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Radical democracy and left populism after the squares: 'Social Movement' (Ukraine), Podemos (Spain), and the question of organization

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Abstract This article begins with a theoretical tension. Radical democracy, in the joint work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, can be understood as a joint articulation of a post-foundational ontology of contingency and a politics of autonomy of 'democratic struggles' within a hegemonic bloc as loci of antagonisms in their own right, while Laclau's theory of populism marks a shift from the autonomy of struggles to the representative function of the empty signifier as a constitutive dimension. This tension between a horizontal logic of autonomy and a vertical logic of representation comes to the fore not least in the manifold attempts to combine radical-democratic and (left-)populist practices in the wake of the 'movements of the squares.' This argument is illustrated empirically in the cases of two party projects situating themselves in contexts of social protest—'Social Movement' in Ukraine and Podemos in Spain—both of which seek to combine a left-populist discursive strategy with some form of radical-democratic politics of autonomy, either by supporting local alliances independent from the party (Podemos) or by integrating trade union representatives into the organizational center, which in turn finds expression in a representative logic ('Social Movement').

Chantal Mouffe's (2018; Errejón and Mouffe 2015) advocacy of 'left populism'—one that is both reflexively situated 'within the conjuncture' in a diagnosis of 'the populist moment' and formulated as the continuation of a project of 'radicalizing democracy'—marks the latest twist in recent theorizing on the relationship between populism and radical democracy. One long-running strand of debate had been centered on a reframing of radical democracy around 'post-hegemonic' (Day 2005; Arditi 2007; Beasley-Murray 2010), non-representative conceptions of politics—

drawing on theoretical impulses ranging from the multitude to the rhizome—as a reaction to not only the apparent 'convergence of politics-as-hegemony and politics-as-populism' in Ernesto Laclau's later work, but also the 'tendency … to equate politics and hegemony' in Laclau's and Mouffe's earlier formulation of radical democracy (Arditi 2010, p. 491). The so-called movements of the squares provided a backdrop for this clash of paradigms (Tønder and Thomassen 2005[1]; Prentoulis and Thomassen 2013; Kioupkiolis and Katsambekis 2014; Eklundh 2016; Kioupkiolis 2018): for some, the likes of Occupy and the *Indignados* pointed to a non-representative logic of 'horizontal assemblies' (Hardt and Negri 2012; Sitrin and Azzellini 2014), while others insisted that 'the vertical dimension of "hegemony"' is also necessary for such movements to bring about 'a radical transformation of the state' (Laclau 2014, p. 9). In her latest work, Mouffe (2018, pp. 65, 15) rejects 'a purely horizontalist conception of radical democracy' and argues that 'today a project of radicalizing democracy requires the development of a "populism of the left"' (Errejón and Mouffe 2015, pp. 111–112) that not only takes up the impulses of 'horizontalist movements,' but also inscribes them in a hegemony project of constructing 'the people' against 'the oligarchy' on the terrain of electoral and parliamentary politics.

Mouffe's (2018, p. 40) contribution emphasizes the mutual 'synergy' between radical democracy and left populism, pointing also to the radical-democratic inflection that emerges from 'inscrib[ing] the left-populist strategy in the democratic tradition' by tying the construction of 'the people' to ever wider demands for liberty and equality. What no longer figures in the argument, however, is an understanding of radical democracy as a politics of autonomy in the sense formulated by Laclau and Mouffe (1985/2001): not only the expansion of equivalentially linked 'democratic struggles' for liberty and equality, but also the autonomy of each 'democratic struggle' as a site of antagonism in its own right. Understood thus, radical democracy stands in a productive but irreducible tension to populism—all the more so in recent attempts to combine a populist strategy of taking up democratic demands around a unifying signifier ('the people') with a radical-democratic politics in this stronger sense of the autonomy of equivalentially linked sites of struggle such as social movements. The aim of this article is to further examine this tension both conceptually within Laclau's and Mouffe's work and 'within the conjuncture,' situating itself in a *post-squares* 'populist moment' that has seen the multiplication of attempts to construct 'vertical structures (party) rooted in horizontalist practices (protests, social movements)' (Thomassen 2016, p. 173). It will be argued (1) that radical democracy in Laclau's and Mouffe's early work can be understood as a joint articulation of contingency and autonomy—a post-foundational ontology of contingency tied to a politics of autonomy of 'democratic struggles' within a hegemonic bloc as sites of antagonisms in their own right; (2) that Laclau's theory of populism marks a shift within this conceptual framework from the autonomy of struggles to the representative function of the

name of a popular subject and, in the last instance, the name of a leader; and (3) that horizontal autonomy and vertical representation both constitute dimensions of hegemony whose tension characterizes the relationship between radical democracy and populism, as becomes especially evident in questions of organization within projects of constructing both a 'people' and autonomous spaces. These reflections carry over into an examination of two left-wing party projects—'Social Movement' in Ukraine and Podemos in Spain—that situate themselves in contexts of social protest and seek to combine left-populist and radical-democratic practices, albeit in contrasting ways and on very different organizational scales.

From Radical Democracy to Populism in Theory

A minimal starting conception of radical democracy can be traced back to Lefort's (1986, 1988) understanding of democracy as the form of society that recognizes the radical contingency of its own foundations. Lefort's (1988, p. 17) notion of power as an 'empty place' in a democracy points to the experience of disincorporation whereby power is supposed to emanate from 'the people' but cannot be 'consubstantial' with any individual or group in the manner that it was 'embodied in the person of the prince.' Power is thus stripped of a transcendental ground such as divine right, yet it must nonetheless assume the function of the agency by which society, with every contest for power, symbolically 'apprehends itself in its unity and relates to itself in time and space' (Lefort 1988, p. 17). Democracy is thus paradoxically sustained by an ontological gap: power is privileged as an 'instituting moment' of society yet must also be 'circumscribed and localized in society' as an object of permanent contestation (Lefort 1986, p. 305); while 'the political' takes on the function of an instituting moment of social order, it can only produce partial order*ings* of the social if 'politics' as the institutionalized struggle over future orderings is to be possible. Lefort, understood thus as a 'contingency theorist' (Marchart 2007, p. 86), presents one version of a 'post-foundational' ontology that thrives on the 'political difference': the instituting function of the political emerges from the absence of an ultimate ground of the social and gives rise to politics as a never-ending struggle for partial groundings—a 'game' called hegemony that takes place on 'the field of the political,' as Laclau and Mouffe (1985/2001, p. 193) would put it.

In the latter's joint book *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (hereafter *HSS*), the category of antagonism takes on this conceptual function of the political as both the instituting moment of 'society' and 'the limit of all objectivity' that points to the impossibility of 'society' as a fixed system of differences (Laclau and Mouffe 1985/2001, p. 122).[2] Antagonism in this ontological sense is the precondition for politics, holding out the possibility of competing constructions of the social around new antagonism*s* in the empirical–analytical sense of frontier effects resulting from

the construction of opposing chains of equivalences (Nonhoff 2017). To take a schematic example, the identity of 'society' is a constantly shifting terrain of competing antagonistic frontier constructions, from the citizenry against the nobility (in the name of 'democracy') to labor against capital (in the name of more 'democracy') to the nation against a foreign power (displacing the labor/capital frontier through the equivalential link against a common outside). Hegemony, then, is this operation of producing partial fixations of the social around nodal points (e.g., 'citizenry,' 'democracy'). Laclau and Mouffe (1985/2001, p. 155) refer to Lefort's idea of democracy as 'a new mode of institution of the social' to argue that the 'democratic revolution' inaugurates a set of discursive resources (Lefort's notion of 'symbolic *dispositif*') in this struggle to constitute social order: in particular, the common reference to the constitutionally enshrined (yet constitutively incomplete) promise of liberty and equality for all. In this vein, Laclau and Mouffe (1985/2001, pp. 176, 132, 192) call for a radical-democratic politics that equivalentially links an ever wider range of 'democratic struggles' for liberty and equality rights ('feminism, anti-racism, the gay movement, etc.') in a hegemonic bloc around the nodal point 'democracy,' with the goal being 'the multiplication of antagonisms and the construction of a plurality of spaces.'

There are, then, at least two constitutive elements of such a politics: (1) the post-foundational recognition of contingency, i.e., 'hegemony supposes the incomplete and open character of the social' (Laclau and Mouffe 1985/2001, p. 134) and cannot be centered on an a priori privileged subject (e.g., 'the working class'); and (2) the autonomous constitution of 'democratic struggles' within the radical-democratic hegemonic bloc as loci of antagonisms in their own right, i.e., 'the autonomy of social movements … is a requirement for the antagonism as such to emerge' insofar as the 'feminist' or 'anti-racist' struggle first constitutes itself *qua* struggle by defining an antagonistic terrain against sexual and racial discrimination, respectively (Laclau and Mouffe 1985/2001, p. 132). Radical democracy, then, is a particular type of hegemony project grounded in the link between contingency and autonomy: in accepting the 'irreducible plurality of the social' (contingency), a project of radicalizing democracy must also recognize the irreducible multiplicity of struggles for democracy (autonomy)—and thus go beyond the formal logic of equivalence to embrace the 'principle of democratic equivalence' (Laclau and Mouffe 1985/2001, pp. 139, 183). Indeed, Laclau and Mouffe (1985/2001, pp. 140–41) emphasize that 'autonomy itself can only be defended and expanded in terms of a wider hegemonic struggle' that provides room for autonomy in the first place, given that identities are contingent and democratic demands can be incorporated as floating signifiers into other hegemony projects that are not so democratic in their equivalence.[3]

With Laclau's later theory of populism, a shift occurs within this conceptual framework from autonomy to representation as a constitutive dimension. Laclau (2005, p. 74) specifies three 'preconditions' for the emergence of populism:

the formation of an internal antagonistic frontier separating the 'people' from power; … (2) an equivalential articulation of demands making the emergence of the 'people' possible … [3] the unification of these various demands … into a stable system of signification.

A key conceptual displacement can already be seen in the category of 'demand' as 'the elementary unit of politics' (Marchart 2018, p. 111). Every 'demand' interpellates a locus of power for its fulfillment; a 'democratic demand' is processed in its differential particularity by the locus of power in question without generating an antagonistic frontier *vis-à-vis* that power. An antagonistic break only emerges when unfulfilled 'democratic demands' become 'popular demands' by forming an equivalential chain to 'constitute a broader social subjectivity' around a negative frontier against the 'power' from which they articulate a collective exclusion (Laclau 2005, p. 74). This negative unity of the equivalential chain is then further re-inscribed in the name of a 'people,' which, as a 'tendentially empty signifier,' performs not only the function of partial fixation as a nodal point, but also that of 'representing' and thus 'constituting' the identity of the equivalential unity by ('tendentially') emptying itself of a differential particularity of its own in order to give the equivalential chain the name of an absent positive unity (Laclau 2005, p. 162; see also Laclau 1996/2007a). In contrast to the 'democratic struggles' in *HSS*, then, the individual 'demands' comprising a populist equivalential chain do not autonomously constitute antagonistic terrains of their own; rather, they depend on their equivalential articulation for generating an antagonistic break and on the unifying instance of the empty signifier for constituting a hegemonic bloc. Indeed, it is the empty signifier that is ascribed a certain autonomy when Laclau (2005, p. 93) speaks of 'the construction of the "people" as a crystallization of a chain of equivalences in which the crystallizing instance has, in its autonomy, as much weight as the infrastructural chain of demands which made its emergence possible.' This 'crystallizing instance' is the third precondition for populism:

> Although the link was originally ancillary to the demands, it now reacts over them and, though an inversion of the relationship, starts behaving as their ground. Without this operation of inversion, there would be no populism.

The empty signifier thus performs a grounding function (analogous to that of the political *vis-à-vis* the social) *vis-à-vis* the equivalential chain through this operation of producing a contingent 'representation of a totality that exceeds it' (Laclau 2005, p. 72).

A key difference that thus emerges between the theories of radical democracy and populism is what Laclau (2015, p. 258) acknowledged as 'the increasing centrality that I have given, in my recent work, to the logic of representation.' Laclau (2005, p. 99; emphasis in original) understands representation as a relation whereby the representing instance 'does not *passively express* what is inscribed in

it, but actually *constitutes*' the latter. The representative function of the empty signifier, then, consists in constituting the popular identity as such. Laclau (2005, p. 100) takes this logic still further to argue that if the name of a popular subject constitutes an equivalential singularity, 'the extreme form of singularity is an individuality'—meaning that 'singularity [leads] to identification of the unity of the group with the name of the leader.' The name of the leader, in other words, is a further instance of representation—an empty signifier of last resort—that comes into play especially as the equivalential chain becomes more extended and the crystallizing force of the name of the popular subject becomes overstretched (the intension/extension trade-off). It is worth noting that this supplementing function could, in theory, be carried out by other nodal points—such as 'democracy'—but a constitutive feature of populism is that the representative logic carries over, to some degree or another, from the name of a popular subject to that of a leader. Here, Laclau (2005, p. 100) points to Nelson Mandela as one example of a 'symbol of the nation [that] was compatible with a great deal of pluralism within his movement' and thus distinguishes a symbolic conception of representation from Hobbes's leviathan (or indeed Schmitt's sovereign), in which the symbolic function of the leader is tied to a concentration of the powers of 'actual ruling.'

It is worth emphasizing that Laclau's theory of populism remains post-foundational insofar as the premise of radical contingency still holds: any construction of a 'people' constitutively falls short of filling 'the empty place' of the universal (Laclau 1996/2007b, p. 60) and maintains the field open to ever more attempts at re-institution. Populism as a contingent equivalential articulation of demands in common demarcation from 'power' can also be contrasted with reductionism, which (in a deeply foundationalist manner) attempts to fix the identity of 'the people' onto a 'transcendental signified' or an a priori privileged (e.g., ethnic or nativist) differential essence (Stavrakakis and Katsambekis 2014; Stavrakakis et al. 2017; Kim 2017). While Laclau's (2005, p. 115) Lacanian reformulation of hegemony as a 'radical investment … making an object the embodiment of a mythical fullness' might appear suggestive of a Lefortian totalitarianism that seeks to re-incorporate power in a leader at one with the people, Laclau (2005, pp. 170, 166) emphasizes that the absent fullness of the sovereign body always 'transmigrates through a variety of bodies' as an emptiness that is thus (*pace* Lefort) constantly produced as 'a type of identity, not a structural location.'[4] What no longer holds in Laclau's populism is the radical-democratic link between contingency and autonomy: it is not the autonomy of struggles that is 'a requirement for the antagonism as such to emerge'; rather, the constitution of a (popular) 'struggle' as such emerges from an equivalential unification of demands culminating in the representative agency of a unifying signifier. Whereas, for instance, a radical-democratic equivalential chain would entail that the 'feminist' and 'anti-racist' struggles are each grounded in an autonomously defined antagonistic terrain (against 'patriarchy' or 'racism,' respectively) while being

linked via the nodal point 'democracy,' a populist equivalential chain can incorporate 'feminist' and 'anti-racist' demands as a simple extension of the central antagonistic moment represented by the empty signifier (e.g., 'women's rights' are part of 'the people' because they are equally threatened by the common outside 'the oligarchy').

In practice, however, radical-democratic and populist discursive structures tend not to occur in pure form, but can coexist in a relationship of productive but ultimately irreducible tension. Indeed, the present conjuncture can be understood not only as a 'populist moment,' but also as a *post-squares* iteration thereof, which has seen a multiplication of attempts to construct 'vertical structures (party) rooted in horizontalist practices (protests, social movements)' (Thomassen 2016, p. 173); Gerbaudo (2017, p. 7) argues that the movements for 'real democracy now' were themselves characterized by 'citizenism,' or the joint articulation of 'the neo-anarchist method of horizontality and the populist demand for sovereignty.' This is the 'synergy' emphasized by Mouffe: a radical-democratic discourse might adopt as one of its nodal points a 'popular' signifier that concentrates onto itself a central antagonistic moment (e.g., 'the citizenry' against 'the oligarchy'), while a populist discourse could seek to build equivalential links to autonomous spaces that define their own terrains of struggle (e.g., party endorsements of various social movements). The tension between the two logics becomes visible when the horizontal and vertical implications of autonomy and representation collide, respectively: a party's attempt to establish horizontal links to social movement actors could mean integrating them into representative structures within an organizational center, while the representative function of signifiers such as 'the citizenry' might be supplemented by vertical identification with a leader, which, in the context of party organizations, could have centralizing implications and destabilize Pitkin's distinction between 'acting for' and 'standing for' (which implicitly sustains Laclau's self-demarcation from Hobbes; Arditi 2005, pp. 83–84). The irreducible nature of this horizontal/vertical tension has been pointed out in a similar vein by Prentoulis and Thomassen (2013, p. 181), who note that '[t]here is no horizontality without verticality, and no equality without inequality, because horizontality and equality are not natural, but must be instituted.' Questions of organization thus constitute a key space in which this tension is negotiated; Mouffe indicates here what is at stake when she argues that left populism must ultimately invent a 'new form of organization' that goes beyond the 'vertical form of the party' and allows for 'horizontalist forms of expression' of the various democratic demands (Errejón and Mouffe 2015, pp. 113–114).

Without denying the relevance of anarchist, multitudinous and 'post-hegemonic' theorizations of horizontality, therefore, it becomes possible to understand both horizontality and verticality as dimensions of hegemony whose tension comes to the fore in the shift from the constitutive role of autonomy in Laclau's and

Mouffe's theory of radical democracy to the emphasis on representation and its extension onto identification with a leader in Laclau's theory of populism. This casts the issue in a somewhat different light from the likes of horizontal multitude versus vertical party (Kioupkiolis 2016) or horizontal autonomy versus vertical hegemony (Prentoulis and Thomassen 2013) for examining how a horizontal/vertical tension is negotiated within the manifold hegemony projects of constructing both a 'people' and autonomous spaces.

The rest of this article is devoted to the analysis of two left-wing party projects emerging from contexts of social protest—'Social Movement' in Ukraine and Podemos in Spain—both of which attempt to combine a left-populist discursive strategy with radical-democratic practices, either by supporting local alliances independent from the party while explicitly rejecting the notion that Podemos can 'represent' movements such as 15-M (as emphasized by Iglesias), or by integrating trade union representatives into an organizational center (in the case of 'Social Movement') and thus lending a representative expression to a radical-democratic understanding of party organization as a 'collective instrument' for horizontally linked movement actors. The analysis, drawing on a combination of programmatic documents, speeches, and slogans, takes up the 'methodological holism' (Marttila 2015) of Essex School or post-foundational discourse analysis (Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000; Nonhoff 2006, 2017; Marttila 2015; Marchart 2017) in applying the above-discussed theoretical concepts as analytical categories for the study of discursive practices.

From #Leftmaidan to 'Social Movement'

The struggle for hegemony on the Maidan: #leftmaidan as a left-populist strategy

When the protests on the Kyiv Maidan began in October 2013, members of the small activist group Left Opposition (LO)[5] participated from the earliest days and went on to pursue a strategy of building up a left-wing presence on the square under the hashtag #leftmaidan. It has been pointed out that what came to be known as Euromaidan overflowed the usual institutional channels, especially in comparison to previous protest episodes on the same square—such as the 'Orange Revolution' of 2004 and the 2010 protests against tax and labor code reforms—in which it was easier for parties, associations, and also the authorities to differentially fix the protest objectives in terms of the election of Yushchenko and the cancelation of the reforms, respectively (see also Beissinger 2011; Varga 2012; Popova 2014). The 2013-14 episode, in contrast, was notable for the vast majority of protesters taking part independently of political parties[6]—a dynamic that dramatically came to a head in February 2014 when the agreement reached by the parliamentary

opposition with Yanukovych was first greeted with jeers at the party leaders on the Maidan stage and then invalidated on the ground through the violent escalation that soon followed—as well as the remarkable plurality and heterogeneity of demands represented on the square, some of which fluctuated either with time or between the permanent protest camp and the protest assemblies.[7]

The LO, given its organizational and numerical weakness, focused primarily on agitation through the distribution of written material; in its 'Plan of Social Transformations' (or 'Ten-Point Program'), released and distributed on the Maidan in December 2013, a left-populist discourse took shape in which 'people power' took on the function of an empty signifier—pitted against the 'oligarchical system' as constitutive outside—alongside the additional nodal point (and floating signifier *par excellence*) 'Europe' (Left Opposition 2013). The preamble to the document set the objective of counteracting the 'ignoring of demands of a socio-economic character in the Euromaidan protests' and 'act[ing] in such a way that the protest wave, unleashed by social injustice, leads to the root cause,' which in turn consists in the 'oligarchical system.' With the first of the ten demands—'People power instead of the power of oligarchs'—'people power' became an empty signifier not only headlining the program and equivalentially linking the other demands around it, but also pointing to an absent, unredeemed fullness whose implications went well beyond the brief differential elaboration that followed ('the transition into a parliamentary republic' and 'the transfer of competences from state administrations to executive committees of elected organs of power (councils) in the localities'). The rest of the program articulated demands for the 'nationalization of key industries'; 'workers' control in enterprises of all ownership forms'; 'introduction of a wealth tax' (on millionaires); 'ending of capital flight into offshore locations' (by which 'Ukrainian businesses free themselves from taxation'); 'real separation of government and business'; 'cost reduction in the bureaucratic apparatus'; 'dissolution of the "Berkut" and other special forces'; 'access to free education and healthcare' (by reducing 'spending on security structures and the bureaucratic apparatus'); and 'liberation from the credit yoke of international organizations' (and 'refusal of further cooperation with the International Monetary Fund'). The equivalential chain thus specified multiple interconnected dimensions of 'people power' (ownership, control, finances, rights) tied to a set of mechanisms for fighting the 'power of oligarchs' (taxation, regulation, new institutions), while also taking up the Euromaidan's key floating signifier 'Europe' as a secondary nodal point that lent the people/oligarch opposition the common reference point of the 'progressive welfare states of Europe'—linking demands such as the 'buildup of a wide network of independent trade unions following the European model,' a wealth tax 'following the Danish example,' a unilateral cancelation of public debt to international creditors following 'the Icelandic example,' and the right of workers to wage arrears payments on credit 'following the Portuguese example.'

The left populism of #leftmaidan, then, came close to the 'leaderless populism' (Gerbaudo 2017) extreme of the vertical identification spectrum, relying on the supplementary nodal point 'Europe' rather than the representative function of a leader for shoring up the popular identity. LO activists' use of imagery on the Maidan was in line with this strategy, featuring slogans such as '#leftmaidan Power to the millions, not the millionaires' and 'For the ЄC [the initials for 'EU,' but also for 'socialist Europe' (*Європа соціалістична*)]—a socialist Europe'; also notable was the use of EU flags on the Maidan with the blue background replaced with a red one as well as a modified LO emblem on social media featuring a ring of stars resembling the EU flag but superimposed onto the red-and-white LO banner. This imagery was suggestive not only of a left-wing appropriation of the floating signifier 'Europe,' but also of the LO's hegemonic claim in using this modified version of its organizational symbol to constitute 'the left' on the Maidan—a contentious claim given the mutual lack of alliance-building with other organized groups such as the anarchist Autonomous Workers' Union (AST) or independent trade unions that were present to varying extents on the Maidan. Indeed, the key problem of #leftmaidan's left populism was the sheer lack of horizontal extension of the equivalential chain onto other autonomously constituted democratic struggles on the square, beyond the ten demands of one marginal grouping—numerically weak, lacking access to mass media as well as the speakers' stage on the Maidan, and under threat of attacks by far-right activists— leaving the vertical identification of a 'people' (as elegantly constructed as it was) with these demands little ground to stand on.[8] LO member Zakhar Popovych (2015) subsequently argued that the various small left-wing groups missed the chance at the beginning to form a unified bloc on the Maidan or a kind of 'Left Sector' as a counterpart to the 'Right Sector'—which formed in the early phase of Euromaidan and quickly took on 'the force of an organized minority' (Ishchenko 2014, p. 15)—and referred to the Maidan in this vein as a 'testament to the absolute organizational incapacity of the left.'

After Maidan: 'Social Movement' and the challenges for a radical-democratic left populism

In August 2014, the LO (2014) issued a joint declaration with several individual signatories that identified the lack of organization as the main lesson of #leftmaidan: 'Social protest is boiling in Ukraine. … But the left lacked the organization for bringing forth our agenda to each and all'; the current task, then, consisted in 'creat[ing] a democratic socialist political force that forcefully defends the interests of all who live off work: workers, precariously employed, students, and intelligentsia.' The signatories thus affirmed the need for party organization rooted in ongoing social struggles as a precondition for expanding the equivalential

chain while rejecting a vertical form thereof, stipulating that the new party had to commit to principles of 'internal democracy' including 'complete financial transparency … minimal empowerment of the center, creation of a collective leadership of the party; broad mobilization for the working out of the party statute, decision of all questions by electronic vote.' The declaration closed with a call to a conference in September 2014, in which over 100 participants discussed the program drafted by the declaration signatories and elected an organizational committee; the founding congress of the new party 'Social Movement' (SR) in Kyiv in June 2015 adopted a programmatic declaration as well as a 'Twelve-Point Program,' which featured much of the same content from the Ten-Point Program—including the left-populist articulation of 'people power instead of the absolute power of oligarchs'—while re-articulating prominent signifiers of post-Maidan discourse in Ukraine with left-wing contents, such as 'dignified work' (Euromaidan being the 'revolution of dignity') and 'social lustration' (as a new signifier for the previous demand for 'separation of government and business') (Social Movement 2015). SR's left populism thus now extended onto a (counter-)hegemonic claim to represent the true unredeemed legacy of the Maidan protests. The programmatic declaration argued thus: 'in one of the most dramatic times of the history of our country … the problems that pushed the inhabitants of Ukraine to protest in the years of independence—poverty, extreme inequality, social injustice, lawlessness, police violence—have not been overcome'; in this context, it is time to put aside the labels of '"pro-Ukrainian" or "pro-Russian"' and fight the 'real threat to society'—namely, the 'absolute power of big capital' (Social Movement 2014). Vitaliy Dudin's central reference to the twofold threat of 'Russian imperialism and Ukrainian capitalism' at the party's 2016 May Day rally is suggestive of a possible extension of the constitutive outside in the context of the military conflict in the country (Hromadske Radio 2016)—while, at the same time, displacing the 'pro-Ukrainian or pro-Russian' dichotomy.

It is worth noting that a radical-democratic orientation toward horizontal extension of the equivalential chain onto autonomous sites of social struggles such as independent trade unions found organizational expression in a logic of representation: numerous representatives of the independent trade union 'Defense of Labor' (ZP) and the Kryvyi Rih branch of the Independent Union of Miners of Ukraine (NPGU), which were actively involved in workers' protests at the Yuzhmash combine in Dnipro and the mining sector in Kryvyi Rih, were elected to the organizational committee at the September 2014 congress and again with the party founding in June 2015. Some of the ZP members elected to the committee explicitly affirmed the representative function of the party in interviews released after the party founding, with one of them referring to the party as a form of 'political representation' of the trade unions, while another asserted that 'the party is a collective instrument and the members of trade unions know how to think and

act collectively' (Russian Socialist Movement 2015). The nine ZP members of the organizational committee, however, left the party in July 2016, citing the unfulfilled desire for 'an actually wide political representation of the Ukrainian independent trade union movement' (Ishchenko 2016)—bemoaning, in other words, the lack of horizontal extension gained in exchange for conceding vertical representative agency to the party. What was clearly lacking here is the synergy that makes the horizontal/vertical tension a productive one: if the party's horizontal aspirations translate into representative structures, the latter, in turn, have to justify themselves by opening up space for ever greater horizontal linkages.

SR's politics of autonomy, in the context of a left-populist discourse, thus finds organizational expression in a representative logic of integrating trade unionists into the party's organizational center—while also insisting on 'minimal empowerment of the center' and 'decision of all questions by electronic vote' through the online platform Loomio, which in turn raises the question to what extent this minimal verticalization would be able to withstand greater horizontal extension onto more numerous and heterogeneous actors with very different time resources at their disposal. The attainment of greater horizontal extension may thus ultimately undermine the other key goal of minimal verticalization, pointing to the irreducible nature of the horizontal/vertical tension; yet even the productive side of this tension continues to elude SR, which has failed to gather the requisite number of signatures for official registration as a political party and to meaningfully expand its organizational base since 2015. SR's predicament is perhaps indicative of the challenges facing an extreme form of radical-democratic 'movement party' relying almost exclusively on horizontal linkages to movement actors (Della Porta et al. 2017)—especially in the 'organizational ecology' of a hybrid regime dominated by oligarchical structures (e.g., within organized labor), in which the scope for alliance-building may be limited even in the wake of a major protest episode (Robertson 2011).

Podemos: From the Hypothesis to 'Unidas Podemos'

After 15-M: the 'Podemos Hypothesis' as a left-populist strategy

The 'Podemos hypothesis' (see also Eklundh 2016; Kiopukiolis 2016; Valdivielso 2017) takes us toward the other extreme of a left populism heavily reliant on vertical identification with a 'mediatic leadership.' This strategy is reflexively grounded in the party leadership's own hegemony analysis consisting of two main components: the diagnosis of an organic crisis (in the sense applicable to both Gramsci and Laclau as a breakdown of hegemonic reproduction) in the context of 15-M; and an understanding of 'the people' as interpellated by the existing hegemonic order as a passive, atomized 'TV nation' (*pueblo de la televisión*) that

can, in turn, be best reached by a 'mediatic leadership' as part of a counter-hegemonic populist strategy. Pablo Iglesias (2015a, pp. 12–14; 2015b, p. 24) defines the Podemos hypothesis as the attempt 'to generate discursively a popular identity that can be politicized along electoral lines,' for which the 'organic crisis' and 'regime crisis' of the Spanish state since the financial crisis have opened up 'an unprecedented set of political opportunities'; in this context, the task for Podemos is 'to aggregate the new demands generated by the crisis around a mediatic leadership, capable of dichotomizing the political space.' The 15-M protests created an opening by 'crystalliz[ing] a new culture of contestation that could not be grasped by the categories of left and right' (Iglesias 2015a, p. 12): while 15-M raised demands that could not be incorporated by the existing institutional framework, no counter-hegemonic project emerged that could redraw political frontiers on this basis—with Íñigo Errejón speaking in this context of a 'crisis of political imagination' that overlapped with the organic crisis of the system (Errejón and Mouffe 2015, p. 28). The way out of this impasse comes with the other key component of the analysis: namely, Iglesias's (2015a, pp. 16–17) diagnosis of Spain as a 'TV nation,' in which television 'conditions and even helps to manufacture the frameworks through which people think … at a much higher level of intensity than the traditional sites of ideological production: family, school, religion'; Iglesias even goes so far as to argue that 'TV studios have become the real parliaments.' Remarkably, Iglesias then situates himself in this mediatized social landscape as 'the TV phenomenon of the "pony-tailed professor"' who has become, through his TV programs (*La Tuerka* and *Fort Apache*) and talk-show appearances, 'a reference-point for the socio-political discontent caused by the crisis' (Iglesias 2015a, p. 17). Thus, the representative function of a 'mediatic leadership' through the very name, or face, of Iglesias provides a starting point for a counter-hegemonic strategy.

Indeed, Podemos relied from the outset on two resources that closely correspond to this diagnosis: the broad participation of a population politicized by 15-M on the one hand and the media activities of a party leadership centered on the pony-tailed professor on the other. This, in turn, points to a tension between a horizontal logic, whereby the 'people of the movements' are meant to retain their autonomy even as their participatory input is constitutive for Podemos, and a vertical logic according to which the 'mediatic leadership' performs a representative function in the constitution of a new collective subjectivity—especially in expanding the equivalential chain beyond the already mobilized onto the largely passive, atomized 'people of the television.' This tension accompanied the 2014 European Parliament election campaign: in introducing Podemos in January as 'a participatory method open to the entire citizenry,' Iglesias emphasized that the point of the project was precisely not to represent 15-M or other social movements because 'the movements are unrepresentable' (*Público* 2014). What followed was a

participatory process of open primaries—open to anyone who registered online—for the party list in the European Parliament election; when the election came, Podemos took the remarkable step of using as its logo on the ballot the face of the lead candidate on the list, Pablo Iglesias—because, as the man himself would later explain, '*el pueblo de la televisión …* didn't know about a new political party called Podemos, but they knew about the guy with the pony-tail' (Iglesias 2015a, p. 17). In other words, Iglesias's representative function was necessary precisely for reaching into the depths of the 'people of the television,' resorting to the vertical identification with a leader given the supposed futility of the other extreme (seen in SR) of trying to represent and build around specific movements.

It is worth noting that Podemos's organizational model entailed fully open primaries not only for electoral lists, but also for the citizens' councils and secretary-generals at the local, regional, and state-wide levels, meaning that anyone registered online could elect these bodies (Rendueles and Sola 2018, pp. 37–38). The vertical and open character of these representative channels was consistent with Podemos's interpellation of the wider 'people' and not just organized activists as its representative subject, even within its own structures— 'we are interested in constructing a people, not constructing the left' (Errejón and Mouffe 2015, p. 108)—marking a clear distinction from a 'movement party' strategy (seen in SR) of integrating organized movements by giving them platforms within the party. Yet the effect of this was to strengthen the hand of the state-wide party leadership in nomination processes by not concentrating participatory input on an organized membership base and thus limiting the 'organic links' between it and the leadership (Rendueles and Sola 2018). Indeed, if the idea was to extend representation onto a largely passive, atomized 'TV nation' by minimizing the costs of participation, then its participatory input had to be wide-ranging but relatively shallow, emphasizing the plebiscitary link to the leadership (Kioupkiolis 2016). One example of this is Podemos's use of plebiscitary votes to decide on cross-party talks after the 2015 general election—in contrast to the Popular Unity Candidacy (CUP), which held mass consultations in the form of assemblies of organized activists to deliberate on negotiations with the Together for the Yes alliance following the 2015 Catalan election.

In the election year 2015, the horizontal/vertical tension in Podemos played out in differing strategies at the local and state-wide levels, with the 'verticalism' of the party openly coexisting with the 'democratic wave that drives it' (Rodríguez and López 2015). The year began with Iglesias standing in front of over 100,000 participants at the 'March of Change' in Madrid, appealing to 'a people with the voice of a giant demanding change, social justice, and democracy' and equivalentially incorporating 15-M with the promise of finally winning:

> This Puerta del Sol saw the reclaiming of liberties and, on that 15th of May, thousands of youths shouting 'they don't represent us,' 'we want democracy'.

> This valiant people is here now. You are the force of change. Thank you for being here. … But we haven't filled the Puerta del Sol in order to dream, but to make our dreams reality in 2015 … This year is the year of change and we are going to win the elections over the People's Party (La Marea 2015).

Precisely because no party, including Podemos, could be 'the electoral expression or translation of 15-M' (Errejón and Mouffe 2015, p. 64), there could only be a contingent equivalential link around the promise of 'winning' against a common adversary—a promise that increasingly took on a nodal point function in the discourse of the 'mediatic leadership.' Carolina Bescansa remarked with reference to upcoming secretary-general elections in the Community of Madrid that while 'the people can choose between the one project and the other' within Podemos, Iglesias's course deserves support as it represents 'a Podemos for winning' while that of his internal critics is for 'a Podemos for protesting' (*InfoLibre*2015). In the May 2015 municipal elections, Podemos supported local alliances rooted in social movements, which succeeded in winning the mayoralty in several major cities including Madrid and Barcelona; most notably, Barcelona En Comú mayoral candidate Ada Colau issued from the Movement against Evictions. While these alliances themselves relied on the representative function of 'mayors of change' such as Colau and Manuela Carmena (Valdivielso 2017, p. 305), Podemos's support for them with their own city-specific names and symbols followed a logic of horizontal extension of local equivalential chains remaining organizationally distinctive and independent from the state-wide party. For the December 2015 parliamentary elections, on the other hand, Podemos ran a campaign 'extremely centered on … Iglesias and aimed at publicity effects'—accompanied by unprecedented numbers of participants at campaign rallies (Zelik 2015a); at the same time, Podemos entered regional alliances that carried their own names and symbols in the Basque Country, Catalonia, Galicia, and the Valencian Community. The party ended up recording its best results in these four regions; in his speech on election night, Iglesias sought to speak for this highly plural social base by emphasizing the irreducibly 'plurinational' character of the Spanish state and making a binding referendum on Catalan independence a condition for a post-election deal with the PSOE.

Can the subalterns speak?

It has been said that Podemos constitutes a unique case of 'reflexive populism' (Kioupkiolis 2016) and 'an original case of interweaving political philosophy and democratic radicalism' (Valdivielso 2017, p. 296). It can be seen from the foregoing analysis that this reflexivity even extends onto the 'explicitly hegemonic' (Critchley 2004, p. 115) nature of Podemos's left-populist project, from Errejón's understanding of Podemos as the explicitly 'vertical' crystallization of demands that 15-M failed to produce (Errejón and Mouffe 2015, p. 93) to Iglesias's recognition that Podemos cannot be the representative extension of 15-M but can

offer the promise of 'winning' against a common adversary. If Errejón's definition of the 'task' of Podemos as 'construct[ing] a people, a general will on the basis of the suffering of the subalterns' (Errejón and Mouffe 2015, p. 32) prompts the familiar question whether 'the subalterns' can speak, the answer is already part of the question in this case: the 'mediatic leadership' speaks for 'the people of the television' (sometimes on the basis of internal plebiscites) while being acutely aware of the multiplicity of the subject that it is speaking for (hence the subalterns). The paradox of the Podemos hypothesis is that it is particularly radical-democratic on this theoretical level of recognizing contingency and autonomy—the irreducible 'plurality of subjects' that Laclau and Mouffe (1985/2001, p. 181) had emphasized in the context of the 'new social movements'—but then draws strongly vertical implications from it: precisely because Podemos cannot pretend to be the 'party of 15-M, of a heterogeneous movement, of horizontal expansion, of very different discontents …' (Errejón in Errejón and Mouffe 2015, pp. 63–64), it ends up relying heavily on vertical identification as opposed to going the path of building around organized movements—except at the local level, which Podemos has used as a radical-democratic terrain for alliance-building grounded in autonomous struggles. This slide from the unrepresentability of the movements to the claim to represent the wider 'TV nation' is nicely captured in the most famous 15-M interpellation of the political elite: 'You don't represent us!' Errejón argues that this slogan can be interpreted as a rejection of ruling elites rather than of representation as such (Errejón and Mouffe 2015, p. 64); Zelik (2015b, pp. 125–126) points out that Iglesias has gone still further with the interpretation that the people sitting in front of their televisions yearn for new representatives—like himself, since 'many television viewers enthusiastically listen to Pablo Iglesias and feel represented by him.' The Podemos hypothesis thrives on this polysemy and the space that opens up for a left-populist politics within a radical-democratic theoretical commitment.

After the Podemos hypothesis: a left populism for the long haul?

Ahead of the 2016 snap parliamentary elections, Podemos opted for an alliance with the United Left (IU) under the banner 'Unidos Podemos' (later 'Unidas Podemos'; UP); the new formation, however, fell below the combined 2015 vote share of the two parties with just over 21%. Shortly after the elections, Iglesias gave a presentation at Complutense University in which he declared that 'the Podemos hypothesis has finished, the Podemos style has finished, the *blitz* has finished' (Unidos Podemos 2016). The 2016 elections, for Iglesias, represented the end of the phase of 'assault of the heavens' in which 'television turned into a fundamental political space' and 'Podemos was the device [*dispositivo*] that best understood … to translate electorally, let's say, the reality created by [15-M]'[9];

now would come the phase of 'parliamentarization' and a 'war of position'—a conversion of the party from 'partisans into a regular army.' Iglesias consistently used the signifier 'Unidos Podemos' to describe the new project, which entailed 'the incorporation of a renewed old left' in the form of Alberto Garzón's IU, while also emphasizing the constitutive nature of the horizontal logic of regional alliances: 'Unidos Podemos is the different autonomous political organizations that represent the plurinationality of the state in the Valencian Community, in Galicia, in the Balearics, in Catalonia' (Unidos Podemos 2016).

While maintaining this autonomy/representation mix, therefore, the proclaimed end of the Podemos hypothesis inaugurates a wider shift away from reliance on populist 'transversality' ('constructing a people, not constructing the left') and toward partial normalization via incorporation of the left/right frontier that the party had previously sought to displace; Iglesias himself highlighted the gamble involved by remarking that in four years, 'we might win the elections or be given a beating of biblical proportions' (Unidos Podemos 2016). Errejón's break with the party leadership in early 2019—and his decision to affiliate himself with Manuela Carmena's autonomous mayoral candidacy outside the framework of the parties, which Podemos also ultimately supported—highlighted his long-standing disagreement with Iglesias over this strategy of incorporating the 'old left.' Following the 2018 censure motion against the PP government, which UP supported in the populist terms of ousting 'corruption,' the partial displacement of the populist antagonistic frontier by a left/right one could be seen in UP's strategy of obtaining differential policy concessions (e.g., a rise in minimum wage) in exchange for confidence-and-supply support for the PSOE minority government and then positioning itself as PSOE's coalition partner-in-waiting during and after the 2019 snap election campaign. The so-called Catalan crisis added yet another dimension to this balancing act with the pro-/anti-independence frontier that gained heightened salience, with Podemos seeking to displace this frontier by continuing to advocate a mutually binding independence referendum while rejecting unilateral moves toward independence. In the midst of all this, the horizontal/vertical tension between support for autonomous regional alliances and the vertical channels of representation within the party found an odd symbiosis when the state-wide Podemos executive suspended the secessionist secretary-general in Catalonia, Albano-Dante Fachin, while initiating an internal referendum on its preferred option of forming an alliance with Colau's (non-secessionist) Catalunya En Comú for the 2017 snap Catalan elections—with Fachin himself denouncing the referendum as 'imposed' (*El Heraldo* 2017).

Conclusion

If radical democracy in Laclau's and Mouffe's early work is a joint articulation of contingency and autonomy, Laclau's theory of populism marks a conceptual shift away from the autonomy of struggles and toward representation as a constitutive dimension of ('popular') struggle. A left populism that seeks to incorporate some degree of radical-democratic politics must navigate this tension between horizontal and vertical logics of constructing a hegemonic bloc; 'Social Movement' and Podemos can be read as two different approaches to this challenge in very different contexts. Whereas SR embraces a radical-democratic understanding of party organization as a collective instrument for autonomous, horizontally linked movement actors—and relies to this end on representative mechanisms within an organizational center while also trying to minimize concentration onto this center—Podemos starts out by renouncing all claim to represent specific movements and arrives at a strategy of vertical identification with a 'mediatic leadership' capable of reaching the depths of the 'people of the television.' The two cases illustrate that a radical-democratic theoretical commitment to the autonomy of struggles can be instituted on the level of left-populist practices in very different ways—entailing in turn corresponding challenges, from the lack of horizontal expansion (SR) to the heavy reliance on vertical identification with a leader and its increasing disconnect with a less 'transversal,' more normalized positioning within the party system (Podemos). If the future of left populism after the squares rests on inventing a 'new form of organization' (following Mouffe), it is clear that the 'vertical form of the party' cannot simply be overcome but can be opened up to allow for some 'horizontalist forms of expression'; a recognition of this productive but irreducible tension is arguably the starting point for radical politics today.

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Notes

1   Tønder and Thomassen (2005) presciently formulated their earlier distinction between ontologies of abundance and lack in terms of a 'critical juncture' for radical-democratic thought.

2   Laclau's (2005) later concept of heterogeneity introduces another limit to objectivity in the form of an internal limit to the signifying system constituted equivalentially by an antagonistic frontier (see also Thomassen 2005; Roskamm 2017).

3   One example of this can be seen in how the democratic demand for 'women's rights' is differentially incorporated by neo-liberalism or equivalentially incorporated by the far right. The first might consist in isolated policy concessions such as gender quotas on company boards (Nancy Fraser's critique of 'progressive neo-liberalism'); an example for the second is the extension of the antagonistic frontier against 'Islam' as a supposed threat to women's rights. Here, the discursive structure is clearly not conducive to autonomy because the element 'women's rights' is incorporated by virtue of the outside common to the entire bloc, not in terms of its own antagonistically defined terrain (e.g., against 'patriarchy').

4   This implies that a *democratic* populism must accept the possibility of alternative claims to 'the people'—in contrast to Müller's (2014, p. 488) understanding of populism as, by definition, an essentially totalitarian (in a Lefortian sense) claim to exclusively represent 'the people.'

5   The LO emerged in 2011 from a split in the Organization of Marxists (OM), which had been an attempt to create a united platform for 'revolutionary Marxists' by displacing the fault lines between 'Stalinists' and 'Trotskyists' ('There is no more Stalinism and Trotskyism, there is revolutionary Marxism and reformism' (Shapinov 2006)). While associated with the 'Trotskyist' wing of the OM, the LO (2011) defined itself as a 'radically anti-capitalist, internationalist, democratic, feminist, and ecological political initiative' fighting for a vision of 'self-management socialism.'

6   According to one field study (Democratic Initiatives Foundation 2014), the share of protesters who cited the 'calls of the opposition leaders' as a reason for coming to the Maidan amounted to just 5.4% (assembly, December), 6.7% (protest camp, December), and 2.8% (assembly, January).

7   To illustrate, the following protest motivations were cited by respondents in the above-cited study (assembly, December/protest camp, December/assembly, January): Yanukovych's refusal to sign the Association Agreement with the EU (53.5%/40.0%/47.0%); police violence against protesters (69.6%/69.0%/61.3%); regime change (39.1%/38.9%/45.6%); improvement of living standards (49.9%/36.2%/51.1%).

8   While a systematic hegemony analysis of Euromaidan would be beyond the scope of this article, one interpretation is that the key hegemonic displacement played out around the signifier 'nation'—which the LO in its Ten-Point Program avoided entirely—with Zhuravlev (2015) arguing on the basis of an extensive interview study that a civic nationalism that emphasized the equivalential unity of 'all Ukrainians' against the Yanukovych and Putin regimes was initially dominant in the Euromaidan protests before giving way to an ethno-linguistic nationalism that extended the constitutive exclusion onto 'untrue Ukrainians' on the basis of language and region (similarly to what Portnov (2015) has criticized as 'Galician reductionism' and in line with the understanding of 'reductionism' proposed by Kim (2017)).

9   To which he was quick to add: 'which is not to say that Podemos represents 15-M, no one could represent 15-M.'

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