy Centre.

³ Bagehot, (2016) 'An Interview with Dominic Cummings', *The Economist*, 21 January 2016, available at <http://www.economist.com/blogs/bagehot/2016/01/out-campaign>, accessed 19 February 2017,.

EU and other partners such as the US. It did find fertile soil especially among those outside the metropolitan centres who did not benefit from globalisation and had been impoverished by thirty years of neoliberalism embraced by successive Tory and Labour governments alike. What is interesting here is that neither the neoliberal direction of the EU political establishment nor the national neoliberal agenda were put into question. Instead, frames with more immediate resonance, such as immigration, were used successfully by right-wing populists dominating the public debate and the mainstream media panels.

Assisted by an unconscious nostalgia for the Imperial past of Great Britain, a past when 'Britishness' dominated (literally) and had brought to submission the colonial 'others', the Leave discourse resonated with voters in every little English town, migrant presence or not. Just like the electorally more successful Marine Le Pen in France, Nigel Farage and the Tory Leavers promised to liberate us from these 'others', those being the obstacle to our national identity: from the EU, from globalisation, from Muslim immigrants and, in Britain above all, from the EU nationals taking British jobs and becoming a burden on the British welfare state.

If the political terrain was ripe for a populist intervention in both Greece and Britain, what were the conditions that differentiated the successful type of populist discourse – left in one case, right in the other? We think the answer has to be traced in the first instance to the social movements, or their absence, that preceded the populist parties, and, in the second instance, the ability of a populist political movement to 'transverse' the terms of the old political landscape and create new antagonisms and new points of identification.

Dislocation, Grassroots Movements and Different Social Sites

The economic crisis in Greece and Spain, and the rapid and severe pauperization of parts of the population that up to that point felt secure in a relative prosperity, led to the grassroots demonstrations known as 'indignants' (*Aganaktismenoi/Indignados*). As the previous political affiliations of diverse groups of people in the two countries were loosened, they joined together in these inclusive movements, which broke the identification with previous political labels. It was indeed this ability of the movements to speak in a way so as to embrace a diversity of grievances beyond the traditional confines of left/right politics that allowed them to play a decisive role in shaping future of politics of the two countries.⁴ In the first instance, scholars proclaimed these protests to be 'horizontalist' experiments of 'direct democracy', resisting the verticality of representational politics. Elsewhere, we have argued that there is no horizontality without verticality, and that attempts to build horizontalism always retain some element of representation.⁵

There is something more at stake here, however, significant for our understanding of the relationship between populist parties and movements, and this has to do with the

⁴ For Greece, see for example Dimitrios Theodossopoulos (2014) 'The Poetics of Indignation in Greece: Anti-austerity Protests and Accountability', in Pnina Werbner, Martin Webb and Kathryn Spellman-Poots (eds.), *The Political Aesthetics of Global Protest: The Arab Spring and beyond*, pp. 368-88, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. For Spain, see Carlos Delclós (2015) *Hope is a Promise: From the Indignados to the Rise of Podemos in Spain*, London: Zed Books.

⁵ Marina Prentoulis and Lasse Thomassen (2013) 'Political Theory In the Square: Protest, Representation and Subjectification', *Contemporary Political Theory* 12:3, 166-84.

kind of demands made by the movements of the indignants. Many of those demands were anti-system, sometimes against the political parties, sometimes against the political system as a whole; sometimes against the capitalist system or key parts of it (financial institutions, above all), and sometimes just against 'the system' as such without specifying what it might mean. Other demands are not immediately anti-system. They are particular demands about this or that public policy or law, or about grievances that people experience in their everyday lives: the mortgage system, the closure of the local post office, and so on.

What we have found is that, for something like a left populist movement to gain traction, it is necessary to connect the anti-system demands with the particular demands. Thereby the particular demands become politicised and radicalised, because they become framed as anti-system demands: the closure of the local post office becomes a sign of some bigger malaise of the political or economic system. But it always works the other way around: as demands against the system become concretised in particular demands, the populist anti-system discourse becomes tangible and meaningful, and can then reach wider sections of the population. This kind of discourse only works if it is at once abstract – 'anti-system' and very concrete – relating to people's everyday lives.

Now, consider the cases of Occupy London, the *Aganaktismenoi* in Greece and the *Indignados* in Spain. In the case of Occupy London, nothing happened: the demands of the movement remained anti-system, and they were left there. They did not manage to become widely accepted by articulating together diverse grievances, grievances which talk to people's everyday experience.. In the case of Greece and Spain (and in the lesser well-known case of Slovenia), the demands were transformed as they were articulated by SYRIZA and Podemos, first, within the mainstream mediascape and, later, within political institutions. As a result, they were no longer simply anti-system marginal demands but contesters of power aiming to take on and change the system. The transformation of demands requires work on both sides: both within the movements and within the parties operating in a different terrain. And in this process, the articulation of concrete demands with a populist frontier between 'the people' and 'the system' is essential. This is what happened in Greece and Spain (and Slovenia), but not in Britain.

The potential transformative ability of the activists and the movements rested on their capacity to move from one social site to another.⁶ In the case of Greece, after the movements receded, part of the grassroots activity was channelled into the creation of 'solidarity networks'. In Spain, part of grassroots activity was channelled into local politics that transformed the municipalities of, for example, Barcelona (Barcelona en Comú) and Madrid (Ahora Madrid). Moving to the site of electoral politics, through Syriza and Podemos, was the attempt to articulate the demands of the 'people', or parts of it, into an equivalential chain, and make them the contesters of a new type of politics. The trajectory of Syriza and Podemos was not similar: Syriza pre-existed the 2011 indignant movements as a small electoral coalition of left organisations, actively supporting the participation in social movements. Podemos, which only

⁶ Marina Prentoulis and Lasse Thomassen (2014) 'Autonomy and Hegemony in the Squares: The 2011 Protests in Greece and Spain', in Alexandros Kioupioulos and Giorgos Katsambekis (eds.), *Radical Democracy and Collective Movements Today: The Biopolitics of the Multitude versus the Hegemony of the People*, pp. 213-34, Farnham: Ashgate, p. 228.

emerged in 2014 is the product of the movements, and that may be part of why it resisted labelling themselves as 'left'. What is important to emphasise here is that the articulatory practice starts on one site, that of the movement, and then moves to another, that of electoral politics.

In Britain, we have a different political trajectory. The two moments in 2011 questioning the political system, the London Riots and the Occupy London Stock Exchange protests, did not manage to bring together different demands or to extend discontent beyond particular sectors of the population. The London riots in August 2011 were set in motion by the police shooting of 29-year-old Mark Duggan. The initially peaceful march to the Tottenham police station soon sparked riots across many districts in and outside London. The looting and violence and the absence of clear demands obscured the root causes of the events and the anger accumulated by British communities that had been victimised, marginalised and excluded from the benefits of globalization for decades.

The Occupy movement born in the US in the summer of 2011 had a global appeal and defined themselves as leaderless and party-less.⁷ Despite its contribution on the grassroots level, in Britain it failed to generate a widespread response that would transform electoral politics. One possible contributing factor is that the financial crisis had not produced the same dislocatory effect on the British working and middle-classes, and, as such, they still identified with the institutions – including the political parties – of the existing economic and political system. As a result, Occupy failed to bring together diverse and wider sections of the population.

Instead, the 'movement' that promised to challenge electoral politics in Britain was Momentum: the organization built out of the Jeremy Corbyn campaign for the leadership of the Labour Party in 2015. The aim of the organization is 'to increase participatory democracy, solidarity, and grassroots power and help Labour become the transformative governing party of the 21st century'.⁸ Many things can be said about the internal debates and organisational structures of Momentum, and it is worth attention in its own right as a different attempt to intervene in electoral politics. Nevertheless, Momentum remained confined to the narrower sphere of Labour politics, and it failed to generate a wider social interest despite its impressive membership. As we will argue in the next part, this is coupled with the inability of the Labour Party, and the Corbyn leadership in particular, to deal with the rupture created by the British EU referendum.

To sum up, the potential for a left populist intervention rests in the first instance on the dislocation of previous political affiliations and identities, a dislocation that may be manifested as grassroots level. When these dislocated identities are then articulated by social movements, and when the anti-system demands are connected to concrete, everyday grievances, we have the possibility for the emergence of populist parties.

Beyond Left and Right?

⁷ <http://occupylondon.org.uk/about/>

⁸ <http://www.peoplesmomentum.com/>

Usually we divide parties into left and right plus its many combinations of centre, centre-left, centre-right, far left and far right. Parties place themselves on the left-right axis, and so do voters who will identify themselves as left or right or centre. This creates a challenge to any populist left party. The experiences of Podemos in Spain, SYRIZA in Greece and the United Left in Slovenia show that there is not a single correct road to be taken.

In Spain, the Indignados refused to be labelled a movement of the Left. When they proclaimed 'They don't represent us!', they referred to the parties of the Left as well as the Right. And so, when Podemos was created three years ago in 2014, they tried to go beyond left and right. Not in the way of Blair's, Clinton's and Schröder's 'the third way', which was an attempt to place themselves in the middle and optimise electorally. For Podemos, it was not a question of moving a bit to the left or a bit to the right; doing so would just reinforce the left-right terms of Spanish politics. Instead, they sought to disrupt the way in which Spanish people thought about politics, and the way in which voters identified themselves. They did so by introducing a new axis or division: between above and below, between the establishment (*la casta*) and the people. All the old parties – left or right – were placed in the category of the establishment together with the banks and other economic elites. Below, as part of the people, were ordinary Spanish folks.

Podemos saw very well that, if they had to change Spanish politics, and if they had to have a chance of winning elections, they could not do so from a position on the Left. They would be squeezed between the centre-left socialist party (PSOE) and the old left in Izquierda Unida (IU). At most, they would be able to take some voters from PSOE's left flank and a few voters from IU's right flank. By moving from the left-right axis to the establishment-the people axis, Podemos would have the people all to themselves. They would become *the* representative of the people, and the old parties would gradually become irrelevant.⁹

This is what, in Podemos, they call transversality. Transversality is really about changing the rules of the political game. Where before Spanish politics was a question of left or right, it now became a question of establishment or the people. Put differently, transversality is about changing the terms of what we are struggling about and for – and making sure that those terms favour the way *we* see the world. In the case of *populism*, transversality involves articulating an antagonistic frontier. The antagonism can be between any two poles: the people vs the establishment, the people vs the EU, the nation vs immigrants, left vs right, and so forth. In the case of Podemos, they managed to articulate a new antagonism (the people vs the establishment) in place of the old one between left and right.

In Spain, the success of Podemos' transversality was undermined, among other things, by the emergence of the centre-right liberal Ciudadanos party. Although much less successful than Podemos, Ciudadanos were, like Podemos, the new kids on the block. And like Podemos, they were happy for Spanish politics to no longer be a matter of left or right, but a matter of, if not above and below, then at least old and

⁹ For good introductions to Podemos as a form of left-wing populism, see Pablo Iglesias (2015) 'Understanding Podemos', *New Left Review* 93 (May-June), 7-22; and Alexandros Kioupiolis (2016) 'Podemos: The ambiguous Promises of Left-Wing Populism in Spain', *Journal of Political Ideologies* 21:2, 99-120.

new. In other words, Ciudadanos was able to play on the terrain opened up by Podemos because they were a new party. (Strictly speaking, they were not a new party, but until then they had only had limited success and only in Catalonia.) Disaffected right-wing and centre-right voters now had a place to go to without having to go to Podemos. Podemos's success in realigning Spanish politics along a new axis thus also made it possible for other parties to take advantage of this realignment.

In Greece, SYRIZA took a different path. The main faction within SYRIZA was the product of KKE-es (Communist Party of Greece-Interior), who split from the KKE (Communist Party of Greece) in 1968 following a Eurocommunist trajectory. In the 1990s, part of KKE-es was incorporated into the electoral coalition *Συνασπισμός της Αριστερας και της Προόδου* (Coalition of the Left and Progress) which in 2004, together with other left extra-parliamentary organisations, formed SYRIZA. The historical roots of SYRIZA were thus always associated with the Left, but a radical, democratic Left in favour of broader coalitions and actively engaged in social movements.¹⁰ Indeed, prior to the emergence of Podemos, Izquierda Unida were the natural allies of SYRIZA in Spain as far as left alliances go; beyond that, IU chose not to engage with the new movements in the way that SYRIZA did.

By 2010, the financial crisis had significantly increased the Greek sovereign debt. The PASOK (centre, socialist) government accepted the unprecedented austerity part of the bailout agreement (the so-called memorandum) proposed by IMF, ECB and EC as sovereign debt started to reach unrealistic levels. The indignant movement expressed the anti-establishment sentiment, and, by the time of the 2012 election, both mainstream parties, New Democracy (centre right) and PASOK, had lost most of their share of the vote. A new element was now added to the antagonistic frontier articulated by the indignants movement between the people and the establishment: the memorandum. The memorandum became a sign that the political establishment had sold the people; the establishment became defined as those who signed the memorandum, with the indignants and SYRIZA opposing it. (Of course, later that changed when the SYRIZA-led government was forced to accept the memorandum.) SYRIZA, actively involved in the indignant movement, against the austerity measures imposed on Greece and 'anti-establishment'¹¹ managed to hijack the centre and centre-left vote. SYRIZA transversed the old left-right axis of Greek politics in two ways in particular. First, because they became the primary voice of opposition towards the old elites and the austerity imposed by the Troika; and, second, because they were able to connect together a variety of demands – of working class sectors, 'educated employees in the public sector, professionals and small employees'¹² – in order to come to power. SYRIZA remains associated with the Left, but this association has not stood in the way of gaining government power.

¹⁰ Myrto Tsakatika and Costas Eleftheriou (2013) 'The Radical Left's Turn towards Civil Society in Greece: One Strategy, Two Paths', *South European Society and Politics*, 18:1, 81-99.

¹¹ For a good introduction to SYRIZA as a form of left-wing populism, see Yannis Stavrakakis and Giorgos Katsambekis, 'Left-wing populism in the European periphery: the case of SYRIZA', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 19:2 (2014): 119-42.

¹² Costas Vernardakis (2012) *Political Parties, Elections and Party System. The Transformation of Political Representation 1990-2010* (in Greek), Athens: Sakkoulas.

In Slovenia, the United Left self-identified as left and socialist from the beginning, and it continues to do so.¹³ Like SYRIZA and Podemos, they rose to prominence on the back of the financial crisis and a crisis of representation and social protest. And, like SYRIZA and Podemos, the United Left struggle with the tensions between horizontalist activist practices and the more vertical structures of the political system. Unlike SYRIZA and Podemos, however, they have not appropriated a populist discourse, and so far they have only made relatively small electoral gains, achieving six percent and six seats in the 2014 parliamentary elections.

As the experiences of Spain, Greece and Slovenia show, there is no one-size-fits-all answer to what a radical left party should do in order to gain electoral support. Syriza and the Slovenian United Left self-identify as left; in electoral terms, one has been successful, the other less so. In one case, the party appropriated a populist discourse and articulated new antagonisms (the people vs the establishment, the people vs the memorandum, the new vs the old); in the other case, the party did not take a populist turn. Podemos chose the road of transversal populism and rejected the Left label. Nonetheless, most people in Spain identify them as to the left, somewhere between PSOE and IU. This has been helped by the old political class and the mainstream media who have not hesitated to shout that the commies are coming (again). Despite their efforts to the contrary, Podemos has not been wholly successful in transversing the old left-right axis, which continues to shape Spanish politics to a significant degree.

In 2016, Podemos created an electoral alliance with Izquierda Unida for the general election in June. The electoral system favours the biggest parties, and the thinking was that the electoral alliance would optimise the number of seats in parliament. Although the new alliance – Unidos Podemos – increased their number of seats by two, the results were disappointing. Compared to the combined total of Podemos and IU votes in the 2015 general election, Unidos Podemos lost more than a million votes.

The question was if Podemos should opt for a more transversal strategy, or if they should present themselves as a party of the Left. How do you maximise your electoral support: do you aim for a thin slice of the whole electorate, or for a big slice of the Left electorate? There is no way of deciding for sure if the poor results were a result of the alliance with IU. The alliance was heavily disputed within Podemos though, dividing the party's leader, Pablo Iglesias, and its number two, Íñigo Errejón. For the *Errejonistas*, the alliance was a mistake because it locked Podemos into the Left, thereby limiting its transversal potential. For the *Pablistas*, the transversal strategy had failed because Podemos had not overtaken PSOE. They might also point out that Podemos is anyway associated with the Left in most people's minds, so they might as well show the flag. The trouble is that this realigns Spanish politics back to where it was: left versus right. And the equivocation over how to identify themselves – as left, or as neither left nor right – makes Podemos look inauthentic: inauthentically left and inauthentically transversal at one and the same time.

¹³ Alen Toplišek (2017) 'The Slovenian United Left: From Protest to Movement, and From Movement to Party', *openDemocracy*, 19 January 2017, available at <https://www.opendemocracy.net/can-europe-make-it/alen-topli-ek/slovenian-united-left-from-protest-to-movement-and-from-movement-to>, accessed 20 February 2017.

Neither transversality nor populism is simply a matter of realigning politics from left-right to the people vs the establishment. It can take many different forms. In the UK, Brexit has realigned British politics along a division between Leavers and Remainers. The Conservatives and Labour are divided down the middle over Brexit. The Conservatives have overwhelmingly gone for Leave; Labour equivocates. The discussion over article 50, the starting of the Brexit process is a good example. The Labour leadership, in order to avoid being branded as ‘the enemy of the people’ (those who will go against the will of the referendum), decided to vote in favour of triggering article 50. This despite the fact that so far the form Brexit will take had been defined by the Conservative government according to the lines of a ‘hard’ Brexit. (A ‘soft’ Brexit would potentially involve membership of the single market and, as a result, fewer border restrictions than Prime Minister Teresa May has promised.) In order to compel Labour MPs to vote for article 50, the leadership imposed a three line whip (enforcing MPs vote with the line of the party), which put some Labour MPs from Remain constituencies at odds with their electorate. Furthermore, the attempts of Labour, SNP (Scottish National Party), Greens and Liberal-Democrats to pass the Bill with some amendments that would ‘soften’ Brexit and make a vote in the British parliament a meaningful one (before the negotiations between the UK and the EU get to their final stages) were all rejected. Now it remains to be seen if the unelected House of Lords can pass some amendments.

What is of interest here is that by following the lead of the Conservative party, Labour forced some of its own MPs to vote against the party line creating more internal splits. Not only is Labour’s equivocation not transversal and may diminish the ability of the party, on the one hand, to act in unity and, on the other hand, to become the agent of a new inclusive, equalitarian discourse. Equivocation just means that you do not let the others define the terms within which you struggle. When you define the terms of the political game, you can define those you are struggling against – and define them up into a corner from where they cannot escape.

As things stand, UKIP and the Conservatives are competing for Leave voters, and the Remain voters are left to the Liberal Democrats and the Greens. To be part of the competition, Labour needs to redefine the terms of the competition so that it is no longer a matter of leave or remain. Brexit needs either to be relegated to a secondary division or to be framed against the Conservative discourse. Although Labour still insists they will fight against the Conservative Brexit, it has not redefined Brexit. It just promises to oppose its more destructive terms at some future moment

Conclusion: The Road Forward

A populist left intervention does not happen in a vacuum. Conditions of dissatisfaction and hostility towards ‘the establishment’ enable new left parties to emerge as important contesters of power. When the links with the political system has been loosened, grassroots activity in the form of protests, movements and/or riots announce the distancing between ‘the people’ and the political system. If the demands of these activities are anti-systemic, but at the same time tangible and close to the everyday grievances of the people, they can potentially become serious contesters at parliamentary level. New left parties can become the embodiment of the ‘will of the people’ as long as it engages actively with grassroots activity,

attempts to draw new antagonistic frontiers which redefining the terms of the struggle and articulating diverse demands together anew.

This is neither a simple nor an easy process. The conditions and the pre-existing social ruptures in each context may be more or less favourable. What is important, however, is – rather than following the examples of SYRIZA, Podemos and other left populist parties as instances offered for imitation – to engage with the underlined logics at play in order to be in a position to recognise the challenges (and the diverse reservoirs) available in each case.