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Syriza's Inclusionary Populism: A Challenge to Exclusionary Populism in Europe

By

Carmen Salloum

A Major Research Paper

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
through the Department of Political Science
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts at the University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

2021

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Syriza's Inclusionary Populism: A Challenge to Exclusionary Populism in Europe

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August 17, 2021

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ABSTRACT

Much of the literature on populism emphasizes the inclusive character of Latin American populism and the exclusive character of European populism; however, there is a dearth of research that analyzes the rise of European left-wing inclusionary populism following the 2008 global financial crisis, particularly the case of Syriza in Greece. Thus, this study seeks address that gap and challenge Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser's geographical differentiation framework, which limits exclusionary populism to Europe and inclusionary populism to Latin America. Adopting Ernesto Laclau's discursive theory of populism, which draws on post-Marxist and post-structuralist theory, this study suggests that his alternative conceptualization of populism as a political logic of articulation is the most effective model for analyzing cross-regional cases of populism as it does not limit sub-types of populism in terms of ideological content and geographical scope. By applying Laclau's model to the case of Syriza, this study argues that Syriza's inclusionary populist profile, which makes an appeal to a 'plural people,' effectively undermines Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser's populist model.

Keywords: Inclusionary and exclusionary populism, Syriza, post-structuralist discourse theory, post-structuralism, hegemony, Ernesto Laclau

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge everyone who played a significant role in my academic accomplishment. Most importantly, I would like to express the deepest appreciation to my supervisor, Dr. Jesse Ovadia for his meaningful assistance, guidance, encouragement, patience and continued feedback over the last three years. Throughout the process of completing my research, there were many challenges, and though I often struggled, Dr. Ovadia offered unending patience. The value of his assistance cannot be overstated, and this research would not have been possible without his persistent support and guidance.

I would like to express my appreciation to my parents, Mohamed and Férial Salloum, and my siblings—Sarah, Daniel, Adam, and Lamis—for their immense love, support, and encouragement.

I would also like to offer a warm thank you to my fiancé, Dr. Omar Dirani, for his continuous love, emotional support, understanding, and encouragement throughout the challenging times.

I likewise owe a debt of gratitude to the faculty and staff of the Department of Political Science at the University of Windsor for their support, kindness, and help. In particular, I want to thank Dr. Tom Najem, Dr. Rebecca Major, Dr. Elena Maltseva, and Dr. Emmanuelle Richez for their assistance and suggestions throughout my research. I would also like to extend a special note of appreciation to the Graduate Secretary, Jennifer Forde, for the administrative work she completed through this process.

In addition, a very special thank you to Jason Horn and Kate Hargreaves at the Writing Support Desk for helping me improve my academic writing through one-on-one consultations since I began my academic journey.

Many of my friends have also offered their enduring support; thus, I would also like to thank each of them, especially Jennifer Abboud, Jesse Antwi-Kusi, Shahd Ghunim, Rachelle Meta, Christelle Ntetani, and Kadir Yapici.

Lastly, I would like to thank God for providing me with the ability, persistence, and determination required to complete my studies.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

When Donald Trump announced his candidacy for President of the United States in June of 2015, he opened by claiming that Mexico was sending “drugs... crime, [and] rapists” to the country (as cited in Kopan, 2016, para. 4). Though the primary issue for voters during the election was the economy (Pew Research Center, 2016), Trump did not outline a plan to address economic issues. Instead, he used populist rhetoric to make an appeal to the common people against their supposed enemies—the most vulnerable members of society, including immigrants and ethnic minorities—evoking strong emotions and using incendiary political language and insulting rhetoric. Trump’s discursive style of insult politics conforms to the long tradition of American right-wing populism. Similar to George Wallace’s populist rhetoric in the 1968 presidential campaign, Trump’s appeal was based on xenophobia, anti-immigration, nativism, neo-nationalism, and anti-establishment. Therefore, Trump, like Wallace, gained the support of many voters who felt powerless and threatened by social changes and economic stagnation.

Many assumed that Trump’s run for the presidency would be farcical, and indeed, it was tragically so in many respects. However, he won the election, leaving many wondering how. In hindsight, the victory should not have been surprising as it was the result of growing support for a new right-wing populist agenda, which emphasizes the general will of the American people against the established structure of power and dangerous ‘others’ (notably immigrants) who are together perceived as depriving the sovereign people of their rights, values, prosperity and voice (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013). Trump’s direct appeal to the American people, along with his use of bold statements and slogans such as ‘Make America great again,’ promised hope, thereby empowering and encouraging Americans who felt their country was in decline (as cited

in Paulin-Booth, 2016). In a similar way, the European Union (EU), a relatively newly formed political entity that is defined by diversity, has proven particularly vulnerable to the current direction in political discourse. For instance, Tasch (2017) reports that Marine Le Pen, leader of the French right-wing populist party National Rally, used a slogan during the 2017 French presidential campaign that translates to ‘In the name of the people.’ This slogan allowed her to present herself as the defender and protector of French identity. As with the rhetoric of many other right-wing populist parties, Le Pen’s platform relied on anti-immigration, exclusivist, and nationalist ideals.

The sudden resurgence of populism within the EU has destabilized its transnational and cosmopolitan identity, leading to a radical transformation with respect to its structure and global importance as it seeks to redefine itself (Fornäs, 2012). Hence, the influx of immigrants and refugees entering the EU has posed a serious humanitarian challenge to European policymakers and has led to increased feelings of frustration, resentment and invisibility among the European public toward outgroups (Garcia-Zamor, 2018). European policymakers are divided between those who are against mass immigration and European integration, and those who support these developments. These conditions have increased the support for Eurosceptic and populist parties on both sides of the political spectrum—from the triumph of Podemos in Spain and Syriza in Greece on the left to the successive shocks of Donald Trump in the United States, Brexit in the United Kingdom, and Marine Le Pen in France on the right (Besley & Persson, 2019). This Pan-European and trans-Atlantic shift in support for populist parties is linked to changing political identities. These identities are shaped by a variety of factors, such as economic distress, globalization, austerity politics, and immigration. As a result, populist parties target identity politics as a strategy to mobilize ‘the people’ around opposition to a shared enemy. The term

‘populism’ has been used in the West to describe parties and politicians that emphasize the idea of ‘the people’ against a supposed enemy. However, not all manifestations of populism are consistent in their interpretations of which specific groups in society belong to ‘the pure people’ and which to ‘the corrupt elite.’

The abundance of populist movements throughout the globe has led to a growing body of literature on populism. Earlier studies on populism by Ionescu and Gellner (1969) and Canovan (1981) suggest that populism is a phenomenon attributed to both the left and right in Latin America, the United States, and Canada. Yet, the contemporary rise of populism in Europe has led many scholars to argue that while all forms of populism share a core set of attributes, there are regional sub-types of populism. Most notably, Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2013) employ their minimal and ideological definition of populism to distinguish between left-wing inclusionary populism predominant in Latin America and right-wing exclusionary populism primarily in Europe. However, adopting Laclau’s discursive approach to populism, which draws on post-Marxist and post-structuralist theory, this study suggests that his alternative conceptualization of populism as a political logic of articulation is the most suitable and effective model for analyzing cross-regional cases of populism as it does not limit sub-types of populism in terms of ideological content and geographical scope. By applying Laclau’s model to the case of Syriza, this study argues that Syriza’s left-wing inclusionary populist profile, which appeals to a ‘plural people,’ effectively undermines Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser’s populist model.

Much of the literature on populism is concentrated on defining the complex relationship between populism and democracy and the various approaches to understanding populism, such as the ideational, discursive, political, and economic approaches. Moreover, most research on inclusionary populism is limited to Latin America’s left-wing populism in the 1990s and early

2000s. While there is a paucity of research on European left-wing populism, much of the literature that does exist on European populism focuses almost exclusively on the contemporary rise of radical right-wing populist movements. This means that research on the rise of European left-wing inclusionary populism that followed the 2008 global financial crisis is relatively underdeveloped, particularly the case of Syriza. Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine the successful rise of Syriza's inclusionary populism, which challenges the analytical tools of Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser's (2013) populist model, thereby demonstrating that Laclau's (2005) definition of populism as political discourse is the most effective approach for analyzing trans-regional cases of populism.

This study is organized into five chapters. The first chapter introduces the purpose of the research and provides background information. The second chapter examines the historical manifestations of populist movements, focusing on the *Narodniki* in pre-revolutionary Russia, 19th-century American populism, and early 20th-century Latin American classical populism. The second chapter also reviews current literature on populism, beginning with an examination of the ideational approach introduced by Mudde and later expounded upon by Rovira Kaltwasser. They define populism as a 'thin-centred ideology' that attaches itself to other thick ideologies, thereby generating the possibility of geographically differentiated frameworks of populism. In their joint work, Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser argue that understanding populism through exclusionary versus inclusionary terms is the most significant aspect of the cross-regional comparison, in which European populism is exclusionary, while Latin American populism is inclusionary. By analyzing the core attributes of populism in the ideational approach—morality, homogeneity and anti-pluralism—this study demonstrates the deficiencies of this paradigm. The third chapter examines, the conceptual and theoretical framework adopted to support this study. This chapter

begins by introducing an in-depth analysis of Laclau's discursive approach, this study's conceptual framework, which understands populism as a political logic of articulation. Critically exploring the three steps of this logic of articulation: (1) the construction of an antagonistic internal frontier dividing 'the people' from the 'dominant bloc,' (2) the construction of a chain of equivalence, and (3) the representation of 'the people.' Laclau draws on the post-structuralist theory, this study's theoretical framework, to operationalize the concepts of articulation, discourse, hegemony and representation. Analyzing populism through the post-structuralist discourse theory demonstrates the advantages of Laclau's model over the ideational approach. The fourth chapter adopts Laclau's model to analyze Syriza as a case study, examining the electoral success of its left-wing inclusionary populist discourse, which challenges Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser's geographical differentiation framework. The final chapter, the conclusion, summarizes and synthesizes the study's findings and provides recommendations for future studies on populism.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter examines the historical manifestations of populist movements, particularly focusing on the *Narodniki* in pre-revolutionary Russia, 19th-century American populism, and early 20th-century Latin American classical populism. The chapter also reviews current literature, beginning with an examination of the ideational approach introduced by Mudde (2004) and later expounded upon Rovira Kaltwasser (2013). They define populism as a ‘thin-centred ideology’ that attaches itself to other thick ideologies, thereby generating the possibility of geographically differentiated frameworks of populism that adopt exclusionary or inclusionary approaches in Europe and Latin America respectively. Their model is based on three analytical dimensions: material, political and symbolic. Analyzing Syriza’s populist discourse with these three elements can determine whether Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser’s geographical distinction framework is accurate. The chapter also examines the four defining elements of the ideational approach: (1) the characterization of populism as an ideology, (2) the belief that what best describes this ideology is a moralist view of division in society, (3) the construction of a pure and homogenous collective identity, and (4) the populist rejection of pluralism (Katsambekis, 2020). By analyzing the core attributes of populism in the ideational approach—morality, homogeneity, and anti-pluralism—this chapter demonstrates the deficiencies of this paradigm.

Main Historical Manifestations of Populism

The term ‘populists’ (originated of self-description) was first introduced by members of the People’s Party in Omaha, Nebraska in 1892 (Canovan, 1981). These self-styled populists represented a grand coalition of American farmers and labourers from the South and West who revolted against the monopolists and financiers of the plutocratic East to restore government to

the hands of ‘the people’ (Canovan, 1981). While populism emerged as a response to agrarian grievances in the United States, in an entirely different political landscape, the radical intelligentsia of late 19th-century Russia used the term *Narodniki*, regularly translated to populist, to self-describe a group of middle-class intellectuals who aimed to represent the historic interests and demands (above all land and liberty) of ‘the people,’ that is, the Russian peasantry (Canovan, 1981). The *Narodniki* stressed the revolutionary potential of the peasantry, thereby encouraging a widespread of peasant movements across Europe (March, 2007; Poblete, 2015). Russian populist influence was dominant within the introduction of revolutionary means and the collective ownership of land, ideas that were alien to European peasants (Eellend, 2008). Hence, agrarian populist movements followed a discourse in defence of the agrarian program as peasantry was perceived to be the starting point of both society and economy (Mudde, 2004).

Like both the Russian and American experiences, various agrarian crises and rural uprisings emerged in Eastern Europe and the Balkans. This happened during the inter-war period, when agriculture and society were rapidly modernizing, which in turn led to the emergence of other agrarian populist movements (Ionescu & Gellner, 1969). While all these cases of classical populism significantly differ in context, all movements adopted the ideology of agrarianism, also known as a peasant ideology, which sought to defend peasant virtues within a rapidly evolving and modernizing society (Canovan, 1981; Eellend, 2008; Mudde, 2002). Another commonality between these movements was their idealized notion of ‘the people’ as the source of virtue and good, and the division of society into two opposing camps: the ‘true’ people, and the people’s enemies (Filc, 2015). ‘The people’ did not entail a single class; rather, it included the urban and rural population (Eellend, 2008).

Following the decline of traditional Marxism in the 1980s and 1990s, ‘neo-populism’ began to rise in Latin America, and ‘new populism’ rose in Europe, both of which have endured (March, 2007). While Latin American populist leaders appealed to ‘the people’ against the oligarchy and North American imperialism, European populism is recognized by its right-wing nature, anti-immigration views, and xenophobic sentiments (Poblete, 2015).

The Ideational Approach

While populism has been used to describe a wide range of experiences across various continents, scholars continue to face difficulty developing a consistent and useful definition of populism (Canovan, 1981; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013). Consequently, many scholars have attempted to develop a conceptual approach with the aim of presenting core characteristics practised in all manifestations of populism.

To address this issue, in 1967 a conference was held at the London School of Economics, titled ‘To Define Populism’ (Canovan, 1981). During the conference, however, leading analysts of populism used the term to refer to a wide range of experiences, while explicitly failing to reach a consensus definitional agreement and theoretical accord (Mudde, 2004). As a result of this scholarly interest, a study— “Populism: Its Meaning and National Characteristics”— conducted by Ghita Ionescu and Ernest Gellner (1969), assembled the various approaches to populism by scholars in distinct disciplines. Based on a review of literature, Canovan (1981) found that the concept was being employed in various distinct political contexts, and therefore many “participants doubted whether it could be said to mean anything at all” (p. 5). Hence, Collier (2001) argues that the central issue with defining populism is that the plurality of conceptualizations often includes ‘consensual’ and ‘contested’ attributes as its defining properties (as cited in Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013).

Although there exists an abundance of approaches to defining populism in the literature, this study will only examine the two leading approaches: Mudde's ideational approach and Laclau's discursive approach. It should be noted that many scholars, including Aguilar and Carlin (2017), argue that Laclau's (2005) interpretation of populism as a discourse falls under the ideational banner. It is notable that both approaches share many similarities, beginning with the exaltation of 'the people' against 'the elite,' and populist leaders who make use of moments of crisis to shape problems in ways that trigger populist attitudes, thereby mobilizing and achieving popular electoral support. However, for the purpose of this study, Laclau's approach will not be subsumed within the ideational approach, given the significant differences evident.

The ideational approach was first proposed by Mudde in 2004 and has been further developed through his joint work with Rovira Kaltwasser. Since then, many new interpretations of populism have been subsumed under the ideational paradigm, in which each interpretation holds significant differences in understanding the particularity of populism, yet all conceptions share the assumption that populism is "first and foremost, about ideas" (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013, p. 150). Among the various scholars who support the ideational approach, there is much debate on which terms most accurately describe populism, common terms include "discourse," "frame," "political claim," "style," "thin-centred ideology," and "worldview" (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2018, p. 1669). Although many argue that these terms should be used interchangeably as the differences between them are insignificant and because they all lead to the same populist phenomenon, this study will only apply the notion of 'thin-centred ideology' to accurately describe populism in an ideational context (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013). Thus, Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2013) adopt the single minimal definition of populism as "a thin-centred ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous

and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite,’ and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people,” to analyze cross-regional manifestations of exclusionary and inclusionary populism (p. 150).

Defining ‘The People’

The notion of ‘the people’ is the focal point of populism and a fundamental pillar of liberal democracy, in which ‘the people’ are considered to be a sovereign, pure, virtuous and homogenous community in an ideational context (Akkerman et al., 2014). Akkerman et al. (2014) posit that “the people represent the backbone of society; they are the silent majority, constituting the basis of the good society” (p. 1327). Canovan’s (2005) review of current literature found that many have argued against the notion of ‘the people’ adopted in populist contexts because it is a vague and ambiguous term. For example, she suggests that, in English, ‘the people’ hold three basic meanings: ‘the people’ as sovereign, peoples as nations, and ‘the common people,’ meaning those in opposition to the ruling elites. Given these definitions, ‘the people’ can act as a sovereign (constituted power) and can participate “in terms of (re)founding and updating the higher legal norms and procedural rules that regulate the exercise of power” (Katsambekis, 2020, p. 3). However, others argue that ‘the people’ is a reference to both the community as a whole and part of the population who are excluded individuals advocating for their symbolic recognition, as well as their economic and political inclusion (Katsambekis, 2020). Moreover, Taggart (2000), Katsambekis (2020), and Mudde (2004) agree that the concept of ‘the people’ has a chameleonic nature and emerges in different times and political spaces as it adopts distinct attributes to fit the context of its surroundings. Therefore, populist rhetoric builds on the ambiguous and polysemic character of the concept, in which who the ‘the people’ are will depend on the setting (Filoc, 2015; Katsambekis, 2020). This is especially true when addressing

the challenges endured by ‘the people’ in ‘the heartland,’ such as their fears and concerns of issues including globalization and immigration.

‘The heartland’ is a term that was introduced by Taggart (2000) and describes ‘the people’ as a single entity that shares common values and ideas and is located in an idealized landscape. For example, Akkerman et al. (2014) argue that populists use ‘the heartland’ as a justification to establish a sharp contrast between ‘us’ (the chosen people), who are members of ‘the heartland’ (the majority), and ‘them’ (notably the elites, minorities and immigrants), who are excluded and are perceived as a threat to the sovereignty of ‘the people.’ Therefore, populist discourse appeals to ‘the people’ by conjuring sentiments of affiliation between ‘the people’ and ‘the heartland,’ as well as by vilifying specific social groups that are excluded. In contrast to more traditional and mainstream political discourses, populists use simplistic language characterized by emotion to mobilize a collective identity and multi-class alliances—voters from diverse socio-economic and socio-cultural backgrounds—against a shared opposition (Aguilar & Carlin, 2017; De la Torre, 2007).

While all manifestations of populism revolve around a central antagonistic relationship between ‘the people’ and ‘the other,’ populist movements and leaders alternate between the signification they link to the signifier ‘the people.’ In other words, not all manifestations of populism are consistent in their interpretations of which specific groups in society belong to the in- or out-group (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013). Building on the work of File (2010), Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2013) analyzed and compared the left-wing inclusionary populism that appeared most in Latin America and right-wing exclusionary populism the was predominant in Europe based on three dimensions of inclusion/exclusion: (1) material dimension, which refers to the distribution of state resources; (2) symbolic dimension, which

refers to the frontiers of ‘the people’ and ‘the elite’; and (3) political dimension, which describes political participation and public contestation. These two core dimensions of democracy were proposed by Dahl (2000). To this end, Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2013) define “who belongs to ‘the people’ vis-à-vis ‘the elite’” in exclusionary and inclusionary contexts and introduce the specific ideological attributes associated with inclusionary/exclusionary cases of populism (p. 148).

European Exclusionary Populism. Exclusionary populism conceptualizes ‘the people’ from a nativist viewpoint, in which symbolic exclusion is based on an exclusionary conception of ‘the people’ (Filc, 2015). Though nativism, which refers to the ethnic division between natives and outsiders, is not a defining attribute of populism, exclusionary populist leaders and movements convey nativist appeals and hostility towards outgroups (Plattner, 2010). As such, ‘the people’ are depicted as a culturally or ethnically homogenous group, and therefore, those who vary from the majority in cultural attributes are often seen as the opposition along with the privileged elites (Plattner, 2010).

European populist radical right parties stress their exclusionary character by advocating to protect the civil and political rights of the native inhabitants who feel threatened by the establishment and the non-native people—such as immigrants, refugees, and ethnic minorities—who are excluded from the definition of ‘the pure people’ (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013). While corporations profit from immigration by keeping wages low, political elites garner new support from the inclusion of immigrants, who right-wing parties argue benefit from the welfare state and will therefore support the established parties (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2018). Hence, exclusionary populist radical right leaders believe “the common people are disenfranchised because of an elite conspiracy,” in which they align themselves with outsiders

and ignore the demands and interests of the ‘silent majority’ (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013, p. 165). For example, the respective former leaders of the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) and the French National Front (FN) both used populist slogans: Jörg Haider’s slogan was “They are against him because he is for you”; Jean-Marie Le Pen’s campaign slogan was “The outsider champions your interests” (as cited in Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013, p. 166). While Latin American populist discourse advances the socioeconomic integration of all people, European right-wing populist movements are based on exclusion from a sociocultural dimension. Therefore, although European populist leaders insist “to be the voice of the people,” ‘the people’ are predominantly ethnicized (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013, p. 166). Hence, European populism directs attention to the exclusion of outgroups rather than specifically articulating who belongs to the ingroup. In other words, defining who are “the Austrian people” or “the French people” is unclear; however, it is evident who does not belong (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013, p. 166).

The success of European populists mobilizing the working class with nativist appeals has encouraged many populist leaders to call for welfare chauvinism, a type of welfare state that restricts outgroups (notably non-natives) from accessing welfare provisions (Filc, 2015; March, 2017; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013). This is because they feel the need to secure the welfare state, which they deemed to be severely threatened by the presence of ‘aliens.’ In addition, many populist parties proposed radical policies that exclude non-native people from accessing social provisions. For instance, in 1991, the FN proposed the 50-point program that included the deportation of undocumented and unemployed immigrants to their native countries, a restriction of citizenship by blood, a limit on immigrant children in schools, and a ‘national preference’ given with regard to jobs, housing services, and welfare services (Ivaldi &

Swyngedouw, 2005). A year later, populist radical right party Flemish Bloc (VB), in Belgium, drafted a plan to resolve “the problem of immigrants,” including measures to reduce immigration and restrict the right of citizenship to only immigrants who are “fully assimilated” (Ivaldi & Swyngedouw, 2005, p. 15).

Many scholars adopt the cultural backlash and economic grievance theses to explain the rise of right-wing populist support (Inglehart & Norris, 2016; Rettberg, 2020). The cultural backlash thesis claims that people will support right-wing populist ideas once they believe their culture is being endangered by “the New Left ideas” (Rettberg, 2020, p. 105). In efforts to protect the ethnic-national identity, right-wing populists will appeal to anti-immigrant attitudes. Likewise, the economic grievance argument emphasizes that economic marginalization leads to populist support. However, in a bid to revise the economic grievance thesis, scholars adopt the relative deprivation theory to explain the support for right-wing populist movements. Essentially, this argument purports that structural inequalities result in economic declinism, thereby increasing perceptions of economic deprivation among individuals (Rettberg, 2020). In contrast, Gidron and Hall (2018) propose their social integration thesis, which combines both economic grievances and cultural insecurities, suggesting that people are more inclined to support populist ideas when they feel to have been ‘left-behind’ economically, culturally, and politically. Rettberg (2020) builds on Gidron and Hall’s argument by analyzing cultural structures, social integration, and relative economic deprivation together, thereby proposing that increasing sentiments of socioeconomic declinism increase support for right-wing populist attitudes.

In political terms, European right-wing populist leaders attempt to establish a model of democracy that focuses on the interests of the native people. They believe that free and fair elections are insufficient as conventional political parties do not give voters a voice in critical

issues such as immigration and European integration (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013). As a result, these leaders aim to win the support of the 'silent majority,' not by advocating socio-economic policies, but by advancing the exclusion of outgroups. For example, Marine Le Pen claimed to "return the word to the people," in which 'the people' are given a direct role in the decision-making process (as cited in Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013, p. 163). This type of appeal to the nation is often made through the direct approval of 'the people' in the form of referendums and mass gatherings. Likewise, the FPÖ demanded referendums on issues surrounding immigrants, the EU, party patronage and privileges, and the deposition of political elites, in which these initiatives were intended to "to break the power of 'the corrupt elite' and give political power back to 'the pure people'" (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2013, p. 163). While traditional European parties are predominantly represented by older-middle class white men with high levels of education, exclusionary populist parties, such as FN and FPÖ, have had higher levels of blue-collar workers as party representatives and have tended to have young representatives from the public or private sector, often without university backgrounds (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013). Hence, European radical right populist parties are exclusionary in their appeal only to native populations, and their representatives are not limited by political class, meaning that they are more representative of 'the common people' (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013).

Right-wing populist leaders oppose the advancement of political and religious rights for outgroups to capitalize on working-class citizens' concerns over cultural and economic marginalization, thereby promoting an exclusionary European sentiment, provoking emotional responses, and increasing support among 'the people.' For example, the FN rejected the official recognition of Islamic honorary services and sought to restrict the number of mosques in France

(Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013). This is emblematic of how European right-wing exclusionary populists are more likely than the left to abuse “‘less politically correct’ concerns such as perceived ethnic, local and regional grievances, while they generally [have] adapted to neoliberalism’s anti-state and individualist emphasis” (March, 2007, p. 66). Thus, given the exclusivity of European populist parties, Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2013) argue that these parties abide by an ethnic democracy that focuses on privileging the rights of native-born citizens and the dominant culture while excluding the rights of immigrants, refugees, and minorities.

Latin American Inclusionary Populism. In contrast to exclusionary populism, inclusionary populism emphasizes the political and economic inclusion of marginalized and excluded people within the definition of ‘the common people.’ Accordingly, various strategies have been adopted by populists to foster a sense of belonging among the excluded social strata unaffiliated to established parties, including mass rallies, the discourse of ‘us’ vs. ‘them,’ and the appeal to a shared mythical past (Filc, 2015). In doing so, inclusionary populist leaders give recognition and self-worth to the excluded people as the discourse positions them at the centre of the nation, thereby increasing their mobilization (Filc, 2015; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013). Thus, discourse, as well as personalized and charismatic leadership, play an essential role for the success of inclusionary populist movements as the leaders become the sole political representation of the excluded people and win power through the “direct, unmediated, uninstitutionalized support from large numbers of mostly unorganized followers” (Aguilar & Carlin, 2017, p. 14).

Unlike European populism, Latin American populism is predominantly inclusive. While there are significant differences between the various types of populist phenomena emerging in Latin America, the literature on populism in this region is divided into three waves: first,

classical populism of the 1940s to the 1960s, which included the expansion of the markets, resulting in rapid social transformations as national societies progressed from rural to urban and industrial (Cammack, 2000; Filc, 2015; Oxfhorn, 1998; Vilas, 1992). Oxfhorn (1998) notes that this was followed by an unstable global political economy and high levels of inflation in Latin America, eventually leading up to the debt crisis of the 1980s, which resulted in the regional collapse of state-led developmentalism. He goes on to assert that this therefore established the foundation for a new neoliberal wave of populism dominated by right-wing populist leaders, including Carlos Menem in Argentina, Fernando Collor de Mello in Brazil, and Alberto Fujimori in Peru. Oxfhorn also observes that, while these leaders continued to adopt populist strategies, they adopted neoliberal economic policies proposed by the IMF, thereby failing to emphasize an anti-imperialist discourse. The third wave, the radical leftist populism, began in the late 1990s and continues into the 21st century. Like the first, leaders in this wave advanced socialist policies while emphasizing giving power back to ‘the people’ and expressing dissent against the establishment, neoliberalism, and Western imperialism (Oxfhorn, 1998).

Contemporary inclusionary Latin American populists have conceptualized ‘the people’ as a multi-ethnic population, which includes distinct excluded groups that have been culturally discriminated against and whose demands have not been considered by the establishment. This includes the middle and lower socioeconomic strata, ethnic minorities, and Indigenous populations. In contrast, ‘the corrupt elite’ represent the members of the political establishment who should be ‘eradicated’ (Filc, 2015). For example, Bolivian President Evo Morales emphasized a discourse that directly attacks the wealthiest members of society while advancing Indigenous rights and alleviating restrictions on coca farmers (Andreucci, 2017; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013; Schamis, 2006). He claimed to be the candidate of “the most

disdained, discriminated against” (as cited in March, 2007, p. 71). Hence, Morales’ reformist framework subverts traditional forms of populism that limit ‘the people’ to a definition rooted in socioeconomic class, thereby excluding the Indigenous population (De la Torre, 2007; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013).

The material inclusion of marginalized groups is addressed through certain policies and programs, thereby associating populism with clientelism as populist leaders render paternalistic social policies in exchange for support (March, 2007; Oxhorn, 1998). According to Oxhorn (1998), plebiscitary politics, paternalistic policies and clientelism are commonly adopted by Latin American populist leaders for the direct and unmediated representation of ‘the people.’ For instance, as Hawkins (2010) reports, Hugo Chávez of Venezuela and Morales adopted various ‘social missions’ funded by the state with two goals. The first was to improve the economic and social conditions of the impoverished and the Indigenous population. The second was to advance their inclusion and participation in policymaking, including poverty reduction programs, health care programs, supply of food and housing services, worker benefits, education reforms, and child benefits (Hawkins, 2010). These social initiatives were mainly subsidized by the increasing value of oil and gas in the global economy and the creation of a new socialist economic development, such as localized economic democratization. These trends thereby increased self-reliance by reducing the influence of foreign capitalists in the region and through regional currencies, financial institutions, and trade treaties (Hawkins, 2010; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013). As such, Chávez and Morales’s inclusionary populist agenda was in direct opposition to Western institutions and neoliberalism and emphasized their compliance with the ideology of Americanismo, which emerged in relation to anti-colonist struggles in the 19th century to protect the identity of the inhabitants of Latin America against imperialist forces (File,

2015; March, 2017). While particular policies were carried out to promote economic growth, increase employment, and income redistribution among the lower and middle classes, many populist leaders instituted taxation policies to further the exclusion of groups that hold the most capital in society (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013). For example, Chávez implemented the ‘luxury tax,’ which increased taxation of non-priority and luxury goods, with the purpose of redistributing wealth to the poor. In doing so, Chávez mobilized the poorest and most marginalized segments of society into the political arena (De la Torre, 2007; Hawkins, 2010).

While Latin American populist leaders aim to strengthen the political inclusion of groups marginalized by the establishment by increasing their representation and political participation, certain groups are purposely politically excluded by a lack of representation and restrictions from engaging in the democratic system. Moreover, these leaders condemned the elitist nature of Latin American governments, calling “for a ‘revolutionary democracy’ or a ‘real democracy’” that aims to empower the “voice of the voiceless” as Latin American representative democracy has failed them (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013, p. 161). For example, in 2009, Morales promulgated Bolivia’s new constitution, which was a direct response to many crises, including the lack of representation by traditional political parties, high levels of social inequality linked to the failure of poverty reduction programs, and cultural discrimination towards Indigenous communities (Hawkins, 2010; Schilling-Vacaflor, 2011). This new constitution aimed to alter the former political, economic, social, symbolic, and legal orders by implementing improved “mechanisms and institutions for participatory democracy,” such as the Constituent Assembly and referendums (Schilling-Vacaflor, 2011, p. 3).

Similarly, Chávez’s government adopted a participatory democratic agenda, referred to as the Bolivarian Revolution, which incorporated and mobilized traditionally disenfranchised

sectors of society, such as women, the poor, and the undereducated. The Bolivarian initiatives sought to establish a “participatory and protagonistic democracy” (Hawkins, 2010, p. 31). While previous Venezuelan governments had implemented various initiatives to distribute power among local governments, including the direct election of municipal officials and the redistribution of wealth among states and municipalities, Chávez sought to reform conventional representative local governments into Communal Councils linked to the national government (Hawkins, 2010). Moreover, Venezuela’s new constitution of 1999 declares participatory democracy to be an essential proposition of governance and citizenship, and constitutional article 62 explicitly states that “All citizens have the right to participate freely in public matters” (as cited in Hawkins, 2010, p. 35). Hence, to effectively achieve the proposed participatory democratic agenda, the government established “the rapid succession of quasi-partisan organizations and social programs that incorporate a heavy emphasis on local participation and decision-making” (Hawkins, 2010, p. 35). One example is the Bolivarian Circles, which consist of groups of approximately ten people who sought to protect the new constitution by fulfilling the interests of their communities. Chávez viewed the Bolivarian Circles as “new forms of genuine democratic grassroots participation” (De la Torre, 2007, p. 387).

However, while Morales and Chávez’s participatory initiatives increased the political participation of the excluded sectors, these efforts “have also undermined the rules of public contestation” as the concentration of power was limited to the executive branch and impeded the right of the opposition to contest the government and propose other perspectives (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013, p. 162). According to Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2013), Morales’s overreliance on ‘the people’ as the “constituent of power” to enact constitutional reforms challenged the system of checks and balances fundamental to modern liberal democracies (p.

162). Likewise, Weyland (2013) argues that Chávez aimed to weaken the power of institutions while increasing his executive powers to commence constitutional reforms.

Hence, the inclusionary character of Latin American populism and the exclusionary character of European populism further demonstrate that populism is a contested term, which is notoriously difficult to define. As a result, ‘the people’ and ‘the elite’ are often perceived as empty signifiers, open to various interpretations by distinct actors as populism is subject to the constant process of re-definition across cultural, historical, political, and regional contexts.

Populism as a ‘Thin-Centred Ideology’

According to Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2013), populism consistently adheres to particular ideological features that are outcomes of resentment and grievances present in distinct regional contexts. As such, all interpretations of populism must acknowledge a wide range of ideological positions and geographical regions. However, Laclau (2005) argues that there scarcely exists any pure form of populism but instead sub-types of populism that represent a particular discourse of certain ideological attributes. Hence, populism in the ideational sense always attaches itself to a host ideology, as demonstrated by comparing exclusionary populism in Europe and inclusionary populism in Latin America.

Although populism is defined as an ideology, it does not have “the same level of intellectual refinement and consistency” as other ideologies, such as communism, liberalism and Marxism (Mudde, 2004, p. 544). As a result, Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2013) characterize populism as a ‘thin-centred ideology’—a term introduced by Michael Freeden (1996)—which signifies a specific set of ideas that are limited in ambition and scope. Thin-centred ideologies are distinct from macro-ideologies because they represent a restricted range of political concepts, the meanings of which often adjust to the understandings and demands of distinct societies,

thereby making them highly context-dependent (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013). In the context of populism, interpretations of its three core features—‘the pure people,’ ‘the corrupt elite,’ and ‘the general will’—vary depending on the setting.

Thin-centred ideologies are frequently combined with a host ideology—which can be a thick ideology, such as socialism and conservatism or a thin-centred ideology, such as ecologism and nationalism (Mudde, 2004; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013). For instance, various radical right-wing populist leaders such as Trump, Marine Le Pen, and Orbán share an electoral discourse centred around nativism, a xenophobic form of nationalism, and authoritarianism (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013). While all three host ideologies are practised alongside populism, these host ideologies, and the leaders who practise them, should not be confused as being attributes of populism itself. Rather, populism should be distinguished from certain attributes that are often combined with but are not a part of it (Mudde, 2004; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013). Likewise, economic and social policies—such as neoliberalism and state-centred development—are not defining features of populism, but rather thick ideologies that may regularly occur together with it.

Hence, populism as a ‘thin-centred ideology’ generates various sub-types of populism, such as exclusionary populism in Europe, which stresses nativist and protectionist ethnic nationalistic appeals, and inclusionary populism in Latin America, which highlights socialist values and socio-economic inclusivity. However, defining populism as an ideology does not hinder all the definitional issues associated with the term (March, 2007).

Towards a Minimal Definition of Populism

While earlier studies on populism, including the work of Ionescu and Gellner (1969), analyzed historical and regional populist phenomena, they failed in their attempt to provide a

minimal definition of populism that can be applied to a wide variety of cases, paving the way for cross-regional comparative research (Deiwiks, 2009; Katsambekis, 2020). Consequently, scholars are further away from reaching a definitional consensus that provides the foundation for empirical comparative research and seeks to avoid the problems of conceptual travelling—the application of concepts to new cases—and conceptual stretching—the distortion that occurs when a concept does not fit new cases. Giovanni Sartori’s (1970) minimal definition framework was among the first to propose guidance in addressing one of the biggest tasks of comparative analysis: to reach broader knowledge by analyzing a wide range of cases throughout history and across various regions. Hence, his work aimed to address the main problems of conceptual travelling and conceptual stretching through a classical approach of categorization. This approach examines the relation across categories in terms of a taxonomic hierarchy, with each category establishing fundamental attributes common to all cases (Sartori, 1970). The foundation of Sartori’s (1970) framework is the understanding of extension and intension: “the extension of a word in the class of things to which the word applies; the intension of a word is the collection of properties which determine the things to which the word applies” (p. 65).

However, many scholars including Collier and Mahon (1993) argue that there appears to be an inversely proportional relationship between the intension and extension: the greater extension when a concept is broader with fewer prescribed attributes, and the greater intension when a concept is specific by possessing a greater number of defining attributes. To avoid the problem of conceptual stretching, Sartori (1970) proposes moving up the ladder of generality, therefore following the law of inverse variation. When moving up the ladder, generality increases, which results in greater extension, and further down an increased amount of defining traits are required to fit the wide range of cases; therefore, intension increases. Hence, Sartori

(1970) argues that general cross-area comparison is challenging because of social and political heterogeneity; therefore, he proposes the ladder of generality, which helps address problems of categorization by allocating defining attributes to classical categories.

Most notably, the ideational approach conforms to Sartori's minimal definition, in which the lowest common denominators that are present in all manifestations of populism—across regional and temporal contexts—are 'the people,' 'the elite,' and the expression of the general will. Moreover, the merit of the minimal definition is that it allows for the recognition of various regional and historical sub-types of populism. For instance, Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser's (2013) geographical distinction framework distinguishes exclusionary right-wing populism prevalent in Europe from inclusionary left-wing populism predominant in Latin America. Although inclusionary and exclusionary manifestations of populism differ in context and ideological attributes, both sub-types share the core conceptual features of populism. However, the meaning of the signifiers 'the people' and 'the establishment' (or 'the other') are not fixed and can mean many different things to many different populists in many different situations. For example, in Latin America's inclusionary context, 'the people' represent the nation within a socioeconomic dimension, while in European exclusionary context, the meaning of the 'the people' is ethnicized and restricted to the native inhabitants (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013). This is not to say that 'the people' have no meaning but rather that the way in which the term is interpreted depends on the particular context, political actors and host ideologies to which the term is being attached.

Similarly, anti-elitism is dependent on the context for its representation, as the signifier—'the elite'—can take different forms, including political, economic, media, legal, and cultural elites (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013). For example, in contemporary Western nations,

criticism is directed towards the political elites, whereas the United States, People's Party in 1892 defended the interests of farmers and directed their opposition towards industrial elites and cosmopolitan intellectuals (Poblete, 2015). Therefore, Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser's (2013) exclusionary versus inclusionary framework is not a defining trait of the minimal definition of populism as not every populist phenomenon is limited to an exclusionary or inclusionary character; rather, it is the consequence of particular populist ideas. Hence, while the signifiers 'the people' and 'the elite' can have many different meanings in many distinct contexts, the minimal definition suggests that all cases of populism involve a conflict between those without power, 'the people,' and those with power 'the elite' (Panizza, 2005).

Like Laclau (2005), Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2013) argue that Sartori's (1970) classical approach is the most effective and flexible method (empirical applicability) when analyzing populism from a comparative approach as it reduces all populist phenomena to a common and minimal core; however, new contributions and debate continue to emerge to address the chameleonic nature of populism. Many scholars argue, in contrast to Sartori's (1970) dilemma of the inversely proportional relationship between the intension and extension of the concepts, that various types of categories do not encompass these attributes. For instance, Collier and Mahon (1993) suggest that the ladder of generality (an overly strict procedure) will result in the wrongful abandonment of a potentially effective and crucial category. As a result, they propose new guidelines to using categorization in comparative analysis, such as alternative types of categories that work parallel to Sartori's framework. Collier and Mahon (1993) introduce two types of non-classical categories—the family resemblance and the radial category—both of which seek to avoid problems of conceptual travelling and conceptual stretching. The first approach represents Ludwig Wittgenstein's framework of family resemblance, which assumes

that distinct attributes from various cases can be employed to define characteristics of the same category. In contrast to Sartori's framework, Wittgenstein's idea suggests that defining attributes of a particular category do not need to be necessarily all shared by each case in the same category; rather, only a limited number of defining attributes are required to be shared across all cases to be a member of the same category.

For instance, Canovan (1981) attempts to follow Wittgenstein's framework of family resemblances by establishing a typology of populism, which explains the equivalence among a multitude of cases across diverse contexts by using two categories: agrarian populism and political populism. As such, she argues that the People's Party, the *Narodniki* in pre-revolutionary Russia, the European agrarian movements of the aftermath of the First World War, the Social Credit Party in Alberta, and Peronism in Argentina all fall under the label of populism. While all these movements are identified as populist without sharing any common tradition, Canovan (1981) claims that there are analogies between one group and another. For example, there are two features that are universally present in populism: the appeal to 'the people' and anti-elitism. Hence, Canovan (1981) is aware of the multitude of movements and leaders that fall under the general heading of populism; therefore, she suggests that a single minimalist definition should not be used; rather, it is better to create a typology that can encompass a great range of distinct experiences perceived from different analytical viewpoints. Consequently, Canovan (1981) deals with diversity by proposing a typology of populism that encompasses two categories—agrarian populism and political populism—both of which are further subdivided into a total of seven distinct sub-fields of populism. The issue with this is that the similarities shared between one group and another are left to the reader to ponder. Thus, Canovan (1981) suggests that a key set of attributes is necessary to define populist movements throughout the world to fit

the typology; however, not all attributes of populism are required to be present in each case to be part of the greater typology. Therefore, each case lacks at least one defining attribute of populism. Laclau (2005), though, criticizes Canovan's work, arguing "that this typology lacks any coherent criterion around which its distinctions are established" (p. 6) and that Canovan fails to mention what are the family resemblances between sub-types. Taggart (2000) and Lutz (1982) likewise suggest that Canovan's (1981) proposed typology fails to mention the common analogies between the wide range of populist movements included in the greater typology (as cited in Deiwi, 2009).

The second approach, known as the radial category, was first introduced by Lakoff (1987), and it fundamentally follows Wittgenstein's framework (as cited in Collier & Mahon, 1993). Similar to the family resemblances framework, Lakoff (1987) believes that it is possible that all 'family members' do not share all defining attributes (as cited in Collier & Mahon, 1993). While both approaches are fundamentally similar, the radial category has a centre-periphery structure in which the centre of the category represents the best prototype of what members of the category should have in common (Collier & Mahon, 1993). In other words, the greater the commonalities between the member and the prototypical centre, the closer to the centre it is located. Hence, members who do not share defining attributes with the centre are located in the periphery (Collier & Mahon, 1993). The radial categorization is widely used in the social sciences; however, in the study of populism, it is difficult for scholars to agree on the relevant attributes of populism to further establish Wittgenstein's framework of family resemblance. Thus, Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2013), as well as Laclau (2005) argue that Sartori's (1970) classical approach is the most effective method when analyzing populism from a comparative approach.

Opposites of Populism: Pluralism and Elitism. While we have already examined the core notions of ‘the pure people’ and ‘the corrupt elite,’ in order to avoid conceptual stretching it is necessary to properly categorize whether a phenomenon is populist or not. Avoiding ambiguity, one must distinguish between the political ideologies that have been proposed by the ideational approach, which are in direct opposition to populism: elitism and pluralism. That being said, cases that adopt solely anti-elitist discourse should not be perceived as populist (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013). Likewise, movements that make a direct appeal to protect the common will and sovereignty of ‘the people’ are not necessarily cases of populism either. Although both elitism and pluralism share minimal characteristics with populism, Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2013; 2017) argue that both concepts are in opposition to populism. While the ideational approach conceptualizes ‘the people’ as a single pure and homogeneous entity, pluralism reflects the multiplicity and diversity of social groups in society, which further helps influence policy and decision-making (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013). Moreover, pluralism being a defining attribute of liberal democracy, proposes that power be equally distributed among diverse ideological and economic interest groups, which particularly emphasizes the rights of minorities. Therefore, pluralists view that politics should express the interests of all groups in society by methods of compromise and consensus (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013). However, pluralists also argue that it is nearly impossible to achieve an absolute common will because elites often abuse their power in the name of ‘the people’; meanwhile, the general will reflect the elite’s desires and interests (Plattner, 2010). According to Akkerman et al. (2014), populists are dubious of the attributes and institutional structures that are inherent to pluralism, including political institutions and policies that protect minority rights. Instead, populists favour direct and personal representation of ‘the people’ by charismatic leaders who embody the

common will of the homogenous and sovereign people (Akkerman et al. 2014; Zaslove, 2008). Although charismatic leadership is not a defining feature of populism, most contemporary populist parties involve affective allegiances to a personalized and charismatic leader, ironically much like elitism (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013).

Furthermore, elitism aligns with the fundamental principle of populism that is the Manichaeian division of society into two opposing groups, ‘the people’ and ‘the elite,’ yet diverges from populism on the morality of each of these entities. In contrast to populism, the very essence of elitism views ‘the people’ as being corrupt and dishonest and perceives the elite as pure and virtuous members of society (Akkerman et al., 2014; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013). Therefore, elitist ideas call for power to be concentrated in the hands of the moral elites due to their perceived intellectual and moral superiority, rather than those of the amoral people. In contrast, pluralism rejects this Manichaeian division, rather viewing politics as an expression of distinct interests and ideas of the heterogeneous social groups in society. Thus, Akkerman et al. (2014) state that, “populist and elitist ideas are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but rather might overlap to some extent” (p. 1328).

Limitations of the Ideational Approach

What distinguishes the ideational approach from other populist paradigms is the characterization of populism as an ideology, the belief that what best describes this ideology is a moralist view of division in society, the construction of a pure and homogenous collective identity and populist rejection of pluralism (Katsambekis, 2020). According to Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2017), “moralism is the essence of the populist division” (as cited in Katsambekis, 2020, p. 7); similarly, Müller’s (2017) analysis of populism proposes a specific ‘moralistic imagination’ of politics, which distinguishes between the morally good people and

the evil and corrupt establishment. Thus, Müller (2017) and Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2017) agree that morality is a necessary characteristic to identifying populist experiences, and therefore actors who fail to organize its discourse around morality yet make an appeal to ‘the people’ against ‘the elite’ are not considered populist; rather, they might be considered anti-establishment or anti-systemic movements.

Morality Thesis

Despite the empirical populist experiences they present, Müller (2017) and Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2017) fail to mention why the mobilization of ‘the people’ against the establishment must inevitably acquire a moral dimension and how to define types of moralization that are specific to populism itself as features of purity and moralistic idealization are present in all political discourses (as cited in Stavrakakis & Jäger, 2018). For example, if moralization describes populism’s aim to divide society into two homogeneously yet opposed camps—in which the popular camp is glorified and the enemy camp is criticized as immoral, evil and corrupt—it is not just populists who stress a moralized rhetoric. In fact, all political discourses, including anti-populist discourses, use some type of moral, dualistic rhetoric such as pure/corrupt, good/bad and right/wrong. For instance, European right-wing parties stress the exclusion of the dangerous and evil ‘other’—predominantly Muslims who are perceived as a threat to the European way of life.

However, Müller’s (2017) argument seems inconsistent and self-contradicting as he also argues that the moral dimension is not restricted to populist discourse; indeed, all political discourse functions through moralistic assertions. Likewise, Mouffe (2005) has emphasized the moralistic nature of contemporary European political actors on both sides of the political spectrum, particularly in the 1990s and 2000s, during the prominence of social democratic

hegemonic forces in Europe. This demonstrates that political discourses have a history of using the language of morality and that this practice is not a unique feature of populism (Mouffe, 2005). Thus, the morality thesis as an essential feature of populism seems to weaken the particularity of the phenomenon and challenge the functionality of the minimal definition.

Anti-Pluralist and Homogeneity Theses

According to ideational scholars, including Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2017) and Hawkins (2010), populists are not only required to establish a definition of ‘the people’ that is “good, morally superior and pure” but also a homogenous entity which represses individuality (Katsambekis, 2020, p. 8). In this definition, ‘the people’—who represents society as a whole—are a monistic group all sharing the same interests and values, therefore minimizing distinctions and individuality, and thus fundamentally rejecting the liberal principle of pluralism (Markou, 2017a). However, Katsambekis (2020) challenges this claim by arguing that embracing the homogeneity and anti-pluralist theses as defining attributes of populism excludes nearly all inclusionary left-wing populist actors, who are classified as populists by ideational scholars. For example, Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2013) present Morales and Chávez as archetypal inclusionary populist leaders although their discourse is essentially pluralistic. Likewise, Mudde (2004) labels Syriza as populist yet fails to mention any examples of Syriza’s rejection of pluralism. Moreover, while Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2017) present examples of contemporary right-wing populist movements that convey anti-pluralist appeals, they fail to support their argument in that they do not mention why it is populism that expresses anti-pluralist aims rather than the host ideology it has attached itself to that provokes this—such as nativism or nationalism. Thus, the anti-pluralist thesis is ambiguous and may lead to normative

bias as ideational scholars fail to define the alleged anti-pluralist features specific to populism and not the attributes of ideologies that may appear alongside it.

Syriza's inclusionary populism challenges all definitions of populism that reject pluralism because the essence of Syriza's agenda is a pluralistic view of society aimed at recognizing and protecting the rights of minorities. Thus, while many cases of European right-wing exclusionary populist parties convey anti-pluralist appeals and aim to construct a homogenous political community that shares one interest and identity, European left-wing inclusionary populist parties such as Syriza and Podemos support a pluralistic, contingent, and non-essentialist perspective of 'the people' (De la Torre, 2019). Therefore, the anti-pluralist and homogenous theses should not be perceived as defining traits of populism as many cases of existing populism do not conform to these criteria but rather attributes of ideologies often associated with right-wing populism such as nativism, nationalism and authoritarianism. Consequently, Mudde (2004) and Müller's (2017) argument is unclear as to how pluralism is defined in populist contexts and what particularly makes populism an anti-pluralist view: its antagonistic division of society into two camps, a homogenous people, or right-wing exclusionary populists' rejection of minority rights. For instance, Hawkins (2009) describes pluralism as a system that emphasizes respect for diversity and individuality, as well as the protection and recognition of minority rights in majority rule; moreover, he "openly respects formal rights and liberties, and it treats opponents with courtesy, as legitimate political actors" (as cited in Katsambekis, 2020, p. 8). Unlike Mudde (2004) and Müller (2017), Hawkins (2009) offers a precise definition of pluralism to support the argument that populism is in contrast to pluralism (as cited in Katsambekis, 2020). Given the many inconsistencies within the ideational approach, Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2017) fail to demonstrate how their proposed core features of populism—morality, homogeneity and anti-

pluralism—supposedly present in all populist experiences actually differ from other forms of political discourses. Hence, the contradictions and deficiencies within this approach further demonstrate that it is an ambiguous approach open to argument. To this end, Laclau's discursive approach offers a more accurate and flexible interpretation to analyze the plurality of populist experiences and proposes a more contemplative theoretical principle that can overcome normative biases in the research.

CHAPTER 3

CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter examines Laclau's discursive approach, which is the conceptual and theoretical framework adopted to challenge the geographically differentiated framework and ideational approach used to define populism. This chapter begins by introducing an in-depth study of Laclau's discursive approach, which understands populism as a political logic of articulation. The chapter then explores the three steps of this logic of articulation: (1) the construction of an antagonistic internal frontier dividing 'the people' from the establishment and elite, (2) the construction of a chain of equivalence, and (3) the representation of 'the people.' Laclau draws on post-structuralist theory, the current study's theoretical framework, to operationalize the concepts of articulation, discourse, hegemony, and antagonism, each of which are fundamental aspects of his theory of populism. In order to clarify who belongs and how they belong to 'the people' within a pluralistic society, the chapter explores the discursive politics that populists engage in to include and exclude particular social groups and identities. Hence, analyzing populism through the post-structuralist discourse demonstrates the advantages of Laclau's model and sets the foundation to understanding Syriza's inclusionary populism as it adopts a minimal discursive definition of populism.

Populism is a vague and contested term, the interpretation of which may differ between regions and within regions. When identified within structural provisions, it can also differ depending on the establishment against which it is mobilizing. Moreover, the plurality of definitions found in the literature makes it difficult to determine the relevant and specific attributes that form a populist movement. The contemporary rise of European left-wing populist movements has led to a renewed interest in the works of Laclau and Mouffe, particularly their

theories of hegemony, populism, and representation. Drawing on post-analytical thought, Lacanian psychoanalysis and the post-structuralist theory, Laclau and Mouffe founded the Essex School of Discourse Analysis, which sets the theoretical foundation for Laclau's theory of populism, prompting many scholars to understand populism through a discursive lens.

Conceptual Framework: Laclau's Discursive Theory of Populism

While Laclau's early work on populism, *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory* (1979), was criticized for its problematic normative assumptions, decades later he revised his theoretical analysis in *On Populist Reason (OPR)* (2005), in which he unites populism with politics "through the language and practice of hegemony" (Arditi, 2010, p. 491). However, prior to challenging the marginalized status of populism, Laclau developed a performative theory of hegemony in his joint work with Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy (HSS)* in 1985. Their theory of hegemony served as the foundation for Laclau's revised theory of populism in *OPR*, in which he attempts to link the concepts of hegemony, politics, and populism. Hence, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) characterize their work as post-Marxist because it is grounded in a Marxist interpretation of hegemony while attempting to break away from the central principles of Marxism, primarily class essentialism.

Populism as a Political Logic of Articulation

In contrast to Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser's (2013) definition, which limits understanding of populism to particular ideological content, Laclau (2005) understands populism as a political logic of articulation that can be found in all political movements across the political spectrum as it represents a political discourse that is not limited to specific social classes, ideologies, or types of society. This political logic of articulation is characterized by three elements: (1) the creation of an antagonistic relation dividing 'the people' from the ideology of

the dominant bloc, (2) the formation of a chain of equivalence, meaning the combination of distinct popular demands left unfulfilled by the power bloc, and (3) the representation of the chain of equivalence through the empty signifier (Laclau, 2005, as cited in Katsambekis, 2020). As such, Laclau (2005) views all politics to be populist, while some more than others because all politics engage in the ‘social logic’ of populism, that is the conflict between the ‘underdog’ (‘the people’) and the ideology of the dominant bloc, and all politics occur through the synthesis of distinctive popular demands. Moreover, populism as a political logic does not perceive charismatic leadership to be a defining feature of populism; rather, populist discourse is directed by an empty signifier that may or may not be a leader (Mazzolini, 2018; Rummens, 2009). Like Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2013), Laclau’s (2005) populist model adopts Sartori’s (1970) minimal definition yet differs regarding the ‘minimal discursive criteria’ essential to identify populist experiences: people-centrism and anti-elitism. People-centrism describes the priority given to ‘the people,’ who represent the nodal point in populist discourse; anti-elitism refers to the division of society into two antagonistic camps, ‘us’ and ‘them,’ the first being ‘the people’ and the latter being the establishment and political elites who are in opposition to the interests of ‘the people’ (Katsambekis, 2020). Prior to examining the theoretical framework employed to support Laclau’s populist model, it is necessary to provide an in-depth explanation of the key theoretical components belonging to Laclau’s theory of populism: demands, antagonism, chain of equivalence, and the empty signifier.

The representation of ‘the people’ occurs when a sequence of distinct social demands is not recognized by the institutional system; consequently, these unsatisfied demands construct a chain of equivalence on the basis of their shared antagonism against an institutionalized ‘other.’ Laclau (2005) distinguishes between ‘institutional’ (democratic) and ‘extra-institutional’

(popular) demands, meaning those that can be addressed by the establishment, and those that challenge it. As a result, one of these many popular demands (signifiers) will “empty itself of its particular content” and act as the empty signifier as it will collectively represent the demands of the newly formed ‘popular identity’ (Laclau, 2005, as cited in Thomassen, 2005, p. 292). The empty signifier is then capitalized on by political leaders who make an appeal to the frustrated people and begin to encourage the formation of a collective identity. Consequently, ‘the people’ construct an internal agonistic frontier—relation of exclusion—between themselves and the existing power structure, and, if successful in challenging the existing hegemonic discourse, they will eventually overthrow the current establishment and establish their own exclusionary project (Laclau, 2005, as cited in Rummens, 2009). Through the practice of hegemonic articulation, the concept of ‘the people’ is created and is then used as the vessel through which shared values and ideas are brought together under a historical bloc (Arditi, 2010). This collective identity includes individuals from various social groups who belong to different political struggles and unite against a shared opposition (Laclau, 2005).

The Construction of ‘the People.’ The formation of ‘the people’ is associated with the way in which Laclau (2005) understands ‘the people.’ Drawing on Jacques Rancière’s notion of demos, Laclau (2005) divides ‘the people’ between the *populus* (the whole) and the *plebs* (part), yet populism emerges when part of ‘the people’ is recognized with the whole, and there exists a radical exclusion within society. Likewise, Canovan (2005) asserts that references to ‘the people’ are at once part and whole, “both a privileged part of the population, claiming universality, and the excluded part of the plebs fighting for inclusion” (as cited in Katsambekis, 2020, p. 4). Hence, populism arises when a partiality ought to work as a totality (Biglieri & Perelló, 2011).

For Laclau (2005), ‘the people’ act as a universal subject, aiming to achieve the particular and shared demands of the various identities within the category of ‘the people.’ However, universality is characterized by particularism, meaning each individual attempts to hegemonize their own particular demands and advance them as universal (Medianu, 2009). Hence, while individuals belong to a wider shared framework (‘the people’), individual identities are not suppressed, thereby demonstrating the necessary interdependence between the universal and the particular for the construction of a legitimate political force—a new hegemonic social order—that will overthrow the existing political order (Medianu, 2009). In contrast to critics who draw on the philosophical work of Rousseau to argue that social unity (universality) is a threat to the social multiplicity and the inclusivity of heterogeneity that defines liberal democracies, Laclau (2005) suggests that plurality can only occur in a setting that accepts universal aims and values (general will).

Hence, all efforts that aim to construct a universal alternative hegemonic project against the existing power bloc must appeal to and address the heterogeneity of isolated identities, which Laclau and Mouffe (1985) refer to as ‘the logic of difference.’ Laclau and Mouffe (1985) note that the concept of ‘the people’ is consequently constructed when the logic of difference is transformed into a ‘logic of equivalence’ in which distinct fragmented demands are met because of their shared antagonism and rejection directed towards the establishment. This constitutes their common denominator and results in the creation of a broad chain of equivalence between distinct demands (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, as cited in Stengel & Nabers, 2019). Particular demands are then transformed into more general demands as particular demands now share at least one common feature (content) with other particular demands—that of having been unfulfilled and rejected by the establishment. Thus, while the logic of difference emphasizes the

difference of content between demands, the logic of equivalence establishes the conditions (common features) for an alliance between diverse antagonistic forces to construct a hegemonic project (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, as cited in Stengel & Nabers, 2019).

Drawing on post-structuralist thoughts, particularly Lacanian psychoanalysis and the work of Derrida on sign and meaning, Laclau (2005) emphasizes the contingent nature of identities. These identities are constantly redefined and reconstructed as actors are not the echo of already-existing identities but rather constitutive of those identities based on their link to other identities (or other signifiers) from whom they construct their meaning. Laclau (2005) confirms that the universal does exist, and universality is necessary for a new social order to become a hegemonic moral and intellectual force in society. However, he argues that the universal is an ‘empty place’ deprived of any pre-given identity and is always open to hegemonic articulation as identities are in the constant process of construction. Thus, like Rousseau’s contingent general will, Laclau (2005) argues that the practice of articulation that unites different subjects, groups, and individuals to construct a collective will is marked by contingency, meaning all identities are incomplete as they are characterized by a constitutive lack. As a result, identities are always in the ongoing process of construction and fluctuation.

Given that society is marked by the impossibility of an identity fully constituting itself—as each signifier acquires its meaning based on the relation it constructs with other signifiers—Laclau (2005) argues that ‘the people’ emerge in “the unachievable search for the fulfilment of the community” as a whole (as cited in Biglieri & Perelló, 2011, p. 57). While Laclau (1990) abandons the idea of social totality in Marxism (economic structure), suggesting that “society, as a unitary and intelligible object which grounds its own partial processes, is an impossibility” (p. 90) he argues that because elements are contingent and relational, this play of differences

requires a particular fixation (alliance), which will avoid diffusion of meaning, thereby making signification impossible. Hence, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) draw on Lacan's notion of nodal point (*point de captation*)—signifier around which collective identities join together—to introduce their concept of the empty signifier, which acts as the universal representation of all elements within the chain of equivalence. The empty signifier “allows a certain suture or fixation—always partial—of the play of signification so that the signifier chain can acquire some meaning” (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, as cited in Biglieri & Perelló, 2011, p. 49). In other words, the empty signifier represents the point of relation in which disparate signifiers coalesce, thereby allowing the partial fixation of meaning to emerge for all signifiers of the chain. Through the use of hegemonic articulation, which establishes an antagonistic frontier dividing ‘us’ from ‘them,’ the different demands construct a chain of equivalence, and the empty signifier represents the totality of relations and differences in the chain. For instance, Laclau (2005) gives the example of former President of Argentina, Juan Perón, who acted as an empty signifier and point of identification for disparate groups in Argentinian society. As such, Laclau (2005) views discourse as a ‘structured totality,’ meaning that, while the empty signifier (‘the people’) seeks to represent a totality, this process is unachievable and impossible. However, it is essential because it is the impossibility of social relations that creates the multiplicity of heterogeneities in society (Laclau, 2005). The social order is not a homogenous entity as there is nothing in common between the plurality of identities in society except for the impossibility of them fully constituting themselves and their heterogeneity (Laclau, 1985, as cited in Biglieri & Perelló, 2011). Thus, “‘the people’ are never truly present, physically, as a whole or coherent totality,” yet it is part of ‘the people,’ which asserts the representation of the whole (Katsambekis, 2020, p. 3).

Theoretical Framework: Post-Structuralist Discourse Theory

Given the core elements of Laclau's populist model, the Essex School of Discourse Analysis—which represents a post-structuralist reformulation of Marxian social theory—presents the theoretical foundation for his populist model. Though there exist many models that analyze populism through a discursive methodological framework within the Essex School of Discourse Analysis, this study will solely examine the dominant post-structuralist discourse theory developed by Laclau and Mouffe (1985), which attempts to break away from class reductionism and economic determinism in Marxist theory and move towards indeterminacy, contingency and a political logic (Jacobs, 2019).

Beginning with a brief description of post-structuralism sets the groundwork for the post-structuralist discourse theory. The analysis of the Gramscian concept of hegemony and its significant role in discourse follows as it is only through hegemonic practices that populists can construct 'the people.'

Post-structuralism

Post-structuralism emerged in France in the late 1960s during a period of political turmoil. Accompanied by a rise of youth countercultural movement, the politicization of sexuality, second-wave feminism, and new social movements, there was an insistence on contingency and diversity that went beyond class-based politics, thereby becoming lasting themes in post-structuralist theory (Wenman, 2013). In post-structuralist thought, structuralism's defining tenets, particularly its principle of the fixed relationship between the signifier and its signified, are criticized and rejected. While there are various post-structuralist streams of thought, such as the writings of Foucault, Lacan, and Althusser, each of whom was influenced by Saussurean linguistics, the early work of French philosopher Jacques Derrida was the first to

propose some theoretical limitations to structuralism and set the tenets of post-structuralism (Wenman, 2013). However, Derrida's work does not disregard structuralism; instead, he introduces a renewed account of meaning and expands on the idea of the arbitrary nature of the signifier. In contrast to the structuralist approach, post-structuralism refuses the distinction between the signifier and the signified. While Derrida (1976) builds upon Saussure's argument that signs are dependent on each other for their meaning, he argues that other signs (words) were always present within the meaning of a single sign by trace (as cited in Wenman, 2013). Therefore, concepts are nothing more than words used to describe other words. Hence, post-structuralists emphasize the ambiguities in the structure of meanings.

In contrast to the problem of essentialism—"the idea that a society, the human subject, or the objects that we encounter in social life, have fixed essences that exhaust what these entities are"—Marxian post-structuralism emphasizes how systems of meanings are essentially incomplete and not fixed, thereby hindering the full formation of discursive structures (Howarth, 2010, p. 311). Hence, Derrida (1976) argues that discursive structures are distinguished by incompletions, exclusions, and interferences that cannot be limited to an essential logic (as cited Howarth, 2010). Consequently, discourses display structural undecidability, in which the argumentative rationale of the discourse can vary depending on one's interpretation (Howarth, 2010). Derrida's most famous work, *Of Grammatology*, written in 1976, deconstructs the work of philosophers and linguists, including Saussure, Lévi-Strauss, and Rousseau. While Rousseau perceives culture and writing to be corrupt, and nature and speech to be good, virtuous, and present, Derrida (1976) proposes the logic of supplementarity to explain the binary opposition between nature/culture and speech/writing (as cited in Bernasconi, 2014; as cited in Howarth, 2010). Moreover, Derrida (1976) argues that the *supplément* is paradoxical as it is an outside

addition to complete a thing that is initially incomplete or to add to something already complete in itself (as cited in Bernasconi, 2014; as cited in Howarth, 2010). Thus, the *supplément* accounts for the unity of two gestures, and the logic of supplementarity emphasizes that all structures are characterized by the absence of the original; therefore, the original becomes a *supplément* that is interrelated to another *supplément* required to explain it. As a result, structures are dependent on each other for meaning and cannot be viewed as separate entities. Similarly, Jacques Lacan's (1998) psychoanalysis theory emphasizes how identities are always marked by incompleteness and that individual identities are therefore constructed through their identification with other identities (signifiers) (as cited in Thomassen, 2016).

In their post-structuralist discourse theory, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) draw on Derridean deconstruction and Lacanian psychoanalysis, which both suggest that all signifiers (discursive structures) are marked by a lack. Based on this, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) consider all signs and concepts regarding populism to be floating signifiers that can be articulated in various ways and in which meaning is non-fixed. The constitutive 'lack' in that dis-articulation and re-articulation are constantly changing and evolving because the entity of 'the people' and the identity of 'the people' are never fixed; thus, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) suggest that some demands and identities are more represented than others by the empty signifier, resulting in some being excluded and marginalized. As a result, Laclau (2005) argues that the construction of 'the people' is only possible through representation, and it is impossible to construct 'the people' without power relations and the rejection of certain demands. However, some signifiers (demands and identities) are more likely than others to become the representation of 'the people.' For example, the idea of 'the people' in right-wing populism is often associated with white, European men (Thomassen, 2019). While it is difficult to determine which identities belong to

‘the people’ and those that are excluded, Thomassen (2019) suggests that “there will always be exclusion and marginalization” (p. 338). As such, Laclau (2005) introduces the term, heterogeneity, which refers to identities that are excluded from ‘the people’ and ‘the other.’ Within the chain of equivalence, there also exists heterogeneity “because of the differences between different parts of the chain and between the empty signifier and parts of the chain” (Laclau, 2005, as cited in Thomassen, 2019, p. 338).

The fusion of various social groups and the relation between the empty signifier and the chain of equivalence are representational as they are contingent and construct ‘the people’ (Laclau, 2005, as cited in Thomassen, 2019). According to Laclau (2005), there is no collective identity without antagonism, and given that collective identities are an essential part of politics, politics, therefore, does not exist without antagonism. Consequently, the struggle between populist movements and the establishment is a hegemonic struggle for power, and populism is seen as a type of hegemony that challenges the existing order with the aim of establishing a new one (Laclau, 2005).

Hegemony

The concept of hegemony is a central attribute of the post-structuralist discourse theory as it unites the ideas of power, ideology, and domination. While hegemony is perceived as a peripheral and territorial concept in Marxist theory, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) argue “that every level of society and of social change can be understood through the logic of hegemony” (as cited in Thomassen, 2016, p. 165). Like the concept of populism, hegemony is a contested term with several interpretations in the literature. However, Antonio Gramsci’s (1971) conceptualization of hegemony remains the main strand applied to the contemporary study of global politics. Gramsci’s (1971) theory of cultural hegemony explains how the ruling class—individuals in

positions of power and influence—use hegemonic ideas to obtain domination over the subjugated classes, thereby maintaining power in capitalist societies. As such, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) draw on Gramsci’s theory of cultural hegemony to explain how political elites—including populist leaders—can maintain power, not through coercion or economic forces, but domination through ideology that induces consent to the rule of the leading groups in society by establishing a hegemonic discourse.

As predicted by Karl Marx, capitalism will inevitably result in a working-class revolution because it is built on class exploitation by the dominant class. However, proletarian revolutionary struggles had failed to occur in capitalist nations of Western Europe; thus, Gramsci (1971) was interested in examining why the Marxist revolutionary strategy was unsuccessful. Consequently, Gramsci re-examines Marxist theory and proposes an alternative that challenges the hegemonic order to mobilize the working class and generate social change. Throughout his prison notebooks, Gramsci developed a variety of notions, which are all interdependent and provide the basis for his theory of hegemony. Although Gramsci’s interpretation of hegemony emerges from a Marxist analysis that the dominant ideology of society reflects the interests and beliefs of the ruling class, he disagrees with the traditional Marxist perspective of how the dominant class rules solely through coercive actions. Instead, inspired by Machiavelli’s philosophy of power, Gramsci argues that power and legitimacy can only be attained through a combination of direct physical coercion exercised by political society (military forces) and consent from civil society—particularly among subordinate classes. Hence, Gramsci characterizes the ‘integral state’ as a balance between political and civil society, in which consent and coercive forces are interrelated, and one does not exist without the other (as cited in Böhm, 2018).

Furthermore, consent to the ruling class is gained through what is generally referred to as ‘common sense’ (Sotiris, 2018). When values and norms propagated by the ruling class through institutions become accepted by citizens as ‘common sense,’ ideology provides legitimacy for those in power, thereby maintaining the status quo. Therefore, commonsensical approaches prevent citizens from perceiving overarching institutional socio-economic exploitation attained by cultural hegemony. As a result, the dominant bloc achieves power by manipulating language, culture, and morality. Moreover, the transformation of social class ideas into ‘common sense’ is achieved by spreading ideology through material and institutional structures, such as schools, churches, and the media (Böhm, 2018). However, in order to challenge the ruling class and bring about structural change, Gramsci (1971) proposes the creation of an alternative historical bloc, which is the foundation for ‘counter-hegemony.’ The historical bloc refers to the alliance formed between social forces: At the national level, it represents social groups, such as the ruling class, that hold domination over subordinate groups (Böhm, 2018). While hegemony is essential for the development of a historical bloc, Gramsci (1971) argues that the relationship between hegemony and the historical bloc is constantly reconstituted and recomposed and therefore never fixed. For example, during times of societal crisis, the hegemony of the ruling class is at risk of being destabilized. As a result, a new historical bloc will emerge, which will empower counter-hegemonic initiatives and lead to a passive revolution. Additionally, Gramsci (1971) emphasizes the significance of moral and intellectual leadership in achieving structural and social change as it forms the collective will through which ideological unity is established between social class forces.

While Gramsci’s theorization of hegemony is an advancement, the remodel of the Marxist base-superstructure relationship advanced by Gramsci is subject to criticism. In *HSS*,

Laclau and Mouffe (1985) challenge the validity of the base-superstructure model as they criticize Gramsci for continuing to understand the identity of ‘the people’ only through the lens of the means of production. Notably, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) begin by questioning the insistent class nature of the unifying hegemonic discourse principle in the Gramscian approach and state that “there exists no foundational ground that orders society and assigns fixed identities to the subject” (as cited in Mazzolini, 2018, p. 36). As an alternative, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) introduce the theory of radical democracy in which they reconsider the relevance of class identity in achieving universal social change and emphasize the significance of the emergence of new social movements—not necessarily centred around class—in spreading principles of freedom and equality in society. With the contemporary Left struggling to preserve the significance of class solidarity, Laclau and Mouffe’s critique of Marx is important in shaping the discourse of existing inclusionary left-wing populist parties, such as Syriza and Podemos. Thus, hegemony refers to the process through which individuals give their consent in support of the ruling bloc.

Given that identities are contingent, and hegemony is not limited to class struggles, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) suggest that it is through the process of hegemonic articulation (discourse) that populists construct an antagonistic relationship between the collective subject of change (‘the people’) and the power bloc. Thus, by linking the concepts of discourse, antagonism, power, and domination (hegemony), Laclau (2005) develops his theory of populism and hypothesizes how populist subjects can establish and propagate their own hegemonic discourse that will generate social change.

Laclau’s Theory of Representation

Since the turn of the 21st-century, the political theory of representation has witnessed two major advancements: first, ‘the representative turn,’ in which political representation moves

beyond formal political institutions and rather views representation as a general category; and the second, the ‘constructivist turn,’ in which the construction of political identities is the result of the process of representation (Thomassen, 2019). Therefore, political representation is understood “not as the reflection of already existing interests and identities, but as constitutive of those interests and identities” (Thomassen, 2019, p. 330). Though the constructivist turn emerged well after the early work of Laclau, many theorists of the constructivist turn have identified his writings as an inspiration for this new model of political representation. Hence, while traditional understandings of political representation that limited representation to formal political institutions and mirror already existing interests and identities, Laclau and Mouffe’s model of representation breaks away from this and views representation as a general category that is performative and constitutive (Thomassen, 2019).

Representation to Articulation

While one of the two conceptions of representation, ‘the model of representation,’ introduced in *HSS* is derived from the Marxist tradition, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) reject this model. In this rejected model, representation mirrors the class character of contemporary capitalist society. In other words, Marxist theory limits identities to class struggle and the already-constructed interests of the class-based collective identity (Thomassen, 2019). Therefore, this model of representation is unidirectional as the level of representation is independent of the represented, and representation can be limited to an echo of the represented, although representation may be distorted (Thomassen, 2019). Laclau and Mouffe (1985) propose a new model known as articulation. Articulation plays a performative role in which it does not only demonstrate but constitutes what is articulated. Therefore, political identities are dependent on the contingent discursive articulation through which they are represented (Thomassen, 2019).

While concepts of hegemony, representation and populism are not emphasized in Marxist theory, Laclau's theory of populism emerged as an improvement of Marxist thought, in which the logic of populism is understood as a general logic of hegemony and politics (Thomassen, 2019). In this way, Laclau and Mouffe apply their model of representation to their understanding of hegemony as articulating identities via a novel method (as cited in Thomassen, 2019). As such, hegemony and counter-hegemony represent the dis-articulation and re-articulation of identities, in which the concept of 'the people' is not a given entity but rather is constructed through articulatory practices, namely hegemonic discourse (Thomassen, 2016; 2019). Given the theoretical background of the concept of representation, it is critical to further explore the relationship between Laclau's model of representation and the construction of the popular subject in populist discourse.

Populism as Articulation. In contrast to the ideational approach, Laclau's (2005) understanding of populism as a political logic of articulation highlights the dependency between populism's ideological content and its stylistic, discursive and performative practice (as cited in Ballacci, 2017). This, therefore, demonstrates that articulatory practices are not independent of political content but rather constructed by it. More explicitly, Laclau (2005) argues that the way in which populists assert that they represent 'the people' "is ontologically constitutive since its style—characterized as vague, radical, strongly emotive and figurative—is fundamental for fostering the division of society into two blocs" (as cited in Ballacci, 2017, p. 3). In other words, Laclau (2005) suggests that populism is a discourse—also called an articulation—that constructs what it asserts that it represents, that is 'the people.' As such, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) describe articulation as any practice that establishes "a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practise" (as cited in Thomassen, 2019, p. 334). In this

context, discourse is defined as “the structured totality resulting from the articulatory practice” (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, as cited in Biglieri & Perelló, 2011, p. 48). Thus, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) emphasize that discourse is not just limited to linguistic elements—such as speech and writing—but refers to any social relation that produces meaning. A discursive structure represents an articulatory practice that constructs social relations (Howarth, 2010). In a populist context, the empty signifier (such as ‘the people’) represents a hegemonic articulation because, in an effort to fill the constitutive ‘lack,’ it gives partial fixation of meaning to each signifier in the chain and assumes the representation of the totality of signifiers.

In his preliminary writings, Laclau starts by linking populism to a crisis of transformism; however, in his later work, *OPR*, he further develops his former argument by understanding populism as an articulatory practice and explicitly connects populism to representation. Laclau (2005) states that the “crisis of representation... is at the root of any populist, anti-institutional outburst” (as cited in Thomassen, 2019, p. 331). Representation plays a crucial role in all political movements, particularly in the process of constructing ‘the people’ in populist discourse. As such, the representation of ‘the people’ is a demonstrative example of representation as performative and constitutive. This is because particular demands that are not being addressed by the establishment through the process of hegemonic articulation are united without sharing any commonalities (Thomassen, 2019). Hence, populism paves the way to understanding the construction of collective identities and the category of representation because ‘the people’ cannot be constructed without claims to their representation, and therefore populist discourse of ‘the people’ is dependent upon representation.

While Laclau and Müller both agree that ‘the people’ are representational, they differ in the interpretation of the implications of this representation. Müller (2017) argues that populist

claims are manipulative in that populist leaders will create a specific image of who belongs and how they belong to ‘the people’ within a pluralistic society. However, Laclau (2005) suggests that representation is inherent to the anti-essentialist approach of politics; therefore, he views all politics as representational, and his approach to populism demonstrates that politics are dependent on the representation and formation of identities and interests rather than reiterating them within political institutions. Furthermore, Müller’s (2017) conception of populism is similar to Laclau’s in that he argues that populism concerns the relation between elites and ‘the people’ and is a direct response to a crisis of political institutions. Nonetheless, Müller (2017) also views populism as a threat to contemporary liberal democracy as he suggests that it fails to embrace liberal democratic institutions and party competitions. Likewise, political leaders within the European Union perceive populism as a threat because it emerges in response to political, social, and economic instability, particularly the failure of liberal democratic institutions, to satisfy the demands and interests of ‘the people’ (Thomassen, 2019). Hence, Laclau’s model outlines the fundamental structure for all populist discourse and advances the premises for these populist discourses to thrive since it is presumed that a crisis of representation is a catalyst for populism to emerge (Katsambekis, 2020).

Populism in Moments of Crisis

Like the concept of populism, the notion of ‘crisis’ is a complex and contested term. Gramsci (1971) introduces the concept of political crisis, meaning a crisis of political sense that is characterized beyond economic reductionism. His work merges junctures of crisis, representation, hegemony and mobilization, all of which are developed and linked to the concept of populism by Laclau.

Most approaches to populism agree that populist phenomena emerge within a crisis context. For instance, Tormey and Moffitt (2014) argue that populism emerges from periods of crisis in which there is a need for direct and decisive action that will guarantee a better resolution, whether it be about the mistrust of political elites and institutions, or unsatisfied grievances and demands, including immigration, social justice, and globalization (as cited in Stavrakakis et al., 2018). However, others, such as Knight (1998), Taggart (2000) and De la Torre (2002), briefly mention the relation between crisis and populism as being a general tendency yet not a fundamental criterion of populism (as cited in Stavrakakis et al., 2018). Conversely, Laclau (1979; 2005) argues that the relationship between periods of crisis and the emergence of populism is fundamental in the articulation of populist discourse. More explicitly, he states, “the emergence of populism is historically linked to a crisis of dominant ideological discourse, which in turn is part of more general social crisis” (as cited in Stavrakakis et al., 2018, p. 6).

Laclau (2005) introduces the notion of ‘dislocation,’ which refers to the moment of destabilization and overthrow of the system of representation/hegemonic order (as cited in Stavrakakis et al., 2018). While dislocation threatens existing identities, it paves the way for new antagonistic and competing discursive articulations that are trying to establish a new hegemonic discourse, thereby resulting in the construction of new identities. Consequently, this process facilitates populist interventions as populist leaders take advantage of destabilization and systemic failure to frame moments of crisis and articulate new appealing solutions to ‘the people’ (Stavrakakis et al., 2018). Hence, the equivalential chain of demands cannot thrive, and populism cannot rise beyond what Laclau (2005) refers to as the ‘petty demagoguery,’ except if there is disorganization or de-institutionalization that destabilizes the existing political institutions. Thus,

particular moments of disorganization are key opportunities to developing a relation of equivalence between unfulfilled demands and the construction of new hegemonic order (Arditi, 2010). However, while populist interventions are dependent on moments of crisis in the existing order, some junctures are more suited than others for the success of populist interventions.

The Relationship between Populism and Democracy

Although many scholars, including Laclau and Mouffe, directly link populism to democracy as both practices advocate the sovereign rule of ‘the people’ in society, critiques of populism, such as Müller (2017) and Mudde (2004), argue that populism is incompatible with the principles of liberal democracy as it threatens representation and individual rights while weakening the institutional system of checks and balances. For instance, Müller (2017) emphasizes the strict opposition between democracy and populism in that he claims that populist politics is “blatantly anti-democratic,” and that Western societies must thus eliminate populism as it is indicative of the collapse of liberal democracy (as cited in Stavrakakis & Jäger, 2018, p. 552). However, to a lesser degree, Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017) argue that the relationship between populism and democracy is ambivalent, noting that some populist experiences can function as a threat to liberal democracies while others are corrective for democracy. More explicitly, they suggest that populism can be corrective for democracy because it supports the recognition and inclusion of once marginalized social groups who are given the ability to criticize the establishment (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). Moreover, they suggest that populism is in conflict with liberal democracy, rather than democracy per se, as populists advocate for popular sovereignty and majority rule yet oppose pluralism—rejecting minority rights—and the separation of powers (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2018). Hence, Mudde differentiates between

democracy and liberal democracy, the latter of which emphasizes the separation of powers to recognize and protect individual freedoms and rights.

In contrast to Müller, Mouffe (2000) asserts the contingent nature of both liberalism and democracy, emphasizing the contradictory outcome of their fusion, in which “liberalism denies the logic of democracy and democracy denies the logic of liberalism” (as cited in Stavrakakis & Jäger, 2018, p. 552). Contemporary liberal democracies regularly face challenges and difficulties in stabilizing capital accumulation and legitimacy in this post-democratic era as politico-economic elites represent business interests and manipulate popular demands, thereby undermining democracy and increasing inequality. Thus, many scholars argue that it is this post-democratic incline that threatens democracy and not populism per se (Stavrakakis & Jäger, 2018).

Laclau and Mouffe (1985) analyze the construction of the populist project by engaging with the popular democratic struggles of diverse constituencies that mobilize non-class identifications, such as the ‘the people,’ against the ideology of the dominant bloc. Consequently, Mouffe (2000; 2005) introduces her own model of agonistic pluralism, in which she asserts that the logic of the political is fundamentally antagonistic and recognizes the pluralistic character of ‘the people.’ Though Mouffe (2000) draws on Carl Schmitt’s model of democracy, which states that real democracy is founded on the antagonistic opposition between friends and enemies, she disagrees and criticizes his idea of a homogenous national identity, in which he only characterizes the international enemies (other nations with distinct national identities) as pluralistic (as cited in Rummens, 2009). Mouffe (2000) states that “the homogeneous nature of the people is an illusion because the antagonistic dimension of the political is also present within the boundaries of the political community” (as cited in Rummens,

2009, p. 378). Consequently, Mouffe (2000; 2005) views the political opposition as an agonistic adversary, in which their political legitimacy should be acknowledged and respected. Hence, although ‘the people’ and ‘the adversary’ are incompatible and competing for power, Mouffe (2000) argues that they are both parts of “the same political association and as sharing a common symbolic space” (as cited in Rummens, 2009, p. 379). Drawing on post-structuralist thought, in contrast to Schmitt, Mouffe’s (2000; 2005) agonistic model of democracy understands the internal frontier of ‘us’ and ‘them’ as temporary and contingent as pluralism. She likewise sees the democratic struggle as inevitable in part because the hegemonic articulation of ‘the other’ and ‘the people’ is never complete as identities are constantly being redefined and reconstructed, thereby making “hegemonic articulations of power relations” perpetually contingent (Rummens, 2009, p. 377). Thus, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) stress the significant aspect of populism, that is, to transform diversity into unity in order to participate in political decision-making and successfully overthrow the existing power structure.

In contrast to Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2013), who understand populism as a thin-centred ideology that limits sub-types of populism in terms of ideological and geographical scope, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) understand populism as a discourse that is articulated around the greater figure of ‘the people’—a progressive collective subject of change. Laclau (2005) argues that what defines discourse as populist is its level of equivalence, emptiness and antagonism; however, while all political discourse can be characterized in these three ways, he states that “the greater the number of demands articulated into an equivalential chain across a greater number of social spaces, the greater the degree of populism” (as cited in Thomassen, 2016, p. 170). Moreover, Laclau’s definition of populism does not refer to any specific content or geography of populist discourse. Although populism can be attached to differing host

ideologies—which can be right- or left-wing—populism per se is not an ideology, nor are host ideologies defining attributes of populism. For instance, while Laclau describes Le Pen’s populist discourse as exclusionary and Jean-Luc Mélenchon’s populist discourse as inclusionary, he does not prescribe inclusionary/exclusionary or right-/left-wing types of populism to particular geographical locations. Therefore, populism can be linked to any populist discourse not limited by geographical scope.

Laclau’s model makes a significant contribution to the literature on populism as he recognizes populism as being contingent “rather than with the purportedly fixed identities of its agents or the history of any specific movement” (as cited in McKean, 2016, p. 798). In other words, Laclau (2005) attempts to recognize and classify the political logic of populist experiences rather than their social or ideological contents. Therefore, Laclau’s (2005) “minimal unit of analysis would not be the group, as a reference, but the socio-political demand” (p. 224). By examining the case of Syriza, which challenges Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser’s geographical differentiation framework, this study suggests that analyzing populism through a discursive framework is the most effective for cross-regional comparative analysis of this phenomenon.

CHAPTER 4

CASE STUDY: SYRIZA

This chapter adopts Laclau's model to analyze Syriza as a case study, examining the electoral success of its left-wing inclusionary populist discourse, which challenges Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser's geographical differentiation framework.

While populism is an attribute of representative politics, and, as Laclau (2005) mentions that periods of crisis trigger populist reactions, tensions within contemporary European representative democratic institutions and practices have provided fertile ground for the emergence of populism. This is particularly true of the Great Recession of 2008, which unleashed the beginning of a wave of populism across the EU; however, this rise of populist movements has been predominantly associated with far-right parties that hold a mixed agenda of anti-immigration, resentment of taxation, and nativism. Moreover, these parties define 'the people' within the framework of in-group and out-group and highlight the necessity to 'take back control' and reinstate national sovereignty. Electoral support for right-wing populist parties has risen in various Western European nations, including the Dutch People's Party (PVV), the Swiss People's Party (SVP), the Alternative for Germany (AFD), and the French National Rally (Halikiopoulou, 2020). The commonality between all these parties is their skeptical view on immigration and their aim to diverge from characteristics that have been attributed to the far right in the past—such as violence, fascism, and extremism—in order to expand their electoral appeal (Halikiopoulou, 2020).

Although populism is often associated with far-right anti-immigration parties in a European context, since 2008, many Western European nations have witnessed an upsurge of success in support for left-wing inclusionary populist parties, including Podemos and Syriza,

both of which oppose neoliberalism and austerity measures. In contrast to right-wing populism, left-wing populism emphasizes egalitarianism, anti-capitalism, and the redistribution of state resources. Having established the provisional theoretical basis and presented the fundamental set of attributes for understanding populism, we can now turn to the case study. Examining the case of Greece demonstrates that Syriza's populist profile seems to challenge the geographical differentiation framework proposed by Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2013) that inclusionary populism is predominant in Latin America while exclusionary populism is limited to a European context. Hence, the unprecedented effects of the global economic crisis of 2008 appear to have destabilized this framework by disassociating the inclusionary/exclusionary character from any particular geographical location. Given this context, Laclau's (2005) discursive approach is the most useful framework through which to analyze cross-regional cases of populism and thus not have to limit exclusionary and inclusionary forms of populism by geographical scope. Instead, it focuses on understanding the content of populism.

Populism in Post-Authoritarian Greece

Before examining the contemporary rise of populism in Greece, it is necessary to provide some background on the country's recent history. Since the collapse of a seven-year military dictatorship in Greece—from 1967 to 1974—followed by a transition to democracy, a two-party system dominated the political scene: on the left, the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) a social-democratic populist party; on the right, the New Democracy (ND) a liberal-conservative party, two parties that alternated in power (Aslanidis & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2016). From the 1970s to the 1980s, also referred to as the 'populist decade' by many scholars, PASOK dominated the political stage, achieving victory with 48.07% of the vote in the national election in 1981 (Aslanidis & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2016; Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2014). This was a

classic example of populism as they attempted to satisfy the demands of the ‘non-privileged’ in the rhetoric of PASOK, or in populist terms ‘the people’ (Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2014). However, PASOK’s leftist populist rhetoric did not last long: By the 1990s, the party underwent a change of leadership that progressively altered their rhetoric into becoming anti-populist with the aim of shifting the party’s discourse from populism to modernization. This resembled many nations across Europe that experienced a modernizing turn, during which a new set of values, policies and strategies were a part of a new era of social democratic discourse. Thus, PASOK’s political agenda gradually abandoned its leftist discourse for a neoliberal agenda.

Following this rhetorical shift in PASOK, populism became an element associated with the far right. The 1990s were a period in which European integration, along with an increase of immigrants to Greece, and the fall of the Soviet Union, heightened feelings of uncertainty, insecurity, and hostility towards multiculturalism. As a result, the new waves of populist mobilization that followed capitalized on nationalistic and xenophobic sentiments and anti-elitist discourse (Katsambekis, 2016; Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2014). For instance, the Popular Orthodox Rally (LAOS) was the first populist radical right-wing party in Greece. The party’s initialization LAOS directly translates to ‘the people,’ and their rhetoric is similar to that of many European right-wing populist parties, emphasizing opposition towards political elites and the establishment, as well as Euroscepticism, hostility towards immigration, and defending the nationalist and religious identity of Greek orthodoxy (Katsambekis, 2016; Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2014).

Greek Party System and the 2008 Financial Crisis

Despite the distinctions between PASOK and ND, throughout their years in power, both parties adopted measures of clientelism at the cost of the welfare state, resulting in a major

misallocation of state funds, which heavily contributed to the country's increasing sovereign debt that eventually became unmanageable following 2009 (Aslanidis & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2016). For instance, during its winning electoral campaign in 2009, PASOK's leader George Papandreou promised redistribution of capital by means of a fairer taxation system that would benefit and support the lower and middle social strata and assure the inclusion of popular participation in decision-making (Katsambekis, 2016). However, upon winning, PASOK failed to accomplish its anticipated agenda. Due to the onset of the 2008 financial crisis, Greece's debt was accumulating; thus, to avoid default, Papandreou had no other choice than to ask for an emergency bailout agreement—termed the 'memorandum'—from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the European Commission (EC), and the EU, also known as the troika (Aslanidis & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2016; Katsambekis, 2016). This decision resulted in a significant decline in the popularity of PASOK in the post-crisis elections, from 43.9% in 2009 to 12.3% in June of 2012, and further decline to 4.7% in January of 2015, as voters directly linked the party to austerity measures and crisis (Katsambekis, 2016).

During the second legislative elections in 2012, ND and PASOK formed a coalition that lasted until 2015. Although both parties had been competing for power steadily throughout the years, they both met in the centre, thereby agreeing on many major policies: PASOK abandoned its left-wing populist and egalitarian discourse; ND left behind its conservative right-wing identity (Katsambekis, 2016). Moreover, the new coalition government agenda included “structural reforms, competitiveness, privatizations, the rationalization of fiscal policies, the advocacy of a society of dynamic individuals and a hostility towards collective forms of organization and mobilization, along with vocal anti-populism” (Katsambekis, 2016, p. 392). However, the two parties constantly changed their policies, thereby provoking the beginning of a

crisis of representation that served as the basis for a populist politicization (Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2014).

While the global economic crisis triggered high levels of instability worldwide, Greece suffered the lengthiest recession of any advanced contemporary capitalist economy, resulting in structural weakness within the Greek economy and lack of monetary policy flexibility as a member of the Eurozone (Markou, 2017b). Following years of severe austerity policies, massive budget cuts, privatization, and neoliberal structural reforms, Greece's debt and deficit were declared unsustainable; thus, further austerity measures were ordered by the troika in exchange for an additional bailout agreement (Markou, 2017b). The coalition government attempted to fix the national economy; however, they failed and instead contributed to the enactment of unconstitutional measures and greater levels of structural inequalities. Between 2008 and 2012, Greece's GDP declined by 20%, and unemployment rates reached 27%, with particularly high youth unemployment rising to 60% (Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2014). The results were twofold: first, the nation's former two-party system lost support, and second, there was a rise in opposition to the neoliberal project of the ruling elites. This led to the fall of the coalition government and the beginning of major changes within Greece's electoral system, thereby laying the foundation for the renewed rise of populist movements in Greece (Halikiopoulou, 2020).

Sociologist Colin Crouch (2004) describes the 2010s as a post-democratic epoch in which political leaders were further away from rightly representing 'the people' (as cited in Markou, 2017b). He states that "politics and government are increasingly slipping back into the control of privileged elites in the manner characteristic of pre-democratic times" (Crouch, 2004, as cited in Markou, 2017b, p. 55). Therefore, this post-democratic setting has provided fertile ground for the emergence of populist parties that claim to represent the marginalized people and their

unsatisfied demands. The contemporary global surge of populist movements appears to be a coercive reaction and new alternative to the post-democratic era (Markou, 2017b). In the case of Greece, popular discontent and frustration with the neoliberal political forces as well as post-democratic politics mainly exist because the majority of ‘the people’ have been pushed out of the political process as political elites shape politics to their own advantages (Markou, 2017b). Thus, the coalition government’s failed neoliberal hegemonic agenda substantially contributed to the transition of the Greek political system into a post-democratic context.

Among the various parties on both sides of the political spectrum, Syriza was the only party that resisted the neoliberal political forces as it promised to challenge austerity policies and deemed itself “as the only true political alternative to a dead-end path” (Markou, 2017b, p. 56). However, anti-populist movements and leaders, along with the media, claimed that Syriza’s success would result in economic, political, and social instability for Greece.

The Rise of Syriza

The European debt crisis led to the rise of major anti-austerity popular protests, such as those organized by the Indignados in Spain, a citizen-led umbrella movement that used a mix of traditional forms of mobilization and social networks to further its demands (Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2014). Consequently, the Indignados influenced solidarity movements across Europe, particularly in Greece, where people were frustrated with the government, austerity measures, and mainstream political parties. Consequently, the Indignados—also called the *Aganaktismenoi*—led massive protest movements involving the mobilization of social actors predominantly by grassroots means (Katsambekis, 2016). When ND declared its support for austerity measures in 2011, frustration and anger rose against the bipartisan system, and Syriza was the only parliamentary party competent in establishing a bond with the anti-austerity wave

of protestors. Hence, the Aganaktismenoi were essential in the sudden rise of Syriza's electoral support because they were viewed as a new populist movement that represented a new political discourse centred around 'the people.' As a result, Syriza expanded its electoral appeal by voicing the demands and struggles of the Aganaktismenoi and other emerging social movements including 'Can't Pay, Won't Pay' (Katsambekis, 2016).

Initially, Syriza members participated in the demonstrations of various anti-austerity social movements without explicitly advancing their party's position and discourse; however, Syriza leader Alexis Tsipras soon seized the opportunity and formed an alliance with various progressive political actors who opposed austerity measures with the aim of transforming this social majority into a political majority and representing them in the political system (Katsambekis, 2016). Therefore, Syriza became the sole representation of the Aganaktismenoi within parliamentary politics, thereby challenging the two-party system by including various progressive political actors, such as trade unions and students (Katsambekis, 2016; Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2014).

Syriza's Inclusionary Populism

The Coalition of Radical Left (Syriza) was initially created in 2004 as an alliance between Synaspismos (SYN) and various small radical left-wing political parties, organizations, and political groups of communist, ecologist, socialist, and left social democratic origins: Together, they formed an electoral coalition with the objective of securing the mandatory three-percent threshold for parliamentary representation (Katsambekis, 2016; Markou, 2017a, 2017b). Influenced by counter-globalization movements and the European Social Forum, SYN sought to detach itself from Euro-communist traditions and instead self-characterize as the radical left to expand its strong appeal to the youth as well as social and political activists (Katsambekis,

2016). SYN—later reframed as Syriza—embraced an anti-neoliberal agenda, which articulated socioeconomic and post-materialist demands and opposed the bipartisan system, presenting itself as “an alternative strategy towards socialist tradition” (Katsambekis, 2016, p. 394).

Attributes of inclusionary populism were evident in Syriza’s discourse since its inception in that the youth and the grassroots movements seemed to be empty signifiers, and the plurality of demands existed within the equivalential chain, including movements for LGBTQ+ rights, gender equality, and environmental initiatives (Katsambekis, 2016). This chain of equivalence was in direct opposition to the establishment. Therefore, since its creation, Syriza has been proactively promoting diversity and full inclusion of minority groups in Greek society, mainly by recognizing and advocating for the basic rights and well-being of migrants, as well as the equal rights of sexual minorities and for gender equality. For example, while political leaders of other parties, such as Papandreou, have been in favour of sexual minority rights, Syriza has been the foremost party formally supporting same-sex marriage in Greek parliament (Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2014). Hence, Syriza’s inclusionary character was perceived as the articulation of a new social unity that represented the working class, socially excluded groups, and the youth. On the organizational level, Syriza was characterized as a “mass connective party” as it aimed to connect in a flexible way the diverse actions, initiatives and movements that embody these [political, social, ideological and cultural anti-capitalist] expressions into a stable federation, and to concern itself with developing popular political capacities as much as with changing state policy. (Katsambekis, 2016, p. 8)

While Syriza was a marginal party with only 5% of the popular vote in the national election held in the fall of 2007, it had gained mass support and strong presence; consequently, its creation was perceived as a success by grassroots movements to help expand their political

platform (Katsambekis, 2016). However, Syriza failed to reach high numbers of electoral votes because the plurality of struggles and demands to which Syriza appealed did not approach a common goal, and the middle-class continued its long-term allegiance to PASOK and ND. Consequently, it was not until the years following the global financial crisis that Syriza would no longer be a fringe party by gaining electoral support and defeating the strong bipartisanship within the Greek political system (Markou, 2017b). Within a short timeframe, electoral support went from 4.6% in the post-crisis election of 2009 to 36.4% in 2015, the greatest electoral jump in modern Greek history (Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2014). Thus, the success of Syriza was a by-product of Greece's socio-economic crisis.

Syriza's Post-Crisis Discourse. According to Katsambekis (2016), pre-crisis Syriza failed to adhere to a leftist hegemonic project as its populist discourse was articulated from a minoritarian approach, meaning its appeal and support was solely based on the youth and marginalized groups, thereby failing to represent society as a whole. Given this, Syriza's pre-crisis discourse was not centred around the universal notion of 'the people' but rather particular signifiers, such as youth and social/political activists (Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2014). However, the unprecedented economic, social, and political crisis increased austerity measures and therefore negatively affected the majority of the population and heightened frustrations and demands among the middle and lower social strata: This encouraged Syriza to reshape its discourse and constituency. From 2012-2015, Syriza's new discursive articulation emphasized a sole collective signifier, that is 'the people.' For example, the notion of 'the people' was mentioned over 50 times by Tsipras within each speech during the party's two winning campaigns of 2012, in May and June (Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2014). This is in contrast to

pre-election speeches for the parliamentary elections of 2009, during which Tsipras referenced ‘the people’ only five times (Markou, 2017b).

As opposed to the ideational approach, which limits understanding of populism to an ideology that creates a homogenous people against a homogeneous ‘establishment/ elites,’ Syriza’s post-crisis discourse makes an appeal to a ‘plural people’ and articulates its support to empower marginalized groups in Greek society (particularism), which populists try to identify with the whole (universality). Moreover, Syriza’s inclusionary populist discourse successfully adopts the three-step process proposed by Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2013), which distinguishes between inclusionary and exclusionary populism: symbolic, political, and material dimensions.

First, following the Greek debt crisis that acted as a catalyst for the emergence of populism, ‘the people’ within Syriza adopted a politics of symbolic inclusion by expanding its discourse to include not only youth movements but also other social groups. These groups include refugees, immigrants, women, workers, LGBTQ+ people, and unemployed people. Syriza particularly focused on swing voters who supported PASOK prior to the pursuit of its new agenda of restrictive monetary policies, extreme budget cuts, and labour deregulation that heavily affected the middle and lower class. Thus, Syriza’s discourse made an open appeal to ‘the plural people’—without racial or racist distinctions—thereby encouraging many voters to abandon their former party preferences. In speeches, Tsipras (2008; 2009) emphasized that Syriza’s main objective was to “give voice to those without a voice,” in which Syriza welcomes the unification of all the ideological and theoretical traditions of the classical and contemporary left (as cited in Katsambekis, 2016, p. 396).

Greece's political landscape was divided between two groups: the pro-memorandum forces, which were associated with the establishment and elites and were an attribute of the right; and the anti-memorandum forces, which aligned with the popular masses associated with the left. The main distinction between Syriza's agenda and that of others was its inclusion of the anti-memorandum forces. From this point onwards, Syriza aimed to present itself as the voice of the anti-memorandum forces and the representation of anti-austerity, anti-neoliberal, and anti-establishment views of the Greek people. Syriza's electoral declaration states, "Democracy everywhere, Democratic political and social rights for all"; thus, within its alternative program Syriza sets out an antagonistic relationship between the Greek people, who are the many negatively impacted by globalized capitalism, and the political and economic elites, who are the few that are profiting (Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2014). For example, for the campaign of the May 2012 election, Syriza's principal discourse framed the Greek people as victims of the political and economic elites:

They decided without us, we move on without them. The upcoming highly critical elections will determine the present and the future of the country. NOW is the time for the struggles of our people to be vindicated, for two-partyism to be punished and defeated, for the memoranda and the troika to be condemned. A new social and political majority, with the radical Left in its core, can overthrow the rotten two-party political system and create alternative governance structures, where the people will be a protagonist. (as cited in Katsambekis, 2016, p. 398)

Although Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2013) propose the morality thesis—as a defining attribute of populism—to explain the division of 'the people' against 'the establishment' in society, the case of Syriza challenges this argument by understanding this division on the basis

of political and socio-economic terms. These divisions include the neoliberal hegemonic project and establishment against the disempowered and marginalized people, as well as the anti-memorandum forces against the pro-memorandum forces. Moreover, ‘the people’ describes a community in a national sense—‘the Greek people’—yet it does not exclude immigrants and ethnic minorities.

Syriza’s strategy towards success emphasized an inclusionary form of politics in which the coalition supported and mobilized diverse social groups ranging from youth groups and counter-globalization movements to marginalized social groups. As the plurality of movements, demands, and social struggles became an essential part of Syriza’s discourse, it established a sharp divide between ‘us’ and ‘them.’ In this context, ‘us’ includes the working people, the marginalized social strata, and the youth, who are collectively being pushed to the margins of society by the process of neoliberal globalization and labour deregulation, and ‘them’ being the power holders, such as the establishment, elites, oligarchs, the banks, and the two-party system of PASOK and ND (Katsambekis, 2016). Thus, through symbolic inclusion, Syriza emphasized the inclusive and polysemic character of ‘the people’ as it represents a plural and heterogenous collective entity, which has been excluded from political participation.

While Syriza’s first effective populist strategy was a discourse that sought to include the demands of popular anti-austerity movements and local issues, its renewed agenda aimed to end austerity measures by renegotiating Greek sovereign debt and adopting neo-Keynesian and social democratic policies to improve the material conditions of marginalized groups in society. For instance, in 2012, Syriza created the “government of the Left,” a broad coalition of leftist parties and movements that intended to cancel the memoranda while negotiating Greece’s position in the Eurozone. This plan aimed to increase taxation for corporations and the wealthiest citizens,

demanded a significant moratorium on debt payments, and called for the restructuring of the Greek political economy and the welfare state. This included supplying universal access to welfare, creating a national plan to increase employment, and restricting wage freezes and pension cuts (Katsambekis, 2016). Likewise, Tsipras pledged universal access to public healthcare and education, as well as social security and other special provisions, for marginalized groups such as migrants, elders, and disabled people. For Syriza's new vision of Greece, Tsipras (2012) claimed

that everyone has the right to a minimum guaranteed dignified income. That everyone has access to dignified health care in public hospitals. That all retirees have a dignified pension and a minimum of care and social protection. That no child goes to school hungry. (as cited in Syriza-United Social Front, 2012, p. 4)

Hence, Tsipras (2012) has emphasized that Syriza's win would be a victory for all people rejected from social security (as cited in Syriza-United Social Front, 2012). More explicitly, Tsipras (2014) made a particular appeal to the youth using strong emotional and persuasive language, thereby building a dynamic relationship with them:

I want to address in particular the young. [...] Fight the system that wants you without rights. Without hope. Without wages and insurance. Without education and health. (as cited in Left GR., 2014, p. 5)

For the legislative elections in January 2015, Syriza outlined a list of welfare policies, including free electricity supply, meal, and rent subsidies, personal debt relief, and transport discounts for households below the poverty line and the long-term unemployed. Hence, both social justice and the welfare state are significant parts of Syriza's agenda.

Another fundamental objective in Syriza's discourse was to expand the political inclusion and participation of formerly excluded groups through democratic reforms related to popular sovereignty and human rights. For example, in 2015, the Syriza-led coalition government was the only parliamentary party that supported a new bill that officially recognized the rights of same-sex couples to enter into a civil union (Petsinis, 2016). Likewise, Syriza emphasized its solidarity with migrants by pledging to implement progressive immigration reforms and policies, including the abolition of immigrant deportation detention centres, the protection of migrant rights, and the right to citizenship to second-generation migrants born in Greece (Petsinis, 2016). In contrast to political exclusion practiced by exclusionary populist parties, Syriza's discourse encourages the active participation of all people in the political process, particularly emphasizing women's representation and participation in politics. Hence, in contrast to many European right-wing exclusionary parties that express anti-foreigner sentiments and call for welfare chauvinism, Syriza's populist discourse is inclusionary as it aims to strengthen the symbolic, material, and political inclusion of formerly socially excluded groups.

Chain of Equivalence, Empty Signifier, and Antagonism. While the notion of 'the people' as the sovereign was continuously reiterated within Syriza's discourse, this discourse also emphasized the increasing popular frustrations with austerity measures, thereby establishing a new hopeful alternative that would mean better days for 'the people' and fewer chances for the power bloc. Tsipras's use of strong language initiated feelings of rejection against the establishment, as well as hope and optimism for the future of 'the people.' Through the practice of discursive populist articulation (discourse), in the terms described by Laclau, Syriza successfully re-asserted a hegemonic appeal to all members of society, thus representing a new social majority and establishing an antagonistic relationship between 'the people' against 'the

dominant bloc.’ The enemy of ‘the people’ represents the European and Greek political structures, which are associated with the forces of globalized capitalism that deem maximizing profit as the best way to organize the economy. However, the only ones profiting from the capitalist model are the private banks and bankers, corporations, industries, and political and economic elites. Therefore, by engaging with anti-austerity demonstrations and protests, expanding its audience, and establishing a strong grassroots base, Syriza represented the dominant counter-hegemonic force in representational politics and became the electoral vehicle for popular demands in parliament. This resulted in the beginning of the construction of the chain of equivalence in which the heterogeneous frustrated demands, identities, and interests were united to emphasize their opposition towards a shared ‘other,’ that is, the enemy of the people including the pro-austerity forces, the pro-memorandum forces, the troika and the bipartisanship of PASOK and ND (Katsambekis, 2016).

Overall, Syriza’s discourse relies upon the fundamental antagonistic division of society into two opposing camps: ‘us’ and ‘them.’ This political logic is implemented in its popular slogans: “It is either us or them: Together, we can overthrow them” (Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2014, p. 130). Therefore, this resulted in the creation of two chains of equivalence in opposition towards each other: ‘us’ being the people affected or impacted by austerity measures, and ‘them’ being the forces that have been implementing such policies, thereby causing increasing levels of recession, unemployment, and poverty. Moreover, the ‘us’ or ‘we’ also includes supporters of all political parties, genders, youth, and people of all socio-economic and socio-cultural backgrounds, thereby attempting to form an alliance based on their shared opposition to the existing power bloc. However, Stavrakakis and Katsambekis (2014) differentiate between the two levels of ‘enemy’: The first level—the internal troika—consist of the mainstream Greek

political parties including ND, PASOK, DIMAR, LAOS; the second level—the external troika—is the neoliberal hegemonic project and its defenders and supporters, including international and European financial institutions (IMF, EC, ECB).

While the reasons for entering the chain of equivalence differ depending on the particular losses experienced by heterogeneous individuals or collective subjects during the period of crisis—be it loss of jobs, pension, salary, and social benefit cuts, or health insurance—the unity of ‘the people’ (universality) does not disregard the individual plurality and social heterogeneity of identities, interests, and demands (particularism). Rather, it is the empty signifier of ‘the people’ that is the common democratic struggle that unites the diverse subjects together and thus directs them towards shared objectives or purposes, specifically the end of austerity politics and the overthrow of two-partyism. In the context of Syriza, struggles and demands within the chain of equivalence included the environmental struggle of the residents of Skouries (northern Greece) against underground mining, the sudden increase of road tolls controlled by private corporations, the loss of jobs due to the conditions of the memorandum, the protection of national economic sovereignty, the end of austerity measures, and a new alternative to the neoliberal hegemonic project (Katsambekis, 2016).

Rather than framing populism as a thin-centred ideology, it should be understood as a political logic of discourse: The latter approach is more advantageous because it allows for a practical understanding of the phenomenon. This is because Laclau’s definition, which adopts the Gramscian framework of analysis, does not limit populism to a specific ideological or geographical context but rather examines the discursive structures. Laclau (2005) states that movements are not inherently populist because the politics they present can be defined as populist but rather because they demonstrate “a particular logic of articulation of those

contents—whatever those contents are” (p. 33). Therefore, populism occurs when a group of heterogeneous people who share parallel political demands construct an empty signifier against the existing hegemonic discourse. Discursive structures represent an articulatory practice that forms social relations between various signifiers. Thus, ‘the people’ function as an empty signifier that is marked by a continuous lack of political agency in one form or another. In an effort to overthrow the existing hegemonic power bloc, this signifier represents a discursive structure that links distinct, shared, and parallel demands. The empty signifier of ‘the people’ specifically gives partial fixation of meaning to each identity and demand within the chain of equivalence while assuming the representation of the totality of signifiers. The electoral success in Syriza validates Laclau’s model of populism and challenges Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser’s geographical differentiation framework by demonstrating that the inclusionary populist framework can be applied to cases beyond Latin America.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

During his 2016 presidential campaign, Trump sought to unite ‘the people’ by demonizing outgroups, promoting a nationalist and nativist agenda, framing America’s political system as corrupt, and promising to be the voice of ‘the people,’ whom he vowed to empower. Upon examining Trumps’ populist approach, it is easy to draw the conclusion that such movements are homogeneous in nature and rooted in geography as well as inclusionary and exclusionary practices; however, this example of populism is strictly anecdotal in nature. In practice, populist movements are much more diverse and need to be understood through a more nuanced lens.

In many ways, Trump’s political movement conforms to the definition of populism outlined by Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2013). They see populism as “a thin-centred ideology that considers society to be to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups,” and that “that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people” (p. 150). However, their ideational approach also makes a geographical distinction between exclusionary and inclusionary populist practises; hence, they analyze cross-regional manifestations of exclusionary and inclusionary populism.

In practice, though, populist movements are often distinguished by the adoptions of right- or left-wing ideological distinctions. Therefore, the issue with Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser’s (2013) definition of populism is their assumption that inclusionary and exclusionary practices are restricted by geographic barriers. For example, they suggest that exclusionary populism is restricted to Europe, whereas inclusionary populism is limited to Latin America. This assumes that geography determines the ideological position of a populist party and that populism can only

be studied alongside diverse ideologies in which populists make moral and Manichean distinctions between “the pure people” and “the corrupt elite” (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2018, p. 1670). This moralistic imagination of politics is a defining attribute of populism within the ideational approach. The problem with this model, though, is that it fails to consider the dominant, leading role of discourse, which determines the ideological position of a populist movement.

Laclau (2005) addresses these shortcomings as he prioritizes the two dichotomous camps whose antagonistic relationship defines populism. Where Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2013) refer to these camps as ‘the pure people’ and ‘the corrupt elite,’ Laclau (2005) defines them simply and respectively as ‘the people’ and ‘the power bloc.’ Like the ideational approach, Laclau’s (2005) discursive approach conforms to Sartori’s minimal definition, in which the lowest common denominators that are present in all manifestations of populism—across regional and temporal contexts—are these two dichotomous camps. Drawing on post-analytical thought, Derridean deconstruction, Lacanian psychoanalysis, Gramsci’s theory of cultural hegemony and the post-structuralist theory, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) founded the Essex School of Discourse Analysis, which sets the theoretical foundation for Laclau’s theory of populism, framing populism through a discursive lens.

Laclau (2005) understands populism as a political logic of articulation that can be found in all political movements across the political spectrum as it represents a political discourse that is not limited to specific social classes, ideologies, or types of society. This political logic of articulation is characterized by three elements: (1) the creation of an antagonistic relation dividing ‘the people’ from the ideology of the dominant bloc, (2) the formation of a chain of equivalence, meaning the combination of distinct popular demands left unfulfilled by the power

bloc, and (3) the representation of the chain of equivalence through the empty signifier (Laclau, 2005, as cited in Katsambekis, 2020). Consequently, adopting the theory of cultural hegemony, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) explain how political elites, including populist leaders, maintain power, not through coercion or economic forces, but domination through ideology that induces consent to the rule of the leading groups in society by establishing a hegemonic discourse. Hence, it is only through the significant role of hegemonic discourse that populist leaders can make an appeal to the plural people to construct the figure of ‘the people.’ Therefore, by understanding populism through discursive lens, we do not restrict populist movements to particular ideological and geographical content but rather focus on the discursive structures that create populist movements.

By adopting the post-structuralist discourse theory as a theoretical lens, this study recognizes how Laclau (2005) operationalizes the concepts of articulation, discourse, hegemony, and representation to understand populism. More specifically, by focusing on Derridean deconstruction and Lacanian psychoanalysis, Laclau (2005) suggests that all signifiers (discursive structures) are marked by a lack. Based on this, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) consider all signs and concepts regarding populism to be floating signifiers that can be articulated in various ways and in which meaning is non-fixed. The constitutive ‘lack’ in dis-articulation and re-articulation is constantly changing and evolving because the entity and identity of ‘the people’ are never fixed. Thus, Laclau (2005) argues that the construction of ‘the people’ is only possible through representation and that it is impossible to construct ‘the people’ without power relations and the rejection of certain demands. Hence, all efforts that aim to construct a universal alternative hegemonic project against the existing power bloc must appeal to and address the heterogeneity of isolated identities. This is consistent with Syriza’s efforts to articulate a

discourse that unifies the particularities of discursive structures. For example, in an effort to overthrow the existing hegemonic power bloc, Syriza's populist political leaders sought to unify people's demands and identities to construct a universal 'people' without dismissing their individual differences. This approach serves as an archetypal example of inclusionary populism.

By analyzing the Syriza case with Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser's three dimensions—political, material, and symbolic—it becomes clear that inclusionary populism is not restricted to Latin America, thereby challenging the geographical distinction of their argument. With regard to political inclusion, the purpose of Syriza's discourse was to expand the political inclusion and participation of formerly excluded groups through democratic reforms related to popular sovereignty and human rights. With respect to the material inclusion, Syriza's agenda aimed to end austerity measures by renegotiating Greek sovereign debt and adopting neo-Keynesian and social democratic policies to improve the material conditions of marginalized groups in society. Finally, Syriza adopted the politics of symbolic inclusion by expanding its discourse to include not only youth movements but also other social groups, such as refugees, immigrants, women, workers, LGBTQ+ people, and unemployed people.

This analysis of Syriza's pre-crisis and post-crisis discourse demonstrates that inclusionary populism has emerged in Europe, which challenges Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser's argument that inclusionary populism can only be applied to Latin American parties. Hence, while the case of Syriza adopts different degrees of inclusionary populism, it shares many similarities with the Latin American inclusionary populist parties. Like Syriza's inclusionary populism, Latin American populism emphasizes socioeconomic conditions and structural inequalities rather than political and policy manifestations. More explicitly, both types of populism center around income redistribution that can help decrease social insecurities among

‘the people’ who are the marginalized and excluded groups in society. For example, Lázaro Cárdenas, former President of Mexico, was among Latin America’s most prominent populist leaders in the 20th century, and he represented a distinct populist framework that focused on multi-class coalitions and lower-class groups (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013). Both populist actors, Cárdenas and Tsipras, emerged during junctures of crisis and employed confrontational politics in a bid to represent the popular demands of vulnerable and marginalized populations and create systemic change. Hence, the cases of inclusionary populism outside of Latin America demonstrates that this form of populism is not unique to Latin America and established a link between the emergence of populism and moments of crisis.

The cross-regional comparison of geographical sub-types of populism further demonstrates that populism is a complex and contested term that can encompass varying defining attributes. However, the contradictions and deficiencies within the ideational approach further demonstrate that it is an ambiguous approach open to argument.

To this end, Laclau’s minimal discursive approach offers a more accurate and flexible interpretation to analyze the plurality of populist experiences across cultural, historical, political, and regional contexts. It also avoids the problems of conceptual travelling and stretching as it proposes a more contemplative theoretical principle that overcomes normative biases in the research. The successful case of Syriza validates Laclau’s (2005) discursive theory of the rise and realization of a “populist rupture” (as cited in Katsambekis, 2016, p. 400). In addition, Laclau’s theoretical framework is critical to comprehending the contemporary rise of populist parties because it provides the tools necessary to identify, understand, and critically assess populist movements, which serve as counter-hegemonic developments.

Hence, this study has made two contributions. First, it challenges Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser's geographical distinction framework. Second, demonstrates the contradictions and deficiencies within the ideational approach, underscoring the ambiguous nature of this model. In so doing, the current study validated Laclau's definition of populism as political discourse, framing it as the most effective approach for analyzing trans-regional cases of populism.

However, a single case study could potentially be dismissed as anecdotal in nature; thus, future research should critically assess the potential permanency of European inclusionary populism. Some scholars suggest that European populist exclusionary right-wing movements will eventually disappear because they respond to momentary disturbance, such as migrant crises and economic distress. However, further research needs to assess the longevity of European left-wing inclusionary populist movements because their voters are grieved by deep structural and institutional crises, such as poverty, inequality, and marginalization.

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