The people in the 'here and now'

Populism, modernization and the state in Greece

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Abstract: The term 'populism' has gained renewed prominence in Greece during the Eurozone crisis, in both public and academic debates. In this article I conceptualize populism as a discourse of territorial and temporal particularism, which challenges the way a state has been incorporated into the international political and economic system. Based on this definition, I question whether oppositional discourses employed by partisan actors or official power are wholesale and genuine expressions of populism. Thus, I contest the notion that Greece failed due to populism. Instead I draw attention to a failure in the official legitimation of modernization by state elites that long preceded the crisis.

Introduction

With the onset in 2010 of the Greek debt crisis and EU-dictated austerity, new parties arose in the Greek party system combining opposition to austerity with resentment towards the political system – a prototypical populist message. This article argues that the intensity of populism in Greece during the crisis is not solely due to the severity of the economic downturn (although this is relevant as well). It also is the culmination of a long-standing failure of state elites to underpin adaptation to the demands of European integration with inclusive visions of the political community.

Populism is defined here as a response to tensions between territorial political rule and external pressures on the state prescribing specific modes of incorporation into the global economy. Populism puts forth territorially and temporally circumscribed representations of the political community mobilized by disenchantment with how the political system mediates between domestic demands and international pressures. In semi-peripheral countries in particular the state is the key agent of incorporation into the global economy and, therefore, also the locus of contestation between rival modernization projects. Greece's semi-peripherality however is compounded by historical legacies like the mismatch between the geographical and normative reach of state and nation in the first century of independence. These exacerbated the tension between territorial rule and integration in the international system of political and economic exchange, and have conditioned the content, character and durability of populist politics to this day.

Populist reactions have thus been a pervasive feature of modern Greek history. It is however only in the last 30 years that the antagonistic logic of populism has overshadowed universal visions of the political community in official legitimation of the state's adaptation

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to dominant international political and economic norms and practices. In the context of the Eurozone crisis, this has meant a deepening of the chasm between state and society as the former attempts to align with the tenets of European integration and, in the process, neutralize the material demands of the latter.

The article proceeds as follows: First I present a conceptualization of populism that is appropriate for the Greek context. I then explain how changes in the international environment historically heightened the contradictions between domestic and international pressures on the Greek state leading to populist ruptures and official counter-responses. Then I analyse populism in Greece during the economic crisis and address the conceptual implications of the Greek case based on the themes of this special issue. The final section concludes.

Populism, the state and the international: A framework for analysis

In order to analyse populism in a setting where it is seemingly omnipresent, its conceptualization needs to be broad but also crisp enough to allow for a differentiation between populist and non-populist phenomena. Ernesto Laclau's understanding of populism is well suited both for the study of populism beyond the partisan arena and as a phenomenon in need of historical contextualization[1].

Laclau conceptualizes populism as a dichotomous discourse that bundles together frustrated social demands by constructing a political subject (usually, but not necessarily, embodied in the signifier of 'the people'[2]) crystalizing opposition to 'power'. This 'logic of equivalence' contrasts with the 'logic of difference', where demands are separated before they become accommodated, and social groups are incorporated in administrative

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practices (Laclau, 2005a; 2005b). Populism arises whenever parts of a political community feel excluded from the 'presumed coincidence between the community and a discursive formation characteristic of institutional discourse' (Arditi, 2010: 493).

A key part of equivalential demands is the aspiration of excluded members of the community to define *themselves* as the legitimate whole community (Laclau, 2005a: 81) – for example in challenging formal definitions of the nation through discourses of the 'real people' (Arditi, 2010: 490; also Stavrakakis, 2014). Thus a major impetus for the emergence of populism is *membership tensions* between the officially and institutionally defined limits and criteria of belonging to a political community and what some consider as the just membership of this community.

But purely populist political projects are ideal-types (Laclau, 2005b: 46-47). Official power will always accommodate elements of particularistic discourses in how it incorporates demands. Dichotomous discourses may also be maintained when populists acquire political power but cannot (or will not) institutionalize their vision of the people as a new hegemonic discourse that defines the whole political community. In these cases the new power-holders may employ what Laclau calls *langues de bois,* discourses of legitimation that aim to shelter the new official power from newly emerging social demands by maintaining the sense of antagonistic division of society that informed populism's rise in the first place.

The 'power' or 'political system' is embedded in a system of interactions with other states structured by formal rules and informal norms about acceptable modes of domestic political and economic governance (Bull, 1977). The state generally mediates the incorporation of economy and society in the international political and economic system.

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The state also aims at its own preservation, not only in the sense of protection from outside threats (Morgenthau, 1948) or engagement with the global economy (Gilpin, 1987), but also of synchronization with global norms of political and economic governance that allow it to reproduce as legitimate political authority on the international stage (Buzan and Wæver, 2003: 22-23).

Thus the mismatch between state and society, which Laclau sees as almost inevitable in any political system, is complicated by pressures for international adaptation that all states are exposed to. Populism is not the expression of particularity only in the sense of weaving together unmet partial demands, but it also represents visions of circumscribed territoriality and temporality. These visions contrast with norms and practices of world politics that are often expressed in normative and universal terms - 'rationalization', 'reform', an ever expanding palette of 'rights' in need of protection etc. – and that impinge on states and economies of all stages of development.

In the global periphery and the semi-periphery the state is a powerful actor in relation to relatively underdeveloped institutions like the market and society, but it is also a porous and contested field. Populism in these settings does not express just frustrated popular demands (these are present in mature economies as well), but also rival programmes of incorporation to international modernity. Modernization thus is not benevolent or linear, but a process of synchronization to dominant global norms and prescriptions about organization of the state, market and society. By the same token, populism is not an aberration or an anomaly (Stavrakakis, 2014: 514), but a reaction to processes that claim normativity and universality.

On the other hand, the effort by political power to treat social demands is never a domestic strategy alone. Domestic discourses of difference and the external adaptation of the state are mutually dependent. Elites often *go abroad* to deflect domestic pressures by pointing to external threats, institutional constraints or the diachronic interests of the nation on the world stage – tactics that have been particularly prominent in Europe under the pressures of EU-led integration (see for example Dyson and Featherstone, 1996).

In sum, even though populism envisages that the chain of demands it coalesces (constituted as the 'real people') will eventually define the whole political community, it initially emerges as an expression of territorial and temporal particularism (demands to be satisfied 'here and now') and partiality. The particularism of populism becomes even more apparent if it is seen as a reaction not only of society against the 'system', but also of society against specific patterns of incorporation of the domestic into the international. State elites on the other hand usually employ the vision of an internally differentiated but inclusive political community. This idea of *diversity-in-unity* (Abts and Rummens, 2007) translates domestically, and is underpinned by, the universality of the international mainstream to which the state is trying to adapt.

Historical legacies of populism in Greece

Sometimes understood as 'Westernization' and more recently as 'Europeanization', modernization has been both a widespread aspiration and a highly contested goal in Greece (Featherstone, 2005). Greece's geographical and cultural liminality has made modernization both synonymous to progress and subject to different definitions by forces that seek to resist it or (more often) co-opt it. It is at the intersection of these rival agendas

of modernization that populism arises. Based on Laclau's concepts of equivalence and difference, we can distinguish three gradations of territorially and temporally demarcated representations of political identity in Greece:

a) Wholesale populist ruptures, the most genuine appearance of populism. They are expressed in extra-institutional popular mobilizations that challenge the state's claim to universal representation of the political community and express the ambition of neglected or dislocated parts to redefine the character and limits of the whole political community.

b) Movements or parties partaking in institutionalized processes (e.g. elections). They will express equivalential chains of demands that seek to modify the terms of popular incorporation in international economy and modernity. But the fact that they use institutional channels makes it difficult to determine where they stop expressing genuine challenges to the system and where they begin to act as agents of popular incorporation (however dialectic and conflictual) to the state's agenda of modernization.

c) Finally, antagonistic discourses can be promoted by elites to compensate for the dislocations of modernization and international adaptation. These *langues de bois* often are residues of populist discourses that were integrated in the official language of legitimation after their bearers acquired political power.

As we will see, the limits between the latter two categories are diffuse and context-dependent, thus making the first category of outright rupture the only clear-cut expression of populism as defined here.

Ruptures

After the Greek state achieved independence in 1830, it aimed to create a centralized administration within its territorial limits. The first populist rupture came when a popular uprising in 1843 demanded a constitution from Greece's Bavarian-born king. In the constitutional assembly of 1843-44 the main dividing line became the one between the autochthones and the heterochthones – those who believed that only Greeks from the Greek state should have full citizenship rights and access to political office and those who thought that also Greeks from the Ottoman Empire should be able to do so. The autochthones reflected popular frustrations against an alien centralizing state and the majority of political elites, who were heterochthones. As such, the mismatch between state and nation turned general dissent into a political identity moulding for the first time the opposition between the people and the political system, and the territorial and the universal (Petropulos, 1985 [1968]: 611-616).

In response to the autochthone insurgency, elites made two decisive turns: They adopted irredentism – the liberation and incorporation into Greece of Greeks still living in the Ottoman Empire – as the official mission of the state (Kitromilides, 1989: 165), and electoral democracy as the means for incorporation of popular demands in the political system. This allowed post-Ottoman elites to reinvent themselves as electoral notables who could use state resources as rewards for their clients (Tsoukalas, 1980: 287-292).

From then until 1922 the Greek state was an *irredentist state*. As European capitalism encroached on the Eastern Mediterranean in the 1860s, a thriving Greek bourgeoisie engaged in commercial activities in the Ottoman Empire introduced large-scale capitalist investments in Greece. Coupled with the ideological dominance of irredentism, the Greek

state perceived and projected internally the universality of the capitalist economy as the universality of the Greek unredeemed nation. Ideologically as much as economically, the Greek state became the object of colonial dependence on its own national (but de-territorialized) bourgeoisie (Tsoukalas, 1977: 266).

Frustrations with economic and foreign policy failures exploded into a military coup and a popular uprising in 1909. Given that its most significant legacy was the rise to power of arch-modernizer Eleftherios Venizelos, the dominant interpretation of 1909 has been as a bourgeois revolution that led the Greek state under the control of the Greek capitalist class of the Ottoman Empire (Mavrogordatos, 1983: 121-127). While this was indeed the culmination of 1909, other interpretations see that mass mobilization, even if it was eventually channelled towards a bourgeois-modernizing direction, as an expression of egalitarian-democratic frustration with the state's capture by big moneyed interests (Potamianos, 2004).

Eleftherios Venizelos represented the most coherent combination of the universality of modernity and of Greek irredentism (Andreopoulos, 1989). Venizelism's potency however also engendered a virulent reaction. Anti-Venizelism was a prototypical populist reaction to the state's espousal of universal norms of modernity. It eventually coalesced a long chain of frustrations united by a territorially and temporally particularistic view of their interests: the localism of southern Greece, alienated by the increase of the territory of the Greek state between 1912 and 1920; the urban petit bourgeois, who saw their importance rapidly diminish after 1909; and the linguistic and religious minorities that became incorporated in the Greek state after the northward territorial expansion of the Balkan Wars in 1912-13 (Mavrogordatos, 1983). In light of the congruence between modernization and irredentism

in Venizelos' message, the anti-Venizelists simply denied the universalism of the Greek nation by prioritizing their own definition of a virtuous people within the old borders of Greece (Mavrogordatos, 2015: 216-230)[3].

There is then an analogy between 1843-44 and the aftermath of 1909. In both cases mass popular mobilization expressed dissatisfaction among all social groups with the state's tentative and uneven efforts (and failures) to modernize (Andreopoulos, 1989: 199). These generalized populist ruptures contained multiple visions of change (Potamianos, 2004). But as the demands for change were co-opted by agendas of modernization, more coherent populist identities crystallized (Mavrogordatos, 2015: 267; Potamianos, 2015: 261). The autochthones and the anti-Venizelists radicalized membership tensions of the political community around anti-universal territorialized identities and frustration with the state's modernizing pretences. The massive and violent demonstrations of November 1916 (Mavrogordatos, 2015: 271-286) were the apex of the populist rupture based on the residual anti-Venizelist identity.

Greece's irredentist project led it after World War I to occupy large swaths of the Ottoman Empire. Turkish nationalists reacted and after a two-year war Greek forces evacuated the Turkish shores in 1922 followed by the mass of the Greek population living there. After the Asia Minor disaster the external mismatch between state and nation became an internal one, as the arrival of one million refugees posed new problems of inclusion and definition of the political community. For the first time state and nation coincided geographically. However the legacy of contestation between particularistic and universal views of the political community continued to inform political competition (Mavrogordatos, 1983).

World War II and the German occupation catalysed another popular rejection of the state and its elites, deprived of the legitimating ideology of irredentism. The immense popularity of the communist-led EAM opposition front led after the occupation to a bitter Civil War between Communists and Loyalists (1944-49). The *post-civil war state* attempted to neutralize social demands under the guise of capitalist modernization and of electoralism combined with a massive system of suppression of the left. The economic growth of the 1950s and 1960s created a vast new urban petit bourgeois and working class with material demands (Mouzelis, 1979) interlocking with political identities created during the Civil War. A nascent populist rupture emerged in the 1960s, when the Venizelist camp was gradually taken over by demands of the new urban strata for democracy, social justice and national emancipation. The military coup of 1967 pre-empted the further expression of this new populist identity.

Parties and movements

In the second half of the 19th century the state based its legitimacy on irredentism while becoming a field for the financial activities of a national but de-territorialized bourgeoisie. The populist reaction to these patterns of incorporation to global capitalism was the party of Theodoros Diligiannis (who was intermittently prime-minister for half of the time between 1885 and 1905). Diligiannis coalesced a variety of frustrations: anti-plutocratic feelings against diaspora capitalists who came to Greece to speculate and exert influence over the political class; social conservatism; resentment at taxes levied for the financing of infrastructure projects; and an impulsive desire for swift satisfaction of Greek irredentist demands (Potamianos, 2015: 502-503).

Another example of populist discourse in the electoral arena was the anti-Venizelist camp in the interwar period. After 1922 the anti-Venizelists, who were in government when Turkey defeated Greece and were thus held responsible for the defeat, found themselves in the position of permanent opposition. They continued to put forward the vision of the virtuous, downtrodden, territorially and temporally demarcated 'people' (peasants of southern Greece, petit bourgeois strata, and religious and linguistic minorities) threatened by modernization and the universal, civic Venizelist 'nation' (Papadimitriou, 2006).

Universal and antagonistic legitimations of the state

With irredentism the Greek state discovered a powerful justification for modernization in the 19th century. Irredentism bridged or fragmented social demands and allowed the state to put through a far-reaching nation-building programme (Andreopoulos, 1989: 198; Kitromilides, 1989: 159-168). Irredentism was sharpened with Venizelism, where the universalism of bourgeois modernity became entangled with the universalism of an economically vibrant Hellenism. The Greek state was to embrace both by way of its simultaneous modernization and expansion.

After 1922 the Venizelist state embraced a differential treatment of demands. The irredentist agenda of bourgeois transformation was transported internally as rationalized accommodation of diverse social demands. In the same vain, the official ideology of the post-civil war state drew on idealized notions developed by liberal intellectuals since the 1930s of the universality of Hellenism and its preordained alignment with Western modernity (Papadimitriou, 2006: 163-166).

After the military dictatorship, the right-wing leader Constantine Karamanlis aimed to establish a functioning liberal democratic regime. Karamanlis tried to deflect challenges to the social regime and Greece's position in the West by increasing public economic interventionism and by shifting the point of reference of Greece's Western orientation from the US to Europe. As a response to the populist semi-rupture of the mid-1960s, the post-1974 republic tried to improve the terms of popular incorporation in the political system as well as make integration with the West more palatable.

Yet successive regimes have also employed antagonistic discourses to legitimize state rationalization and modernization. For example in his early days in power Eleftherios Venizelos adopted some of the anti-vested interests rhetoric that had characterized the 1909-10 popular mobilizations (Potamianos, 2004: 127). Perhaps the most typical example of exclusion-as-elite-discourse was the anti-communism of the post-Civil War state. Drawing on anti-Venizelism's legacy of a morally exclusive view of the 'people' (Papadimitriou, 2006: 174-175), the popular anti-communism of the post-war Right did not just reflect internal security and foreign policy considerations, but also neutralized part of social disgruntlement at a time of economic transformation.

The long eclipse of universalism: The Euro-clientelist state

The electoral victory of the socialist PASOK of Andreas Papandreou in 1981 – an example of populist rupture effected through the ballot box – coincided with Greece joining the EEC (later EU). Electoralism and patronage had long been standard modes of social incorporation, but PASOK updated them via a system of partisan clientelism (Mavrogordatos, 1997). Given the parallel process of European market integration that

Greece partook in, external constraints and domestic demands entered into a complicated relationship. This *Euro-clientelist state* faced a new set of opportunities and challenges with respect to incorporating social demands.

PASOK's re-election in 1985, in a hotly contested election against the conservative New Democracy, was followed by Papandreou's decision to commit Greece to the EEC's revamped project of continental market liberalization, upending PASOK's early Euroscepticism. Papandreou's divisive rhetoric remained a fixture of political life until his death in 1996, but after the 1980s PASOK ceased being a populist reaction to the mismatch between domestic material demands and the state's international commitments. Instead PASOK became the hub for the negotiation of the tension between popular demands and pressures by the EEC/EU for rationalization of the state's functioning. Despite these pressures, the state consistently fostered the gradual *middle-classization* of large parts of PASOK's original petit bourgeois and working class following.

PASOK's mutation into manager of the divide between domestic and international pressures was completed with the takeover of the party by a leadership of social-democratic ilk in 1996. This leadership tried to balance their wish to bring Greece into the European common currency, which demanded severe budgetary retrenchment, with PASOK's identification with popular material demands. Given that New Democracy was already pro-European and economically liberal, after the mid-1990s the two parties' policy outlook became almost indistinguishable. Persistent phenomena like the two parties' rhetoric of outbidding are sometimes seen as expressions of populism during this period (Pappas, 2013). But I would argue that in the Euro-clientelist state of the 1990s and 2000s partisan outbidding and promises for access to state resources constituted a convergent strategy of

neutralization of social demands, i.e. the *langue de bois* of the state, not populism as defined here. After 1990 genuine populist reactions to the state's alignment with Europe were mostly expressed outside the electoral arena (e.g. in the discourse of the Orthodox Church, see Stavrakakis, 2004).

PASOK's embedding of modernization in a rearticulated dichotomous discourse (against the alleged backwardness and conservatism of major parts of Greek society) meant that modernization was perceived less as a way to satisfy the long-term goals of an inclusively defined political community and more as a new source of division. To be sure, the modernizers of PASOK flirted with a universal-nationalist discourse, for example in the elevation of the 2004 Olympic Games to the status of a major national goal. Ultimately however, integration to the European mainstream was increasingly justified with reference to particularistic identities – partisan allegiance and sectoral demands that required immediate validation in return of support for modernizing policies. Thus modernization became embedded in PASOK's traditional polarization strategy, which reflected the party's rooting in an exclusive, morally defined identity built on antagonism with the historical legacy of the post-Civil War Right. As Eleftheriou and Tassis (2013: 134-148) show, 'anti-right polarization', a lynchpin of PASOK's capacity to antagonistically divide the political field, remained a key element of its strategy under its modernizing leadership. New Democracy followed a more moderate language of outbidding but converted completely to the practices of PASOK with regards to popular incorporation. When it returned to power in 2004 it practiced partisan clientelism even more recklessly than its rival, paving the way for the derailment of public finances in 2009.

Populism and the Eurozone crisis

Eurozone austerity broke the compromise between mass integration and state reproduction via European resources and legitimation. It is telling that the political system of the Euro-clientelist state initially tried to contain the contestation of Greece's relationship with Europe within the confines of two-party outbidding. When in 2009 New Democracy instituted the first austerity measures, PASOK opposed them and campaigned in the snap elections that followed on a platform of increased spending. PASOK won but when it agreed on a bailout with the EU and IMF in 2010, New Democracy opposed the deal.

New Democracy's opposition to austerity in 2010-11 contributed to the emergence of the political identity of the *anti-memorandum* (referring to the official name of the bailout agreement). But this identity was only crystallized during the mass demonstrations in front of the Greek parliament in the summer of 2011, inspired by the Spanish Indignados. These demonstrations can be seen as yet another genuine populist rupture against the Greek state. Opposition to austerity was one reason for mobilization, but the anti-memorandum rallied also concerns about national sovereignty and frustrations with elites. Anti-system feelings persisted until, under the threat of expulsion from the euro, New Democracy agreed to form a government with PASOK in late 2011 to implement a second bailout (Katsambekis, 2016: 392-393).

As the two traditional opponents of Greek politics formed a coalition, the capacity of their competition to absorb popular frustrations and material demands collapsed. As a result popular frustration migrated from the streets to the party system (Stavrakakis and Katsambekis, 2014: 126). On the right New Democracy suffered a split with the emergence

of the nationalist Independent Greeks (ANEL) party and the rise of the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn. On the left PASOK came under the pressure of the radical left SYRIZA, whose leader Alexis Tsipras started blending his critique of neoliberalism with a virulent anti-establishment discourse.

The two elections of May and June 2012 gave rise to a transformed and fragmented party system, with PASOK's support collapsing and SYRIZA arising as the main opposition party. The formation in June 2012 of a cross-ideological pro-European coalition (New Democracy, PASOK and the smaller Democratic Left party) formalized the memorandum as the main dividing line of Greek politics. This changed how the party system dealt with international pressures and domestic demands – from a distribution of labour between two parties that espoused rationalization of the state and incorporated popular demands through outbidding and clientelism, to a divide between a pro-European camp prioritizing Greece's long-term European orientation and an anti-austerity camp prioritizing immediate material demands (Katsanidou and Otjes, 2016; Stavrakakis and Katsambekis, 2014).

During the years of the pro-European coalition under New Democracy leader Antonis Samaras from 2012 to 2015, New Democracy and PASOK tried to justify austerity as a way for Greece to remain aligned with the European mainstream. PASOK leader Evangelos Venizelos[4] captured the particularist/universalist divide perfectly when he said that PASOK 'sacrificed the people to protect the nation'[5] – an obvious reference to the divide between the temporally and territorially circumscribed and universal. That this statement came from the leader of the party that first came to power in 1981 with the slogan 'Here and Now' was particularly ironic.

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Yet the Samaras government increasingly relied on a renewed *langue de bois* that drew on previous practices of antagonistic justification of modernization of the state. Right-wing politicians of New Democracy resurrected anti-communism as a way to mobilize conservative fears of SYRIZA. Popular frustrations with austerity were dismissed as demands of vested interests, unions and privileged groups, thus reproducing the dismissal of social demands as 'backwards' and 'conservative' by PASOK's social-democratic leadership in the 1990s.

After the elections of January 2015 an anti-austerity coalition of two populist parties, SYRIZA and ANEL, was formed that crossed conventional ideological lines. Their victory reflected the exhaustion of the Euro-clientelist state and its inability to translate European integration into a domestic vision of the whole political community. The extent of this became evident in the referendum of July 2015 organized by the SYRIZA-ANEL government as part of its effort to renegotiate the terms of financing from the EU. Even though the referendum concerned formally an austerity package offered by the creditors, Tsipras explicitly framed it as a choice between the anti-memorandum government and the 'restoration' of the old parties.

Despite warnings of economic disaster, more than 60% of Greeks voted with the government. The No vote straddled ideological camps and social classes. It was united by a firm resentment against the elites of the Euro-clientelist state and their betrayal of material demands in order to satisfy European imperatives of rationalization of the state. The Yes campaign tried to make references to Greece's belonging to a Europe of universal values, but it failed to disentangle Europe from the elites of the Greek state or to relate it to a universal vision of the political community.

As in previous cases (from the revolution of 1843 to the autochthones in 1844; from the general popular call for renewal of 1909 to the fanatic anti-Venizelist demonstrations of 1916; from PASOK's inclusive call for 'Change' in 1981 to its re-election campaign mobilizing Civil War-era themes and divisions in 1985), there was an evolution of the identity of the populist rupture from the loose to the specific and from the general to the partial. The demonstrations of 2011 reflected a broad protest against the political system as a whole, catalysed by austerity. The referendum of 2015 represented the evolution of this general feeling of discontent into a more coherent populist identity that explicitly rejected the identification of the political community with the universal themes of European integration. The referendum campaign showcased a deep divide between two conceptions of the community: one territorial and particularistic, seeking immediate material restitution; the other temporally and territorially universalist, emphasising Greece's long-term alignment with Europe.

The populist rupture of the referendum did not translate politically however. At the last moment Tsipras changed tack and agreed a new bailout agreement with Greece's creditors. Within weeks SYRIZA changed from a party expressing a popular equivalential chain of demands to a party employing a *langue de bois* against its competitors in order to domesticate popular dissent. The snap elections of September 2015 that returned the SYRIZA-ANEL coalition were won on the basis of an *equivalential rearticulation* (Laclau 2005a) – from the memorandum/anti-memorandum divide to the opposition between the 'old' and the 'new'.

With the main bearer of a populist challenge now absorbed in the logic of the Euro-clientelist state, the latter's capacity to balance domestic and international demands seemed

to be renewed. Not unlike previous examples of antagonistic discourses in the electoral arena (most prominently, PASOK in the 1990s), SYRIZA's rhetoric turned from a genuine expression of popular dissatisfaction to an instrument of domestication of social demands without fundamentally changing the terms of the state's adaptation to dominant international norms and prescriptions of political and economic governance.

Theoretical implications of the Greek case

The shifting social bases of populism

The Greek case has interesting implications for the question of the social bases of populism. First, disaffected groups need not be subaltern but could actually have benefited from modernization strategies in the past. Second, which groups coalesce around antagonistic and particularistic discourses of exclusion will evolve through time. Third, populism mostly reflects varied and cross-class coalitions. The example of the Athenian petit bourgeoisie of the early-20th century is indicative of the ambiguities of the social character of populism.

The urban petit bourgeoisie emerged as Greece became embedded in the European capitalist networks impinging on the Ottoman world. To the extent that the state invited the financialization of the economy after the 1860s, the petit bourgeoisie owed to it its existence and reproduction. For this reason, while it became identified primarily with Diligiannis, many of its members were attracted to his rival, Charilaos Trikoupis, and his program of state rationalization (Potamianos, 2015: 503).

The merchants and artisans of Athens were at the forefront of popular mobilization after the coup of 1909. With Venizelos in power however, the state became more clearly

the agent of the de-territorialized Greek bourgeoisie. The petit bourgeoisie despised Venizelist labour legislation that threatened to fragment their guilds and foster in their employees a working class mentality (Mavrogordatos, 2015: 256-257; Potamianos, 2015: 398-399). In the violent anti-Venizelist mobilization of 1916 the Athenian petit bourgeoisie played again a significant role, this time as the exponent of a decidedly parochial identity. In Mavrogordatos' words (2015: 247), if 1909 had been a bourgeois revolution, 1915-16 was a 'petit bourgeois counter-revolution'.

On a different level however, the schism between Venizelists and anti-Venizelists also split the petit bourgeoisie, with merchants attracted to Venizelos' promise of increased commercial opportunities and artisans antagonized by the prospect of industrialization and social differentiation along class lines (ibid: 249-251). What divided the two groups was not class appeals but different logics of articulating and addressing social interests. Contrary to the Venizelist conception of class interests that were to be tackled differentially (Andreopoulos, 1989), the anti-Venizelists put forth the vision of strata organically linked in the traditional artisan shop, where owners and employees – the undifferentiated 'people' – worked side-by-side. This appealed particularly to sub-sections of the petit bourgeoisie who fretted modernization (Mavrogordatos, 2015: 266-267; Potamianos, 2015: 399).

An analogous pattern can be detected in the Eurozone crisis. Thanks to state spending and the opening up of Greece to European financial markets in the years of EU and EMU membership, the Euro-clientelist state had assisted the emergence of a new middle class. This middle class formed the bulk of the mobilization in the summer of 2011 in protest against austerity and the reversal of the compromise between material advancement of society and adaptation to European rules by the state.

The subsequent translation of the populist rupture into party politics acquired a clear socioeconomic character. The double elections of 2012 revealed a strong socioeconomic dimension of the memorandum cleavage (Mavris, 2013). Anti-memorandum parties (SYRIZA, ANEL, Golden Dawn) did substantially better in working class and petit bourgeois districts, while their ideological equivalents (Democratic Left, PASOK, New Democracy) did better in better-off areas. The middle class remained equivocal towards the state, primarily due to fears of rapid economic collapse if Greece left the euro.

Progressively the socioeconomic dimension of the memorandum cleavage decreased as austerity hit the middle class. SYRIZA aimed to address a broad variety of frustrations, from public sector pensioners and employees to small businessmen, homeowners, the youth and the unemployed (Stavrakakis and Katsambekis, 2014: 128-131). In 2015, after years of punishing austerity, a vast part of the middle class created and then targeted for extraction by the Euro-clientelist state finally turned to SYRIZA, contributing to its major victories in the January elections and the July referendum. In the referendum all but the most affluent suburbs of Athens voted with Tsipras and his government[6].

International and historical dimensions

One focus of this special issue is the role of the international as a conditioning factor of the specific character of populist challenges. If the state is the main addressee of popular demands as well as an actor with the independent capacity to regulate economic and political life while pursuing its own reproduction (Mann, 1984), the international dimension is crucial as the environment within which this actor is embedded. In Greece,

the encroachment of capitalism in the Ottoman space after the 1860s, the Cold War, neoliberal globalization, and European integration posed specific demands on the state and hence generated specific types of populist reaction.

Another aspect is the role of historical legacies in the specific expression of populism. Without making a blanket historical argument, it is interesting to note here continuities between political legacies, for example the petit bourgeois support in Diligiannis' coalition, the popular demonstrations of 1909, and the anti-Venizelist reaction in the 1910s. Anti-Venizelism's interwar particularism and morally exclusive view of the legitimate political community became a valuable resource as a *langue de bois* for post-war anti-communism. The Civil War and quasi-rupture of the 1960s informed Papandreou's populism in the 1980s, and the actors of the anti-memorandum identity during the Eurozone crisis have made frequent references to the occupation and national resistance of the 1940s. Thus different traditions of populist discourses and mobilizations inform and become absorbed in each other through time.

Populism and nationalism

As discussed in the introduction, populism aims to integrate groups that are (or feel) marginalized, but to the extent that it also elevates specific conceptions of the 'people' to the level of the legitimate whole political community (Stavrakakis, 2014: 506) populism can be *internally exclusive* (since it excludes from the definition of the whole community characteristics that are not present in its definition of the 'people'). Nationalism on the

other hand is exclusive in that it seeks to demarcate a community and endow it with a political expression. But once this has been achieved, nationalism can also be inclusive, particularly if civic definitions of the community predominate or if ethnic, religious and other divisions are weak or absent. Thus nationalism is externally exclusive, but can often be *internally inclusive*.

In Greece there has been a constant historical dialectic between nationalism as politics of difference and populism as politics of equivalence. For example, Venizelist irredentism was externally exclusive since it had territorial aspirations against other states and ethnicities. Anti-Venizelism energized a division *inside* the political community of Greeks, prioritizing a specific idea of the people to the point of outright hostility towards the unredeemed Greeks of the Ottoman Empire represented by Venizelos.

The exhaustion of inclusive discourses during the Euro-clientelist state can be seen as a byproduct of the discursive weakness of the universal and diachronic nation. The 'nation' was anyway debilitated as a discursive tool after 1974 due to its association with the post-Civil War state and the junta. Papandreou's 1980s rhetoric was an example of populism's inclusionary potential, since it reintegrated popular masses to the political system. But his success, and PASOK's need to maintain political dominance after his death, meant that from then on adaptation to European integration would be largely legitimated through reference to exclusive political identities rather than to an inclusive political community (which is how the reconstituted Right tried to justify Greece's EEC entry after the fall of the dictatorship in the second half of the 1970s).

Konstantinos Mitsotakis, the New Democracy prime minister in the early-1990s, was perhaps the last Greek statesman apt to making more references to the 'nation' and its

timeless interests than to the 'people' and its ephemeral demands in order to justify alignment with the West after the Cold War. Interestingly enough, even Andreas Papandreou after he returned to power in 1993 felt the need to make reference to the universal and diachronic nation to justify a turn towards fiscal rationalization: 'Either the nation will eliminate the debt, or the debt will exterminate the nation'[7]. Ultimately however PASOK's modernizing turn in the 1990s ended up being based on an updated version of the party's antagonistic discourse, whereby anchoring to Europe was justified through partisanship and delegitimation of opponents. Antonis Samaras also relied on a polarizing discourse delegitimizing the SYRIZA opposition to justify austerity in 2012-15.

Thus in the Euro-clientelist state the particularism of populism dominated official justification of alignment with Europe in the shape of partisan *langues de bois*. Not populism *per se* but its dichotomous logic that persisted in official legitimation crowded out references to a diverse but unified political community that, while inhabiting a specific territory demarcated by national boundaries, would engage with the globalized economy and align with universal international norms. While in Greece, as in many other European countries, there had been an attempt to justify Europeanization based on long-term national strategic interests, aggregate economic benefits or administrative efficiency, 'Europe' eventually became absorbed in discourses and practices that deepened the chasm between the state and people. This in turn crucially conditioned the elites' capacity to convince society of the necessity of 'reforms' after 2010.

Genuine challenge to the system or domestication of popular demands?

In cases of populism within the formal confines of political competition (e.g. Diligiannis in the late-20th century, the anti-Venizelists of the 1920s, PASOK in the 1980s, SYRIZA today) it is interesting to note the duality of stability and destabilization. For as much as these populist movements expressed reactions to the way state elites balanced domestic and international pressures, they also ensured that these reactions were channelled through institutionalized processes thus updating, when they entered government, the ways the state addressed popular demands.

In many ways the boundary between genuine long-standing populist reaction in the electoral arena and institutional *langues de bois* is unclear and shifts over time. Antagonistic reaction to and populist-like legitimation of the state are parts of a continuum, along which the same actor or party may move over time. This confluence is probably inevitable for any populist party that manages to gain power. A degree of particularism can complement universal discourses and help the state bridge conflicting domestic and international pressures. But this cannot be a perfect substitute for universal legitimating ideologies altogether. If these are weak or absent, as they increasingly were in the Euro-clientelist state of the 1990s and 2000s, the prevalence of legitimations drawing on partial political identities inevitably leads to exhaustion of legitimacy itself.

Conclusion

This article analysed populism in Greece by drawing on a conceptualization of populism as a binary logic of politics that seeks to redefine the limits and character of the political community. While populism aims at this redefinition of the *whole* political community, at its starting point lies the *partiality* of specific unmet social demands. To the extent that the political system which populism addresses is embedded in an international

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structure of economic exchange and norms of governance, populism is particularistic also in the sense of opposing the patterns of a state's incorporation into the international system.

The struggle between territorial and temporal particularism and the exigencies of international political and economic modernity naturally lends itself to the articulation of oppositions between the 'people' and 'power', particularly in peripheral societies where the state's role in mediating the domestic and the international is both exceedingly important and heavily contested. In Greece this is compounded by the historical contestation of the character of a national community itself split between contrasting visions of territoriality and universality for over a century. This duality of the Greek political community's universal, open, entrepreneurial and diasporic past on the one hand, and its rooted, territorial and parochial character that has informed a succession of populist reactions since the mid-19ᵗʰ century on the other, still informs Greek ambivalence towards Europe and Western modernity in general.

This article differentiated between genuine populist ruptures and discourses of official legitimation that rely on populism's logic of circumscribed political identities. While this logic has historically been pervasive in Greek politics, it has co-existed and cross-fertilized inclusive, universalist and technocratic discourses both in partisan politics and in the state's legitimation. Thus, even if populist-like politics has seemingly been omnipresent in Greece, genuine populist ruptures as defined here have been actually rare.

One can even say that populism never really became *hegemonic* in the sense of imposing a new definition and new terms of inclusion in the political community. While inevitably making use of exclusive discourses to a certain degree, in the past Greek elites managed to rebound from populist ruptures by effectively translating pressures for

rationalization and modernization of the state into potent universal visions of the political community. Irredentism cultivated in the 19th century the legitimacy of a state that had been perceived by many as intrusive and incompetent. The vision of a functioning democracy put forward by Karamanlis in the 1970s was a response to the populist rupture-in-the-making of the 1960s and it justified – as well as was underpinned by – Greece's turn towards Europe.

This long-term historical perspective offers important insights as to the reasons of the Greek state's failure today. The long but inconclusive rupture between people and state during the Eurozone crisis can be attributed not only to the intensity of the economic downturn, but also to the excessive reliance since the 1990s on particularistic discourses and the neglect, to the point of extinction, of universal visions of the political community – a significant departure from past practices of official legitimation.

This article ultimately functions as middle ground between damning (Pappas, 2013) and optimistic views (Stavrakakis, 2014) of populism's role in Greece today. To those who celebrated the rise of SYRIZA as incarnation of Laclau's vision of emancipatory politics it cautions that, once populism mutates from popular uprising to party politics, its emancipatory function can easily transform into domestication of social demands and ultimately absorption in the logic of official legitimation. And to those who see the fickleness and irrationality of 'the people' behind all Greek malaise it counters that particularistic justifications of modernization are never a perfect substitute for universal and inclusive representations of the political community.

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Notes

[1] For an application of Laclau's discursive framework to cases of populism see Panizza (2005). For a comparative application of discourse theory and the insights of the so-called Essex School to political analysis more generally see Howarth et al (2000).

[2] See however the discussion in Stavrakakis and Katsambekis (2014: 139, ref. 25).

[3] Mavrogordatos notes that the Venizelists represented the universality of the unredeemed nation and the anti-Venizelists the territoriality of the state. But Mavrogordatos explains that the state the anti-Venizelists represented was not the actual (expanded) Greek state after 1913, but the idealized Old Greece within its pre-expansion borders. While they referred to the 'state', the anti-Venizelists in reality opposed the actual state that expanded under the leadership of Venizelos. The anti-Venizelist 'state' does not refer so much to modernizing and rationalizing political power as to an idealized *heartland* (Taggart, 2000) that opposition to modernization could rally around.

[4] No relation to Eleftherios Venizelos.

[5] Evangelos Venizelos' statement to the National Assembly of PASOK, 10 March 2012. A summary (in Greek) is available at http://news247.gr/eidiseis/politiki/venizelos-zhtw-sygnwmh-apo-ton-ellhniko-lao-gia-ta-lathh-mas.1686012.html, accessed 27 June 2016.

[6] See the interactive map at http://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/ng-interactive/2015/jul/09/greek-referendum-how-athens-voted-interactive-map, accessed 28 June 2016.

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[7] Statement of Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou to his cabinet, 2 December 1993. Available at http://www.tanea.gr/news/politics/article/5272246/eite-to-ethnos-tha-eksafanisei-to-xreos-eite-to-xreos-tha-afanisei-to-ethnos/, accessed 31 October 2016.