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Research Article

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The Rise of Inclusionary Populism in Europe: The Case of SYRIZA

Grigoris Markou*

In recent years, and especially after the outbreak of the global financial crisis, right-wing and left-wing populist parties and movements have enjoyed significant political success in Europe. One of these parties is SYRIZA in Greece. In this paper, we explore some of the particular characteristics of the political discourse articulated by SYRIZA in power. The core argument of the paper is that the Greek radical left party continues to express an inclusionary populist discourse after its rise to power. We examine this issue by utilising the methodology of the Essex School of Discourse Analysis. Moreover, we attempt to substantiate the view that populism does not always have a negative connotation and is not deterministically associated with nationalism or racism. Furthermore, we try to establish whether the concept of "crypto-colonialism" is an important key to understanding the rise of inclusionary populism to power in Greece. Finally, we analyse various manifestations of Greek anti-populism in order to highlight the danger that derives from this kind of stereotypical discourse.

Keywords: Inclusionary populism, Essex School of Discourse Analysis, crypto-colonialism, radical left, SYRIZA

Introduction

The eruption of the global economic crisis (2008/09) has precipitated rapid and radical changes in Southeastern Europe, such as the emergence of left-wing populist movements (SYRIZA, Podemos, Front de Gauche etc.) opposing neoliberalism and austerity policies. The style and nature of these movements have been inspired by Latin America's populist experiments (Chavismo, Kirchnerismo etc.) and their "Socialism of the 21st century." The Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA) is the first radical left party in Europe to seize power, dissolving the dominance of the traditional parties.¹ However, after two years in government it had not succeeded in securing its populist and radical programme for an alternative economic model and for a new form of democracy.

The dynamic emergence of populist forces in Greece, such as SYRIZA and the Independent Greeks (ANEL), has led to the ideological abuse of the concept of populism by mainstream political forces. All the pro-European parties (ND, PASOK, To Potami, etc.) have entered into a grand alliance to exorcise the spectre of populism. As a result, Greek public discourse has been dominated by the idea that populism is a kind of "pathology," a destructive ideology, which prevents the

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¹ In recent years, many radical left parties have emerged in Europe. In Greece, SYRIZA rose to power within a short period; in Cyprus, AKEL governed the country for five years; in Portugal, the PCP and the Left Bloc offered support to the Socialist government. In France, Mélenchon gained 11% of the vote in the 2012 presidential elections and 19.58% in the 2017 presidential elections.

policies of the “good” reformist forces and threatens democracy and the stability of the EU.² But is populism by definition a threat to democracy? This is not certain, as there are different kinds of populist parties and politicians. Additionally, the idea consisting of treating populism as pathology has its own limits, as it fails to take into account the drawbacks of liberal democracy. One of the starting points of this paper is that the declaration of populism as the main enemy of democracy refers principally to an *exclusionary* (racist and xenophobic) right-wing populism and not to an *inclusionary* one. Left-wing populist movements promote radical political solutions in a democratic way. Hence, it is clear that populism “can be both a corrective and a threat to democracy.”³

In this paper, we explore some of the particular characteristics of the political discourse articulated by SYRIZA in power. The main question that we try to answer is this: Does left-wing populist discourse change when the party moves from opposition to government? The core argument of the paper is that SYRIZA continues to express an inclusionary populist discourse after its rise to power. We examine this issue by utilising the methodology of the Essex School of Discourse Analysis. Moreover, we attempt to substantiate the view that populism does not always have a negative connotation and is not deterministically associated with nationalism or racism. Thus, we outline the differentiation between inclusionary and exclusionary populism. Furthermore, we try to find if the concept of “crypto-colonialism” is an important key to understanding the rise of inclusionary populism to power in Greece. Finally, we analyse the different manifestations of Greek anti-populism (such as “kitsch” and “cultural dualism”), in order to highlight the danger that derives from this kind of stereotypical discourse.

Post-democracy and populism

The outbreak of the global financial crisis has substantially contributed to the emergence of all the pathologies of the Western political system and democracy. In recent decades, both liberal and social-democratic parties have established a hegemonic neoliberal consensus which has undermined the quality of democracy and created the conditions for a new, non-antagonistic and undemocratic political landscape. According to sociologist Colin Crouch, “politics and government are increasingly slipping back into the control of privileged elites in the manner characteristic of pre-democratic times.”⁴ Crouch has suggested that we live in a post-democratic era, namely in a period in which the political elite tends to be furthest removed from the people it is supposed to represent.⁵ This post-democratic context has created a favourable space for populist parties, which claim to represent the poor and marginalised. Therefore, the rise of populist parties in many countries of the world seems to be a forceful response (and a “real alternative”) to the post-political consensus at the centre.⁶

² Katsambekis, Giorgos and Yannis Stavrakakis. 2013. *Populism, Anti-populism and European Democracy: a View From the South*. *Open Democracy*, 23. July 2013 (accessed: 01. June 2017).

³ Mudde, Cas and Cristobal Rovira Kaltwasser. (eds.). 2012. *Populism in Europe and the Americas: Threat or Corrective for Democracy*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 16.

⁴ Crouch, Colin. 2004. *Post-democracy*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 6.

⁵ Crouch, *Post-democracy*.

⁶ According to Rancière: “*Post-democracy is the government practice and conceptual legitimisation of a democracy after the demos, a democracy that has eliminated the appearance, miscount, and*

In recent years, the Greek political landscape has been characterised by the decline of strong party identifications⁷ and the consolidation of the neoliberal project. The two mainstream parties, ND and PASOK, played a central role in the transformation of the Greek political system towards a post-democratic orientation. The post-democratic consensus at the centre (namely the collaboration between ND and PASOK) and the neoliberal project of the ruling elites led to popular discontent. Specifically, after some years of extreme austerity measures and massive budget cuts, the country was clearly facing an extremely difficult situation. Greece's debt and deficit were declared unsustainable, and austerity measures (tough fiscal discipline, radical budget cuts, privatisation and neoliberal structural reforms) were imperatively demanded by the EU.⁸ The efforts of coalition governments and technocrats to recover the national economy led to a massive onslaught against the people's interests, the violation of human rights, the implementation of unconstitutional policies, and larger social inequalities.⁹ The citizens' anger and frustration resulted in the collapse of governmental parties. The only dynamic response against the neoliberal political forces was given by the populist party of SYRIZA, which opposed austerity policies and presented itself as the only true political alternative to a dead-end path. Anti-populist forces and a large part of the mainstream media argued that if SYRIZA came to power, Greece would face total economic, political and social catastrophe.¹⁰

In order to understand clearly the political conflict between populism and anti-populism in Greece, we may use Ostiguy's "high-low" axis.¹¹ Just as there is a left-right political spectrum, there is also a high-low spectrum, crosscutting the left-right axis. The high-low axis consists of two closely related sub-dimensions: the *social-cultural* and the *political-cultural* dimension. The first sub-dimension consists of manners, demeanours, ways of speaking and dressing, vocabulary and tastes displayed in public (ways of being in politics). At the high end, people present themselves as well behaved and tend to use rationalist and technocratic discourse. At the low end of the spectrum, people often use language with slang expressions and are more demonstrative and

dispute of the people, and is thereby reducible to the sole interplay of state mechanisms and combinations of social energies and interests," in Rancière, Jacques. 1998. *Disagreement*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 101-102.

⁷ Teperoglou, Eftichia and Tsatsanis Emmanouil. 2014. Dealignment, De-legitimation and the Implosion of the Two-party System in Greece: the Earthquake Election of 6 May 2012. *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion, and Parties* 24(2), 222-42.

⁸ Lapavistas, Costas. 2012. *Crisis in the Eurozone*. London-New York: Verso, 119-21.

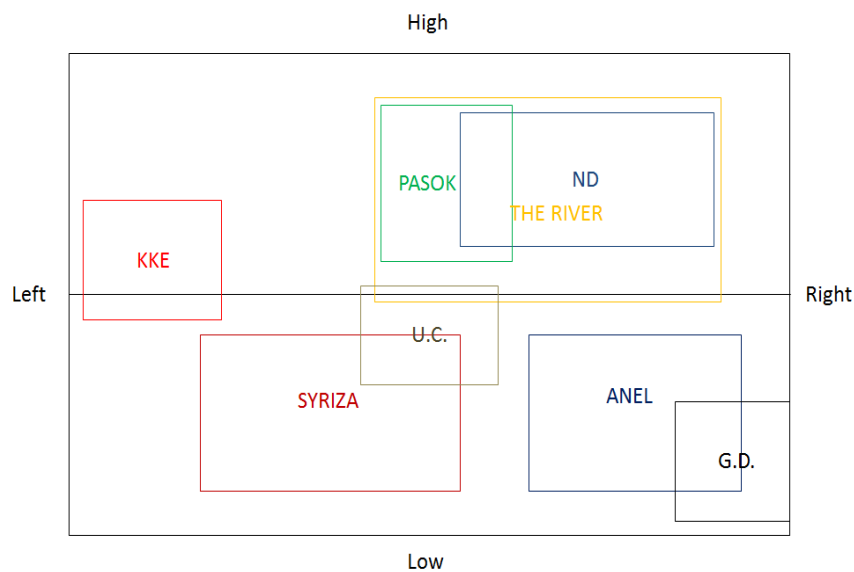
⁹ The cost of austerity in Greece: "This report depicts a country in which human rights [...] have been openly challenged and violated across all sectors. This has not only been felt in sectors such as work and healthcare, where the State has implemented austerity measures that had an adverse impact on human rights, but are equally visible in the curtailment of fundamental freedoms, such as media freedom and the right to voice dissent through peaceful public protest [...] In this context, it is impossible to overlook the fact that what started as an economic and financial breakdown has turned into an unprecedented assault on human rights and democratic standards in Greece and all countries sharing a similar fate," FIDH. 2014. *Downgrading Rights: the Cost of Austerity in Greece*. 2014. *Hellenic League for Human Rights*. Paris.

¹⁰ Katsambekis, Giorgos. 2014. The Place of the People in Post-Democracy: Researching Antipopulism and Post-Democracy in Crisis-Ridden Greece. *POSTData* 19(2), 555-82.

¹¹ Ostiguy, Pierre. 2009. The High And the Low in Politics: A Two Dimensional Political Space for Comparative Analysis and Electoral Studies. Kellogg Institute Working Paper #360, Kellogg Institute for International Studies.

“colourful” in their bodily or facial expressions. The second sub-dimension is about forms of political leadership and preferred modes of decision-making in politics (way of doing in politics). At the high end, political appeals consist of claims to favour formal and institutionally mediated models of authority, while at the low end the political appeals emphasise strong leadership. The politicians of the low spectrum usually claim that it is much closer to “the people” than the impersonal politicians of the high spectrum of politics.¹² In Greece, the low spectrum of politics is mainly dominated by populist political parties (SYRIZA, ANEL), while the high spectrum by anti-populist forces (ND, PASOK, The River/To Potami etc.).

Figure 1: The Greek (parliamentary) political space



Source: the author

But what exactly is populism? Is it a political style or an ideology? Is it a political strategy or a political discourse? Populism is a concept that occupies a significant part of public debate all over the world, but does not have a clear content. Mudde and Kaltwasser define populism as a “thin-centred ideology” (not a typical comprehensive ideology):

*“that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, the pure people versus the corrupt elite, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonte generale* (general will) of the people.”¹³*

However, the problem with this definition is that it presumes homogeneity of the people and takes a moralistic reading of the competition between the people and the elite (“pure people” and “corrupt elite”).

¹² Ostiguy, *The High and the Low in Politics*.

¹³ Mudde and Kaltwasser, *Populism in Europe and the Americas*, 8.

In order to understand the notion of populism, we can highlight the theoretical insights of Ernesto Laclau, who avoids attributing certain ideological contents. Laclau (Essex School) analyses populism as a political logic that can be found in any political movement, a type of discourse characterised by the emergence of “equivalences, popular subjectivity” and the construction of an “enemy.”¹⁴ Specifically, populism divides society into two opposing groups, the people and the elites, through the connection of different popular demands (logic of equivalence) and the creation of a collective identity (the recognition of an enemy).¹⁵ As Laclau points out, “populism starts at the point where popular democratic elements are presented as an antagonistic option against the ideology of the dominant bloc.”¹⁶ Laclau believes that:

*“the equivalential chain cannot be the result of a purely fortuitous coincidence, but has to be consolidated through the emergence of an element which gives coherence to the chain by signifying it as a totality. This element is what we have called empty signifier.”*¹⁷

In that sense, we argue that there are mainly two “minimal criteria” of a populist discourse (following “POPULISMUS project” approach): (1) prominent references to “the people” (or equivalent signifiers, e.g. the “underdog”) and the “popular will” and to the need to truly represent it; (2) an antagonistic perception of the socio-political terrain as divided between “the people”/the underdog and “the elites”/the establishment.¹⁸ The concept of “the people” works as a nodal point in the context of populist discourse. According to Laclau and Mouffe:

*“any discourse is constituted as an attempt to dominate the field of discursivity, to arrest the flow of difference, to construct a centre. We will call the privileged discursive points of this partial fixation, nodal points.”*¹⁹

Populism is usually combined with another “host” ideology (e.g. socialism, nationalism etc.). As Taggart points out, “populism has an essential chameleonic quality that means it always takes on the hue of the environment in which it occurs.”²⁰ It is hence possible to have politically antithetical articulations of populism, such as left-wing and right-wing populism. The first often has an inclusionary character, while the second is exclusionary. Inclusionary populism allows for the political integration of marginalised and excluded people, thus expanding the boundaries of democracy (stresses the notion of the people as plebeians). Exclusionary populism understands the people as an ethnically or culturally homogeneous unit and excludes people

¹⁴ Laclau, Ernesto. 2005. *Populism: What's in a Name?*, in *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*, edited by Panizza, Francisco. London: Verso, 39.

¹⁵ Laclau, *Populism*, 32-38.

¹⁶ Laclau, Ernesto. 1977. *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory: Capitalism, Fascism, Populism*. London: New Left Books, 173.

¹⁷ Laclau, *Populism*, 44.

¹⁸ International Conference “POPULISMUS: Populist Discourse and Democracy.” Background Paper, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.

¹⁹ Laclau, Ernesto and Mouffe Chantal. 1985. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. London-New York: Verso, 112.

²⁰ Taggart, Paul. 2000. *Populism*. Buckingham: Open University Press, 4.

(migrants, minorities etc.) on the grounds of racist and nativist reasons.²¹ Latin-American and South-European populism are mostly inclusive and egalitarian (socioeconomic dimension), while North-American and North-European populism are principally exclusionary and hierarchical in profile (sociocultural dimension).²²

Finally, it is noteworthy to mention that there is a significant difference between the two types of populism. Inclusionary populism is usually expressed by left-wing movements and is combined with a kind of progressive patriotism, while exclusionary populism is expressed by extreme right-wing parties and is associated with nationalism.²³ Left-wing populist movements do not necessarily involve nationalism and xenophobia, as is demonstrated by their anti-racist orientation. However, it is possible to utilise a type of progressive patriotism, a sense of pride in a culturally or territorially defined community.²⁴ Patriotism is usually defined as the persistence of love or loyalty to a country and is distinguished from xenophobia or hatred of others.²⁵ According to Kosterman and Fleshbach, there is a sharp difference between nationalism and patriotism. Patriotism taps the affective component of one's feelings toward one's country, while nationalism reflects a perception of national superiority and an orientation toward national dominance. As they argue patriotism is valuable because it is as "important to the well-being of the nation as high self-esteem is to the well-being of an individual."²⁶

Based on the above theoretical framework, this research tries to find if the notion of "the people" emerges as a nodal point in SYRIZA's discourse and if Tsipras' discourse presents an antagonistic and equivalential logic. Moreover, it examines the inclusionary character of its populism and its "anti-imperialist" orientation. In order to achieve these research objectives, the analysis draws on a random sample of (25) speeches, interviews and statements by Alexis Tsipras before and after the elections of September 2015.²⁷ However, we present here just some examples of SYRIZA's populist discourse.

SYRIZA's rise to power

SYRIZA was founded in January 2004 by Synaspismos and other small leftist groups, with the aim of helping the radical left party secure the 3% threshold required for parliamentary representation. Until the early 2010s, SYRIZA was

²¹ Filc, Dani. 2015. Latin American Inclusive and European Exclusionary Populism: Colonialism as an Explanation. *Journal of Political Ideologies* 20(3), 263-83.

²² Mudde, Cas and Cristobal Rovira Kaltwasser. 2013. Exclusionary vs. Inclusionary Populism: Comparing the Contemporary Europe and Latin America. *Government and Opposition* 48(2), 147-74.

²³ Patriotism derives from the etymological root *patria* and refers to the land of one's fathers (fatherland). The patria is not so much a geographical entity as a political one. On the contrary, nationalism often appeals to "blood ties."

²⁴ Gerbaudo, Paolo. 2016. Leftwing Populism: a Primer. *Medium*, 30 November 2016 (accessed: 01. June 2017).

²⁵ Janowitz, Morris. 1983. *The Reconstruction of Patriotism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 194.

²⁶ Kosterman, Rick and Feshbach Seymour. 1989. Toward a Measure of Patriotic and Nationalistic Attitudes. *Political Psychology* 10, 257-74.

²⁷ We used speeches, interviews and statements by Alexis Tsipras between July 2015 and April 2017.

a marginal party of the left and was unable to capitalise on PASOK's decline and to demolish the powerful bipartisanship of the Greek party system.²⁸

The massive change in the Greek political system came after the eruption of the economic crisis and its repercussions. As mentioned above, the growing frustration and anger of the Greek citizens due to the ongoing imposition of austerity policies resulted in the collapse of previous party identifications.²⁹ SYRIZA realised that traditional bipartisanship was coming to an end, and Alexis Tsipras had the opportunity to represent the majority of the people and to build a new broader social alliance. In order to achieve this, Tsipras decided to use references to "the people" (Λός) in his political rhetoric. According to Stavrakakis and Katsambekis, if one examines Tsipras' speech in the central electoral campaign of the party in Athens in 2009, he/she will find that there are only five references to "the people." Compare that to SYRIZA's central electoral campaign in 2012, where one can find more than fifty-one references to the "people" in Tsipras' speech. This decisive shift in his discourse helped SYRIZA to jump from marginal coalition of the left to a party close to seizing power.³⁰

In the elections of June 2012, SYRIZA gained 26.89% of the vote. This dynamic did not come out of the blue, but was fuelled by the massive anti-austerity popular movements, such as "Aganaktismenoi". SYRIZA's political programme was based on an alternative kind of policy (annulling the Memorandum, increasing the minimum monthly wage, putting the banking sector under public control, etc.), and its goal was to fight against the neoliberal policies of the two traditional parties. Alexis Tsipras, through his alternative political orientation, called for a broad social coalition that would lead to a strong left government. In 2014 SYRIZA won the European elections in Greece and returned 6 MPs. In the parliamentary elections of January 2015, SYRIZA won for the first time (securing 149 out of 300 seats) and formed a coalition government with the populist party of ANEL (radical right).³¹

SYRIZA's governmental programme was based on an alternative mix of policies, with the aim of annulling the "Memorandum" and the policies of austerity, which were blamed for the exacerbation of the crisis. After six months of harsh marathon negotiations with the "institutions"/"troika" (without an agreement), which led to closed banks and capital controls, SYRIZA chose to hold a referendum. The referendum took place on 5 July 2015 to decide whether Greece was to accept the bailout proposals by the European Commission (EC), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the European Central Bank (ECB). The two parties of the coalition government (SYRIZA & ANEL) and the (neo-Nazi) Golden Dawn recommended a "No" vote to the Greek

²⁸ Katsourides, Yiannos. 2016. *Radical Left Parties in Government: The Cases of SYRIZA and AKEL*. Palgrave Macmillan, 53-67.

²⁹ Teperoglou and Tsatsanis, *Dealignment, De-legitimation and the Implosion of the Two-party System in Greece*.

³⁰ Stavrakakis, Yannis and Giorgos Katsambekis. 2014. Left-wing Populism in the European Periphery: The Case of SYRIZA. *Journal of Political Ideologies* 19(2), 119-42.

³¹ A political party needs 151 seats in parliament to form a government. You can find the election results in the webpage of Ministry of Interior (Greece). Ministry of Interior, Greece, Accessible [here](#).

people. The pro-European (anti-populist) political parties of New Democracy, To Potami and PASOK campaigned for a “Yes” vote. The Communist Party of Greece (KKE) declared that it was against both of two options of the referendum. Finally, against the predictions of many opinion polls, the majority of the Greek people voted in favour of “No” (61%). Tsipras stated that the result of the referendum was not a mandate for rupture with Europe, but rather for a strengthened negotiating position for Greece. According to Mudde, the referendum was much more about the survival of the Greek government than it was about Greece or Europe.³² However, Tsipras decided to reject the result of the referendum and sign a new agreement with Europe. The refusal of SYRIZA’s 43 MPs to support the new bailout agreement (third Memorandum) led to new elections.³³ In September 2015, just a few months after its large victory, SYRIZA won the elections again and to retain power (with ANEL).

The political discourse of SYRIZA in power

SYRIZA’s unexpected results were explained by mainstream media, the established parties and many intellectuals with recourse to its populist character. Using the two formal criteria mentioned above, can we accept this populist characterisation? Is the discourse articulated by SYRIZA a populist one?

SYRIZA’s political discourse does not change after its rise to power, but retains its main populist features. Although one would expect huge changes in SYRIZA’s political strategy (perhaps a shift towards a bureaucratic discourse), this did not happen. Alexis Tsipras’ enemies of “the people” are still the establishment, the media, the banks, neoliberalism, the EU of austerity and Golden Dawn. The main theme of SYRIZA’s discourse before and after his victory in the elections of September 2015 is the “battle against the old establishment and the EU of austerity”.

But let us examine in some more detail how the signifier “the people” operates within Tsipras’ discourse before and after the elections of September 2015.³⁴ The leader of the radical left calls upon all democratic citizens, the working class, the unemployed who demand work, leftists, immigrants and all the Greek people to join forces with SYRIZA to seek out and defeat the neoliberal right. These people must not allow the conservatives and neoliberal political forces to rise to power again. These people must fight in order to provide an opportunity for SYRIZA to continue the battle against the neoliberal forces and austerity.³⁵ According to Alexis Tsipras, SYRIZA did not betray its people, but negotiated hard under conditions of unprecedented financial asphyxiation in order to fulfil its commitments.³⁶

After SYRIZA’s victory in the elections of September 2015, Tsipras continues to use the central signifier of “the people” (the non-privileged) in his discourse:

³² Mudde, Cas. 2017. *SYRIZA: The Failure of the Populist Promise*. Palgrave Mcmillan, 19.

³³ Memorandums: The loan agreements between Greece and its emergency lenders.

³⁴ [Speeches of Prime Minister of Greece Alexis Tsipras](#) (accessed: 01. June 2017).

³⁵ [Tsipras’ speech](#), 2015. *SYRIZA* (accessed: 01. June 2017).

³⁶ [Tsipras in TITF](#), 2015. *SYRIZA*, 07. September 2015 (accessed: 01. June 2017).

“SYRIZA won three crucial elections in just a few months, and one crucial referendum. It won the elections [...] with the Greek people and Greek society as its sole ally.”³⁷ In a speech opening a SYRIZA party conference in 2016, Tsipras stated: “The Greek people have suffered for so many years and deserve to be compensated.”³⁸ Some months later in a speech in Berlin to a congress of European leftist parties, he said: “Our creditors need to keep in mind that the Greek people have made enough sacrifices, and now it’s time for them to fulfil their obligations.”³⁹ It is clear that the signifier “the people” continues to appear in SYRIZA’s discourse as a privileged reference, a nodal point. Nonetheless, one may notice that there are also other important signifiers (keywords) in its discourse, such as “Europe” and “democracy.”

But the crucial question here is whether SYRIZA’s discourse is antagonistic. Who are “the people” and who are “the enemies of the people”? As mentioned above, SYRIZA’s “the people” includes many different social groups: all the heterogeneous subjects who have lost their salary or their jobs in the years of the crisis, all these people who are suffering from the consequences of austerity policies. The democratic struggle against neoliberal forces and the old establishment holds the various subjects together, orienting their actions towards a common purpose: victory against the corrupt establishment and the austerity of the EU. “The people” of the Greek radical left, called upon to participate in a new radical democratic change, is a plural and inclusionary subject, unbound by ethnic, racial, sexual and gender restrictions. For example, SYRIZA is the only parliamentary party that supports the right to gay marriage.

On the other side, “the enemy” in SYRIZA’s discourse before and after its rise to power is clearly “the old establishment,” the political forces which have been governing the country for many decades with negative consequences. Specifically, there are two different sides: On one side, SYRIZA attacks the political forces within the country (the old establishment: ND and PASOK), and on the other side criticises neoliberalism and its advocates (IMF, the current EU). New Democracy, the main political opponent of SYRIZA, is vehemently blamed by the leader of the radical left for all the problems facing the country. ND and PASOK are characterised by SYRIZA as the political forces of the old corrupt party system, which exploit the people and promote partisanship, corruption, bureaucracy, political favours (*rousfeti*) and unequal justice. These corrupt political forces, the bank system and the media sector (“triangle of sin”) must be defeated by the social alliance of the people. In the election of September 2015, SYRIZA poses this dilemma: “The Greek people vote for the restoration of the corrupt system of oligarchs or for the path to the future with stability, security and social justice.”⁴⁰

After the party’s rise to power, Tsipras continues to defend the non-privileged and attack the opposition parties and the economic oligarchy. SYRIZA calls its

³⁷ Tsipras’ speech. 2015. *SYRIZA*, 01. December 2015 (accessed: 01. June 2017).

³⁸ N.N. 2016. *Opening SYRIZA Conference, Tsipras Takes Hard Line on Debt*. *Kathimerini*, 13. October 2016 (accessed: 01. June 2017).

³⁹ Kirschbaum, Erik. 2016. *Tsipras Says People of Greece Have Made Enough Sacrifices*. *Yahoo news*, 17. December 2016 (accessed: 01. June 2017).

⁴⁰ *Tsipras’ speech in Livadeia*. 2015. *SYRIZA*, 04. September 2015 (accessed: 01. June 2016).

people to stand by its side in order to win the harsh battles against neoliberal obsessions and oligarchy. He also argues that only through such struggles will it be useful as a political movement for the working class and youth.⁴¹ According to Tsipras, the hegemony of neoliberalism within the EU must be defeated. However, SYRIZA does not reject the initial vision of the EU, but its current neoliberal form. The leadership of the party is in favour of the settlement reached with the leaders of the EU (July 2015) in order to prevent the most extreme objectives from being implemented – those pushed for by the most extreme conservative forces in the EU. The PM of Greece argues that this agreement prevented the transfer of property abroad, financial asphyxiation and the collapse of the financial system.⁴² Moreover, Tsipras characterises SYRIZA as a progressive European force which fights to change the anti-immigration logic of the EU. It is true that SYRIZA has been one of the most consistent advocates of equal rights for immigrants and their full inclusion in Greek society. The radical left supports the rights of immigrants and refugees and defends the idea of a new EU based on solidarity. The “Europe of repression” and the fascist forces that support it, such as the Golden Dawn, are a major threat to democracy.⁴³ Hence, there is no doubt that SYRIZA’s discourse is organised according to an antagonistic schema. It distinguishes between “us” (the people/non-privileged) and “them” (the elites, i.e. the corrupt political parties, neoliberalism, the EU of austerity etc.).

It is also worth noting, at this point, that the chain of equivalence structured by SYRIZA does not follow an exclusionary logic. SYRIZA should not be equated with the populist radical right parties, despite the fact that it collaborates with a nationalist party. SYRIZA’s cooperation with ANEL is not based on nationalist or racist reasons, but on their common “struggle” against austerity policies. Tsipras’ patriotic references clearly have an anti-imperialist character. As we mentioned above, SYRIZA embraces the project of a Europe of solidarity and it defends immigrants and marginalised social groups. Its “people” is a plural, active, democratic, emancipatory and inclusionary subject unbound by ethnic, racial, sexual and gender restrictions. In contrast, the “people” of extreme right-wing parties is nationalist, rather passive, racially and ethnically pure, sometimes anti-democratic and authoritarian.⁴⁴ This proves the fact that inclusionary populism is not necessarily a threat to the quality of democracy. Therefore, some concepts such as “national-populism”⁴⁵ and the idea that all populisms (right or left) share more or less similar substantive futures should not be accepted. The linkage between populism and nationalism (or racism) is a relation of articulation and not a relation of a necessary fusion.⁴⁶

⁴¹ [Tsipras’ speech in the central committee](#). 2015. *SYRIZA*, 12. December 2015 (accessed: 01. June 2017).

⁴² [Tsipras’ statement following the conclusion of the Eurozone Summit](#). 2015. *Prime Minister*, 13. July 2015 (accessed: 01. June 2017).

⁴³ [Tsipras’ speech in Athens](#). 2015. *SYRIZA*, 18. September 2015 (accessed: 01. June 2017).

⁴⁴ Stavrakakis, Yannis / Andreadis, Ioannis and Giorgos Katsambekis. 2016. A New Populism Index at Work: Identifying Populist Candidates and Parties in the Contemporary Greek Context. *European Politics and Society*, 4-5.

⁴⁵ Pantazopoulos, Andreas. 2017. [The National-Populist Illusion as a “Pathology” of Politics: The Greek Case and Beyond](#). *Telos*, 11. August 2016 (accessed: 01. June 2017).

⁴⁶ Stavrakakis, Yannis. 2005. *Religion and Populism in Contemporary Greece*, in *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*, edited by Francisco, Panizza (ed.). London-New York: Verso, 244-47.

Inclusionary populism in Greece: “Crypto-colonialism” as an explanation⁴⁷

At a time when many European countries are dominated by exclusionary populist parties, the Greek political landscape is hegemonised by inclusionary populism and anti-colonialist discourse. What are the conditions explaining the emergence and dominance of inclusionary populism in Greece and Southern Europe more widely?

According to Filc, “colonialism is an important key to understanding the development of either form of populism.”⁴⁸ Specifically, inclusive populism appears mostly in colonised countries and regions (such as Latin America), and the people are constituted by the inclusion of different ethnic or social groups.⁴⁹ The patriotic character of populism in Latin America differs from the nationalist rhetoric of racial discrimination used by far-right parties in Europe because it emphasises indigenous people’s pasts and the identity of mestizos. The indigenous is always a mix of Native American, mestizo, creole and black, a mix that is inherently inclusive.⁵⁰ Thus, the notion of “the people” does not refer to the “pure people of the nation,” as it is constructed through a continuous process of interaction between different social and cultural groups. It is not surprising that inclusionary populism is expressed both by progressive and conservative movements and leaders. On the contrary, exclusionary populism appears mainly in former colonialist countries (such as in Northern Europe) because its nativism is that of the coloniser. Racism, as an innate characteristic of their culture, plays a key role in the formation of their identity (the people as an ethnocultural unit). In the past, the colonialist denied the benefits of citizenship to the foreign peoples, while today the former colonialist prohibits the entry of immigrants into the country. It is interesting that many of the immigrants targeted by exclusionary populist parties come from the former colonies of those countries.⁵¹ As we understand, the ethnocentrism of their culture does not allow the conservative and radical right parties to express an inclusionary populism. But what happens in the case of Greece? What are the conditions explaining the emergence and the dominance of inclusionary populism in the “low” spectrum of politics?

Greece was not a colony of a powerful Western European country, but it has always been economically and culturally dependent on the West. As Herzfeld argues, since its declaration of independence in 1821 Greece has always been highly dependent both economically and politically.⁵² According to him, some countries (such as Greece) are nominally independent, but that independence comes at the price of a humiliating form of effective dependence (crypto-

⁴⁷ For more information about this: Stavrakakis, Yannis and Siomos Thomas. 2016. SYRIZA’s Populism: Testing and Extending an Essex School Perspective, ECPR General Conference, Charles University Prague, 7-10. September 2016.

⁴⁸ Filc, *Latin American Inclusive and European Exclusionary Populism*.

⁴⁹ Filc, *Latin American Inclusive and European Exclusionary Populism*.

⁵⁰ Filc, *Latin American Inclusive and European Exclusionary Populism*.

⁵¹ Filc, *Latin American Inclusive and European Exclusionary Populism*.

⁵² Herzfeld, Michael. 2011. Crisis Attack: Impromptu Ethnography in the Greek Maelstrom. *Anthropology Today* 27(5), 22-26, 25.

colonialism).⁵³ This kind of dependence is maintained until today through the imposition of neoliberal doctrine by European institutions and the IMF. The management of the crisis by the EU and IMF and severe austerity measures resulted in the loss of national sovereignty, as the Troika/Institutions control the Greek government's agencies.⁵⁴ Greece and other South European countries faced the aggressive and stereotypical behaviour of the North European countries. The German government, in its effort to establish a strong dominance in the heart of the EU, promoted policies that exacerbated the economies of weaker countries. According to Douzinas and Papaconstantinou, a new type of colonialism is emerging in Europe today, in which the Brussels elites treat the European south as "colonial subjects" to be reformed and civilised. This political project is not related to the initial vision of European integration into a peaceful and equal European community, but aims instead at a neocolonial disciplining of "poor" and "weak" countries.⁵⁵ Hence, this "shadowy" dependence of Greece on the West (crypto-colonialism) perhaps explains the dominance of inclusionary populism in the "low" dimension of Greek politics.

The extremely difficult situation in Greece triggered a wave of anti-Germanism (a kind of anti-imperialism) that was presented with explicit references to the 1940s and Axis Occupation of the country.⁵⁶ The "neo-colonial" character of the EU has been represented by left-wing populist forces as an attempt by European technocrats and the German government to transform Greece into a "colony of debt." SYRIZA developed an anti-Troika and anti-German discourse with references to "national independence." According to Lialiouti and Bithymitris, SYRIZA has instrumentalised the German occupation of the 2nd World War and incorporated it into its anti-memorandum discourse. Hence, it is not strange that at the head of the party list was Manolis Glezos, (a symbol of anti-Nazi resistance) and that one of the party's programmatic declarations was the return of German war reparations to Greece.⁵⁷

The emergence of SYRIZA seems to be a response to the colonial overtones in the relation between Germany and the countries of the semi-periphery. However, the domination of inclusionary populism in Greece is not a new phenomenon. In the period after the fall of the Colonels' dictatorship (1974), Andreas Papandreou constructed the political discourse of PASOK through the connection of populism and anti-imperialism (anti-Americanism). PASOK claimed to be a political movement that struggles for four political aims: "national independence", "popular sovereignty", "social liberation" and "democratic procedure." The enemy of "the people" of Andreas Papandreou was

⁵³ Herzfeld, Michael. 2002. The Absent Presence: Discourses of Cryptocolonialism. *The South-Atlantic Quarterly* 101(4), 899-926, 900-01.

⁵⁴ Ness, Immanuel and Zak Cope. (eds.). 2016. *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Imperialism and Anti-imperialism*. New York: Palgrave Mcmillan, 346.

⁵⁵ Douzinas, Costas and Petros Papaconstantinou. 2011. Greece is Standing up to EU Neocolonialism. *The Guardian*, 27. June 2011 (accessed: 01. June 2017).

⁵⁶ Ness and Cope, *the Palgrave Encyclopedia of Imperialism and Anti-imperialism*, 346.

⁵⁷ Lialiouti, Zinovia and Giorgos Bithymitris. 2013. "The Nazis Strike Again": The Concept of 'the German Enemy', *Party Strategies and Mass Perceptions Through the Prism of The Greek Economic Crisis*, in *The Use and Abuse of Memory: Interpreting World War II in Contemporary European Politics*, edited by Karner, Christian and Bram Mertens. New Brunswick-London: Transaction Publishers, 168.

not the immigrant or the foreigner, but the imperialist powers of the West (The USA, NATO etc.). The populist and anti-imperialist discourse of PASOK was a strong response to the Western foreign powers, which were deeply involved in the internal affairs of the country. Moreover, New Democracy was accused by PASOK as the cardinal proponent of imperialist interests in Greece. It is characteristic that there was a single slogan that PASOK elaborated until its ascent to power: “Greece belongs to Greeks,” a slogan that contradicted Karamanlis’ motto “Greece belongs to the West.”⁵⁸

Greek anti-populism: From “Kitsch” to “Cultural Dualism”

The imposition of austerity and the re-emergence of populist parties in Greece have introduced a polarisation along a memorandum/anti-memorandum axis, which reactivated the pre-existing populism/anti-populism division. In anti-populist discourse, the notion of populism emerges as an empty signifier *par excellence* and is presented as the absolute evil. As Stavrakakis argues, anti-populist discourses are “downgrading populists to subhumans, to bare life: cavemen, Neanderthals, and troglodytes.”⁵⁹

The forceful emergence of left-wing populist parties led to the ideological abuse of the concept of populism by neoliberal political forces. The rise of populism displeased the liberal and reformist parties, which tried to find a solution to deal with it. Hence, the anti-populist forces either constructed new (stereotypical) theories about populism, or they utilised the existing concepts. Many anti-populist theories have been inspired by the work of Richard Hofstadter, who equated the phenomenon of populism with an irresponsible and irrational political culture (“paranoid style of politics”).⁶⁰ Hence, Greek public discourse has been dominated by the idea that populism is a democratic malaise and an irresponsible ideology that hypnotises the “immature” masses and threatens the quality of democracy.⁶¹ The mainstream parties and their organic intellectuals, in their efforts to demonise SYRIZA’s populist programme, utilised the “theory of the extremes” (through the concept of national-populism), equating the radical left with the radical right parties. Moreover, they described the Greek political landscape as a political battle between the forces of “enlightened rationalism” (liberalism) and “destructive populism.” This idea is based on the concept of “cultural dualism”⁶² that understands contemporary Greek history as a continuous struggle between an “underdog” and a “modernising” cultural camp. In this context, populism is associated with the underdog culture and threatens European democracy. The idea of cultural dualism has functioned as a legitimising force to the

⁵⁸ Ness and Cope, *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Imperialism and Anti-imperialism*, 343.

⁵⁹ Stavrakakis, Yannis. 2014. “The Return of “the People”: Populism and Anti-Populism in the Shadow of the European Crisis. *Constellations* 21(4), 505-17, 510.

⁶⁰ Hofstadter, Richard. 1964. The Paranoid Style in American Politics. *Harper's Magazine*.

⁶¹ The mainstream political parties and the majority of the Greek media use populism in a derogatory way. According to Stavrakakis, “*the discursive sequence in question (reference to popular demands and ‘the people’ = populism = radical evil) has been sedimented in many public spheres to such an extent that one could argue that it has been naturalized.*” Stavrakakis, Yannis. 2017. How Did ‘Populism’ Become a Pejorative Concept? And Why is This Important Today? A Genealogy of Double Hermeneutics, POPULISMUS Working Papers 6, 2.

⁶² Diamandouros, Nikiforos. 1994. Cultural Dualism and Political Change in Post-authoritarian Greece, Estudio/Working paper, N° 50, Madrid, Instituto Juan March.

modernising strategy led by PASOK governments (1993-2004) and ND (2004-2009). Nowadays, this theory seems to function as a legitimising force to the neoliberal project of anti-populist forces.

Greek anti-populism has taken different forms at different times. In the period of “Metapolitefsi” and after the rise of PASOK to power (1981) the social subject of “the people” (with a progressive and anti-imperialist character) played a central role in Greek political life. The construction of a new social alliance by Andreas Papandreou and the formation of popular identities within Greek society were directly connected with the emergence of popular social, political and cultural phenomena (rebetiko, folk art, the prevalence of the demotic Greek language etc.).⁶³ PASOK embraced the emerging popular culture and promised to commit itself to shelter Greek popular culture against the interests of the local economic elite.⁶⁴ The behaviour of Andreas Papandreou, his folksy language and anti-intellectualism were important components of PASOK’s culture.

A large part of the intelligentsia and reformist opposition took positions against the popular culture and populism of this period. A remarkable example is the case of the political and cultural magazine of the Left, “Anti” (1972-2008), which launched a huge campaign against Modern Greek kitsch, considering that “tasteless” objects, perceptions, images and themes disfigure the natural environment and affect culture in a negative way.⁶⁵ The book of the “Friends of the magazine Anti” published the initiative of the magazine to capture “bad taste” throughout the Greek territory and to terminate it, because, as Koutsikou argues, kitsch contradicts harmony and degrades the quality of life.⁶⁶ According to this book, kitsch has spread throughout the country through objects and behaviours and is directly associated with fascism and populism. As Dimitris Raftopoulos asks: “Why does politics [...] adopt kitsch? [...] Demagogy and Populism are the answer;”⁶⁷ Loukianos Kilaidonis mentions: “It is difficult to determine where exactly the relationship between kitsch, fascism and madness is located. Because it is certain that there is a connection between them.”⁶⁸ The initiative of the magazine against kitsch was, in fact, an attempt to terminate the cultural side of PASOK’s populism, mainly from the side of the “reformist left.” The conservative and liberal politicians of New Democracy could also not accept this kind of popular culture, because they believed that it undermined the moral order.⁶⁹

Today, the vast majority of academic research tries to examine and locate the “problem” with populism. However, it does not examine the consequences of anti-populist discourse on the quality of democratic political confrontation.

⁶³ Sofos, Spyros. 2000. *Popular Identity and Political Culture in Post-Dictatorship Greece: Towards a Cultural Approach of The Populist Phenomenon*, in *Political Culture Today*, edited by Demertzis, Nicos. Athens: Odysseas, 133-35 (in Greek).

⁶⁴ Tragaki, Dafni. 2007. *Rebetiko Words: Ethnomusicology and Ethnography in the City*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholar Publishing, 131.

⁶⁵ *Anti*, Period 2, No. 275, 23. November 1984, 29 (in Greek).

⁶⁶ Koutsikou, Dafni. (ed.). 1984. *Something “Nice”: A Tour to the Modern Greek Kitsch*. Athens: The Friends of the magazine Anti, 14-16 (in Greek).

⁶⁷ Koutsikou (ed.), *Something “Nice”: A tour to the Modern Greek kitsch*, 69.

⁶⁸ Koutsikou (ed.), *Something “Nice”: A tour to the Modern Greek kitsch*, 272.

⁶⁹ Sofos, *Popular Identity and Political Culture in Post-dictatorship Greece*, 144-51.

What exactly is the problem? The problem with anti-populist discourse is that it marginalises “the people” as the legitimising cornerstone of democratic processes and leaves no space for democratic disagreement or a healthy political dialogue. The popular-democratic subject of modernity (the people) is systematically ignored and stigmatised by liberal and social-democratic political forces, in their effort to develop the idea that the “uncontrolled masses” are the main enemy of democracy (a kind of demophobia).⁷⁰ The anti-populist strategy gives opportunity to the governing elites to marginalise the people and to transform politics into a political game only for liberals and technocrats. Hence, as Stavrakakis argues, the demonisation of “the people” furthers de-democratisation, leading to what Rancière depicted as “to govern without people” or “to govern without politics.”⁷¹

Conclusion

In this paper, we have shown through the methodology of the Essex School of Discourse Analysis that SYRIZA continues to express an inclusionary populist discourse after its rise to power. It is clear that SYRIZA’s populist and anti-establishment attitude continues to be a central component once in office. Furthermore, we outlined the differentiation between inclusionary and exclusionary populism and tried to prove that SYRIZA’s populism does not have the same characteristics as right-wing populist parties. We also argued that populism is not by necessity nationalist or racist. Moreover, we tried to explain the domination of inclusionary populism in Greece through the concept of “crypto-colonialism.” Finally, we analysed two different manifestations of anti-populism, “kitsch” and “cultural dualism”, in order to highlight the danger derived from this kind of stereotypical discourse.

The crucial questions that arise here are: Did SYRIZA succeed in fulfilling popular demands and creating the conditions for a new “pluralistic” and a more democratic society? What are the consequences of SYRIZA’s populist discourse? It is true that SYRIZA’s populism in opposition managed to improve the quality of democracy through its struggles against the technocratic EU and neoliberal parties, and it became the voice of marginalised people (the silent majority). However, it seems that SYRIZA’s populist promise for the radical transformation of the political and economic system is still in limbo. The leadership of SYRIZA rejected the result of the Greek referendum (No to a new bailout: 61%) and to continue the implementation of austerity policies, a fact that provoked an internal crisis in the social movement. The new agreements (Memorandums) violate fundamental human rights while increasing poverty, class polarisation and social exclusion. According to Katsourides, SYRIZA failed to: (1) restore pension payments; (2) restore the minimum wage; (3) reverse privatisations; (4) end austerity programmes; and (5) increase funds for education, health, housing, and local development.⁷² Nevertheless, SYRIZA argues that the signing of the Memorandums was a defeat in a battle, but not a defeat in the war.

⁷⁰ Katsambekis, *the Place of The People*.

⁷¹ Stavrakakis, “*the Return of “the People,”*” 510.

⁷² Katsourides, *Radical Left Parties in Government*, 129.

Nine years after the eruption of the economic crisis there is still no sign of recovery for Greece. The radical left has not achieved a decisive breakthrough by taking advantage of the popular protests. However, the defeat of inclusionary populism in Greece does not prove the defeat of left-wing populism in general, but underlines mainly the failure of the Greek radical left to address serious issues and to tackle EU policies. In contrast to the Greek case, there are many examples of left-wing populist movements that succeeded in creating the conditions for a democratic society and achieving their goals (Morales, Kirchner etc.).

Future research should consider the following important questions: Is it possible today for a radical party to overcome the obstacle of neoliberal Europe and to implement pro-worker/pro-popular policies without harsh consequences? Could the Greek radical left take heed of the mistakes and failures of SYRIZA's government and set about reorganising the social movements?

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