

# **Populism in post-democratic times**

*Greek politics and the limits of consensus*

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## Introduction

In this paper we focus on several kinds of transformations that have affected the Greek political system during the past fifteen years. Furthermore, we purport to discuss the role of populism in contemporary democracies (and its relation to democracy in general) and especially the rise of new types of populist phenomena in the contemporary Greek (post)democratic context. Starting with a brief account of the consolidation of democratic politics in post-authoritarian Greece, which was associated with the hegemony of a certain kind of (left-wing) populism,<sup>1</sup> we will move to highlighting certain ‘*signs*’ of *post-democratic change* that emerged especially after 1996, when the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) and its leader Constantinos Simitis won the general elections held on that year (articulating an ideal-type *anti-populist* discourse, a Greek version of third way social-democratic politics).<sup>2</sup> This post-democratic direction (without changing dramatically) acquired new contents and meaning(s) when the power passed from the centre-left PASOK to the centre-right party of New Democracy (ND) and Kostas Karamanlis (nephew of the first prime minister of post-authoritarian Greece, Konstantinos Karamanlis).

The years from 1996 to 2009 seem to form a distinct period in the Greek post-authoritarian political and social history. A period characterized by the end (or decline) of strong traditional political identifications of the *Right* and *Left* and the formation of a new ‘modernizing’ (largely neoliberal) consensus at the *centre*; a period that we could call *post-democratic*. The consensus, in its turn, triggered a variety of populist reactions (varying from the extreme and religious right to the radical left) which attempted to present themselves as true political alternatives to a dead-end path, claiming to represent the true ‘voice of the people’.

All these populist reactions and also the counter-reactions they generated, raise critical questions. What is the role of populism in contemporary established democracies, and particularly in Greece, and what is its relation to the so called consensus at the *center*? Is populism some sort of *malaise* of democratic politics (as many politicians and commentators suggest) or maybe a ‘perennial possibility’,<sup>3</sup> producing an inescapable tension that sustains and ‘moves’ democratic life? In the course of our paper we will seek to address (directly or indirectly) these questions by moving at first at a more abstract, theoretical level (with reference to the relevant European and international theoretico-political literature about post-democracy and

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<sup>1</sup> We are referring here to PASOK’s populism (especially during the 70s and 80s) which was articulated mainly around its historical leader Andreas Papandreu. See Christos Lyrintzis, ‘The power of populism: the Greek case’, *European Journal of Political Research*, vol. 15, no 6, 1987, pp. 667-686; Ioannis Papadopoulos, *Dynamique du discours politique et conquête du pouvoir. Le cas du PASOK (Mouvement socialiste panhellénique): 1974-1981*, Peter Lang, Berne 1989; Richard Clogg (ed), *Greece 1981-89: The Populist Decade*, Macmillan Press, London 1993; Andréas Pantazopoulos, ‘Le national-populisme grec, 1974-2004’, *Les Temps Modernes*, N° 645-646, Septembre-Décembre 2007, pp. 237-267.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Third-way’ political leaders were and still are well known for their discomfort (or even *disgust*) with populism (or with what they refer to as populism). Characteristic of this stance is (among others) an article written about Gerhard Schroeder in 2005, which noted: ‘It’s a word that’s almost become an obscenity for German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, and he usually frowns when he mentions it. He usually says it quietly, groaning a little, expressing a blend of mild condescension and restrained disgust. The word is ‘populism’. Sometimes he refers to it dismissively as ‘pure populism’. Other times, with disgust creeping into his voice, he even calls it ‘cheap populism’” (*Der Spiegel*, 05/09/2005, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/spiegel/0,1518,355485,00.html>; retrieved 7 January 2011).

<sup>3</sup> See Margaret Canovan, ‘Trust the People! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy’, *Political Studies*, 47(1), 1999, p. 2.

populism) and afterwards through the encounter with relevant empirical examples that illustrate the tension between populism and (post)democracy, focusing especially on the current discourse of Greek political parties and that of the Greek government.

### **The post-democratic context**

It has almost become a *cliché* in the relevant literature to note that ‘actually existing’ established democracies are going through a gradual but rather steady transition or even transformation to ‘something different’ from what we traditionally call ‘democracy’. As Colin Crouch points out ‘politics and government are increasingly slipping back into the control of privileged elites in the manner characteristic of pre-democratic times’.<sup>4</sup> However, that doesn’t necessarily mean a passage to a *non-democracy*, a step back to pre-democratic times, neither to a completely new form of politics and government, since basic characteristics of the former are preserved, when others are abandoned or re-articulated acquiring a whole new different meaning. Whether we call it a ‘turn’, or a ‘transition’, or even a ‘transformation’, examples of this process are well identifiable within contemporary established democracies around the world. Various thinkers and researchers of this phenomenon, who originate from different starting points and methodological backgrounds, seem to draw the same conclusions discerning *tendencies of a de-politicization and/or de-democratization of politics towards a post-democratic and post-political consensus at the centre*.<sup>5</sup>

Basic characteristics of this *post-democratic* transformation are: the decline of forms of collective regulation and control of the markets,<sup>6</sup> the marginalization of trade unions, economic globalization and *normalization* of the practices and ideology of neoliberalism,<sup>7</sup> the unfair and less redistributive taxation systems, the alienation from politics and the rise of various forms of *political cynicism*, the replacement of politics by *passionless*<sup>8</sup> administration and/or management and its reduction to a consumerist logic (resemblant to an advertising one),<sup>9</sup> which in effect causes the transformation of

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<sup>4</sup> Colin Crouch, *Post-democracy*, Polity Press, Cambridge 2004, p.6.

<sup>5</sup> We are referring here to intellectuals like Chantal Mouffe, Colin Crouch, Jacques Rancière, Slavoj Žižek, Ernesto Laclau, Richard Rorty, Giorgio Agamben and others. For an outline of the current politico-theoretical debate on the various faces of *Postdemocracy* see: Colin Crouch, *Post-democracy*; Chantal Mouffe, *On the political*, Routledge, Abingdon-New York 2005; Chantal Mouffe, *The democratic paradox*, Verso, London-New York 2000; Jacques Rancière, *Hatred for democracy*, Verso, London 2006; Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1999; Yannis Stavrakakis, ‘Democracy in Post-Democratic Times’, in *The Lacanian Left*, Edinburgh University press, Edinburgh 2007, pp. 254-285; Richard Rorty, ‘Post-Democracy’, *London Review of Books*, vol. 26, no. 7, 1 April 2004, pp. 10-11.

<sup>6</sup> The nowadays infamous *markets* (especially with the face of the *global rating agencies*) are becoming more and more independent, uncontrolled by any form of collective political influence and regulation and yet they are influencing and to some extent are controlling the course of the economies of nation-states that since recently were regarded to be rather stabled and strong (see Greece, Ireland, Portugal, and so on).

<sup>7</sup> In other words, the *reign* of the TINA doctrine: ‘*there is no alternative*’ (to quote Margaret Thatcher's famous dictum).

<sup>8</sup> On the crucial role that *passions* play in the field of democratic politics, see Chantal Mouffe, *Politics and Passions: the stakes of Democracy*, Centre for the Study of Democracy, University of Westminster, London 2002.

<sup>9</sup> See Yannis Stavrakakis, ‘Re-Activating the Democratic Revolution: The Politics of Transformation Beyond Reoccupation and Conformism’, *Parallax*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2003, pp. 56-71.

politics and political debate to a *'tightly controlled spectacle'*<sup>10</sup>, where the *image*, the impression (rather than the actual *content*) becomes primary, leading to the growing importance of mass media and especially the television. No wonder then why the various 'image makers', communication consultants or media experts acquire a 'key' role in today's western democracies' public spaces. A more general symptom/characteristic of the *post-democratic zeitgeist*, which in a way includes all the formerly mentioned, is that the logic of '*police*', in the sense that Rancière uses the term,<sup>11</sup> becomes dominant over that of '*politics*' and the states turn towards the (a-political) *regulation of 'everyday lives'*.<sup>12</sup>

All of these symptoms/characteristics are parts of a general *logic*, a particular dominating discourse that tries to repress, or even eliminate, the ontological primacy of the 'political' (as it is defined by theorists like Chantal Mouffe<sup>13</sup>), i.e. the dimension of *antagonism*, the critical moment of *discord* or *dissensus*. At this point it is worth quoting Jacques Rancière's classical and often referred to, remarks:

Postdemocracy is the government practice and conceptual legitimation of a democracy after the demos, a democracy that has eliminated the appearance, miscount, and dispute of the people and is thereby reducible to the sole interplay of state mechanisms and combinations of social energies and interests.<sup>14</sup>

This hegemonic post-democratic logic/discourse in its current guise (and especially in Europe) acquired an *anti-populist 'scent'*, which, again in Rancière's words, serves the causes of a politico-theoretical justification needed to found 'the idea that we don't have a choice';<sup>15</sup> in other words, Thatcher's doctrine and neoliberalism's cornerstone re-addressed and rearticulated. Contemporary anti-populism is thus understood as another guise of the neoliberal rationale of *one-way politics* (or even of the *end of politics*).

However, let us not visualize a romanticized democratic past. Was there ever a *thriving* (western) democracy? Have we witnessed in our recent history a time of full realization of 'liberty and equality for all'?<sup>16</sup> Rather not. Nevertheless, we have seen a certain blossoming of democratic life through the reinforcement of political participation and the broadening of the democratic arena; mass participation in unions and political parties; the rise and the thirty 'golden years' of social-democracy and the

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<sup>10</sup> Colin Crouch, *Coping with Post-democracy*, Fabian Society, London 2000, p. 2` emphasis ours.

<sup>11</sup> See Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, p. 28. In Laclau's words *police* is 'the logic of counting and assigning the population to differential places, and [*politics*] the subversion of that differentiating logic through the constitution of an egalitarian discourse which puts into question established identities'; Ernesto Laclau, 'Can Immanence Explain Social Struggles?', *Diacritics*, vol. 31, no. 4, Winter, 2001, p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> An attempt to the Saint-Simonian dream for the '*administration of things*'.

<sup>13</sup> See Chantal Mouffe, *On the political*, pp. 8-34.

<sup>14</sup> Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, p. 102.

<sup>15</sup> Jacques Rancière, 'Non, le peuple n'est pas une masse brutale et ignorante', *Libération*, 3 Janvier 2011 (<http://www.liberation.fr/politiques/01012311198-non-le-peuple-n-est-pas-une-masse-brutale-et-ignorante>; retrieved 2 February 2011).

<sup>16</sup> The core 'ethico-political' principles of liberal democracy according to Mouffe; see Chantal Mouffe, *The democratic paradox*, pp. 102-104.

institution of the welfare state (1945-1975).<sup>17</sup> This particular course towards the realization of a democracy ‘to come’<sup>18</sup> however has somehow been blocked, or even worse, reversed, and we seem to already be taking steps backwards at a pace that has been even more accelerated by the global economic and financial crisis (or in its current guise, the ‘debt crisis’). This inversion is evident especially nowadays when we see private institutions and specific groups of technocrats with no democratic authority or legitimization, controlling policies and the course of the economies of nation-states (for now, that is more evident in the cases of Greece and Ireland, but also in Portugal and Spain).

In this context, populism plays a controversial but crucial role and seems to occupy a significant part of public discourses in most European countries. On the one hand, populism seems to present a ‘real alternative’, a *passionate opponent* to the post-democratic consensus;<sup>19</sup> on the other hand it seems to have an ambiguous content and a hazy relation with a wide range of phenomena, ranging from right-wing xenophobia and neo-racism to anti-capitalism and counter-globalization movements. What is puzzling is that technocratic elites all over Europe (and as far as this paper is concerned, in Greece) tend to stigmatize as ‘*populistic*’, any form of opposition, any form of alternative political choice or proposition, marginalizing in this way political struggle and dissensus; the ‘heart’ of politics. In this field, political theory and political analysis have to play a crucial role in decoding the ways certain populist discourses/phenomena operate in specific contexts (nationally and supra-nationally) and in searching a general schema that could explain the relation of populism to democracy, its great ‘insistency’, and its particular meaning(s) in several discourses.

### **The Populist Challenge**

So, what exactly is it that we mean by speaking about ‘populism’? A concept that occupies such a significant part of public debate (not only in Greece and Europe, but almost in any established democracy), would be expected to have a clear or at least relatively clear content. Although thoroughly studied and debated by many researchers and academics, the exact opposite thing seems to be happening with the concept of populism. The problem of conceptual ambiguity<sup>20</sup> of the term is certainly not new. It is rather old. It is indeed as old as the first significant scientific

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<sup>17</sup> See Christopher Pierson, *Beyond the welfare state? The new political economy of welfare*, Polity (3rd edition), Cambridge 2006, pp. 129-142.

<sup>18</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, New York & London 1994, p. 81, 108.

<sup>19</sup> It is no coincidence that, in his recent article on the economic crisis, Greece and Europe, Étienne Balibar sees no other way for the revival of Europe’s democratic politics, than the articulation of a certain broad popular alliance: *a pan-European populism*; see Étienne Balibar, ‘Europe: Final Crisis? Some Theses’, *Theory & Event*, Vol. 13(2), 2010

([http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/theory\\_and\\_event/v013/13.2.balibar.html](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/theory_and_event/v013/13.2.balibar.html); retrieved 9 December 2010).

<sup>20</sup> As Nonna Mayer points: ‘Populism is a fashionable concept. But it remains a fuzzy one, loosely defined, disconnected from a specific type of regime, ideological content or position in the political space. It can be left-wing or right-wing, it can suit Juan Domingo Peron and Margaret Thatcher, Vladimir Poutine and Ross Perot, Bernard Tapie, the socialist businessman and Jean-Marie le Pen, leader of the French FN’; Nonna Mayer, ‘Radical Right Populism in France: How much of the 2002 Le Pen votes does populism explain?’, Symposium *Globalization and the Radical Right Populism*, Centre for the Study of European Politics and Society (<http://hsf.bgu.ac.il/europe>), Ben Gurion University of the Negev, 11-12 April 2005.

publications on the phenomenon.<sup>21</sup> But the problem of conceptual ambiguity was accentuated even more when the term passed from scientific discourse to journalism and public political discourse and debate. Then we were confronted with the growing problem of several different and often conflicting uses (and misuses) of the term 'populism', and hence a certain conceptual confusion. As some commentators have stressed, populism is a primarily scientific concept that gradually became very popular and it has suffered ever since, precisely because of its increasing popularity.<sup>22</sup> So, to state that dealing with populism is a rather *risky* and *slippery* process would be nothing more but another *cliché*.

Following Ernesto Laclau, who avoids attributing certain social or ideological contents<sup>23</sup> to populism, this paper adopts a *formal* approach. In this 'formalist' turn, Laclau isn't alone; Margaret Canovan, another standard reference in the relevant literature (we could characterize her as the 'number two' in the study of populism), has also turned to a rather formal approach to populism concentrating, in her own words, on 'structural considerations' when dealing with it.<sup>24</sup>

Ernesto Laclau's influential (though still controversial and vividly debated) work on the phenomenon of populism (an *ontological approach* as it has been characterized) has provided us with a coherent analytical 'body' of theory and methodology<sup>25</sup> that is founded on *discourse theory* (as developed by the so called 'Essex School'<sup>26</sup>) and has triggered significant empirical research.<sup>27</sup> So, according to a discourse-analytic perspective, populism is a certain political logic, a type of discourse characterized by the emergence of 'equivalences, popular subjectivity', the 'dichotomic construction of the social around an internal frontier' and the 'discursive construction of an enemy'.<sup>28</sup> As such, it cannot be *a priori* recognized as something *good* or *bad*, since the *ontological* presumptions cannot be reduced or equated to the

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<sup>21</sup> The first attempt at a systematic, scientific investigation of populism, both at a theoretical and an empirical level, was that of the collective volume edited forty years ago by Ghita Ionescu & Ernest Gellner, *Populism: its meaning and national characteristics*, New York, Macmillan, 1969, which followed a conference with the same subject at the London School of Economics (LSE, May 19-21, 1967). For a brief account of the conference see Berlin I., Hofstadter R., MacRae D., 'To define populism', *Government and Opposition*, vol. 3(2), 1968, pp. 137-179.

<sup>22</sup> See Pierre-André Taguieff, 'Le populisme et la science politique. Du mirage conceptuel aux vrais problèmes', *Vingtième Siècle*, No. 56, Numéro spécial: 'Les populismes', Oct.-Dec., 1997, p. 4.

<sup>23</sup> Ernesto Laclau, «Populism: What's in a Name?», in Francisco Panizza, (ed.), *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*, Verso, London 2005, p. 32.

<sup>24</sup> Margaret Canovan, 'Trust the People! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy', p. 3.

<sup>25</sup> Ernesto Laclau, *Politics and ideology in Marxist theory: Capitalism, fascism, populism*, NLB, London 1977; Ernesto Laclau, 'Populist rupture and discourse', *Screen Education*, no. 34, (Spring) 1980, pp. 87-93; Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, Verso, London 2005; Ernesto Laclau, 'Populism: What's in a Name?'

<sup>26</sup> For the politico-theoretical foundations of the Essex School of discourse analysis see Ernesto Laclau & Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, Verso, London-New York 1985.

<sup>27</sup> See Yannis Stavrakakis, 'Antinomies of formalism: Laclau's theory of populism and the lessons from religious populism in Greece', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, vol. 9(3), October 2004, pp. 253-267; Steven Griggs & David Howarth, 'Populism, Localism and Environmental Politics: the Logic and Rhetoric of the Stop Stansted Expansion campaign', *Planning Theory*, vol. 7(2), 2008, pp. 123-144; Barros S. & Castagnola G., 'The political frontiers of the social: Argentine politics after peronist populism (1955-1973)' in Howarth D., Norval A., Stavrakakis Y., (eds.), *Discourse Theory and Political Analysis*, Manchester University Press, Manchester 2000; Christos Lyrantzis, 'The power of populism: the Greek case'.

<sup>28</sup> Ernesto Laclau, 'Populism: What's in a Name?', p. 39.

contingent specific (*ontic*) contents. An ontological approach of populism therefore helps us escape the various problems and dead-ends that other approaches encounter when moving strictly at the ontical level of analysis.

A crucial element in the formation of a *populist rupture* is the way (the *logic* in which) the various subjects-identities-demands are articulated and are collectively opposed to the common ‘other’ (the ‘enemy of the people’). This logic ‘can be described as a *logic of equivalence* –ie. one in which all the demands, in spite of their differential character, tend to reaggregate themselves forming (...) an *equivalential chain*.<sup>29</sup>

Populism then, conceived as a dichotomic view of society (as a construction of a frontier and a demarcation of distinct alternative political options and ideologies) and therefore as a *birth-process* (a discursive construction and a process of cathetic investment) of a collective ‘us’ against a ‘them’ is a core element of the ontological dimension of the *political*. In other words, it is located at the heart of the ontological preconditions of politics in its democratic perspective (difference, opposition, antagonism, agonism). Should that lead us in declaring populism synonymous with politics? The answer for Ernesto Laclau can only be affirmative.<sup>30</sup> Of course such a move is not without its antinomies and paradoxes.<sup>31</sup> An emphasis on the ontological level and/or a kind of ‘slippage between the two levels of analysis’<sup>32</sup> (ontical and ontological) can easily lead to *reductionism*. Because, although at the core of populism we can locate (inherently) the emergence of a dichotomy of the social, i.e. the organization of sociopolitical struggle around an internal frontier (a fundamental antagonism) –something that is a presupposition to any form of hegemony, that is also of politics–, however this cannot necessary result in identifying populism to politics as such. Identifying the ontological presuppositions of populism with those of politics (that is the element of *antagonism*, of *discord*, the ‘disturbing’ event of the *political*) cannot mean necessarily that we ‘expand’ this identification to the *ontical* level –since the particular and contingent contents of a given discourse may differ depending on the specific context. Such a ‘slippage’ would prevent us from recognizing *anti-political* or even *post-political* forms of populism, which, as we shall see have emerged in contemporary Greece.

### **The Historical frame of ‘Metapolitefsi’:<sup>33</sup> from ‘hyper-politicization’ to ‘modernisation’**

Greece’s recent democratic history is very strongly related with (not to say *attached to*) populism. Almost any book, paper or article referring to Greece’s recent social and political history must, to some extent, get involved with the various aspects of the phenomenon and its various manifestations in social and political life.<sup>34</sup> Although

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>31</sup> On which Yannis Stavrakakis has already made some critical remarks. See Yannis Stavrakakis, ‘Antinomies of formalism: Laclau's theory of populism and the lessons from religious populism in Greece’.

<sup>32</sup> David Howarth, *Discourse*, Open University Press, Buckingham-Philadelphia 2000, p.117.

<sup>33</sup> The term ‘*Metapolitefsi*’ is used in Greece, to signify the restoration of democracy in 1974, and the transition from dictatorship to a multi-party democratic system. It signifies not only the *moment* of transition in 1974, but also the *era* that this moment initiated.

<sup>34</sup> To name a few, see: Nikiforos Diamandouros, ‘Cultural Dualism and Political Change in Post-authoritarian Greece’, Working paper 50, Instituto Juan March de Estudios e Investigaciones, Madrid

populism is largely linked and/or attributed to the political party (PASOK) that admittedly played a crucial role to the ‘democratization of the Greek society and polity’,<sup>35</sup> it continues to signal a quasi sociopolitical *plague*; a democratic *malaise*.

PASOK rose in early post-authoritarian Greece as a response to a *hegemonic crisis* (or, to put it in Antonio Gramsci’s words, an *organic crisis*,<sup>36</sup>) and ever since it has dominated the country’s political life.<sup>37</sup> It managed to present itself as the continuation (the political incarnation) of the radicalization of broad masses of population in late 1960s which was *interrupted* by the seven-year military Junta (1967 to 1974). Putting an end to ‘a long-lasting post-civil-war regime’<sup>38</sup> it managed to express, represent and legitimize a wide range of collective subjects that were excluded from the political arena.<sup>39</sup> With the declared aim of a ‘radicalization of the masses’, it provided a *way through* (be it symbolically) for the accumulated social demands produced by an ‘explosion of expectations’<sup>40</sup> that had risen to that time. The *archetypal* populism of Andreas Papandreou was a core element in this new hegemony, since through a *logic of equivalence* it gave the power to the leader of PASOK of interpellating a new historical-political subject, the ‘*non-privileged*’ (‘*mi pronomiouxoi*’), the new unified and undifferentiated ‘*people*’ of the Metapolitefsi. PASOK, in this way, appeared as the sole *carrier* of the ‘people’s voice’, of the people’s resentments and frustration. The ideological vehicle of this interpellation was the project of the ‘National Popular Unity’ (‘EAE’ in Greek) which operated as a *discursive frame*, a key signifier, with a very inclusive way, since those excluded from the national-popular interpellation were almost none. Moreover PASOK’s populism was grounded in signifying ‘the people’ as ‘the nation’ and *vice versa*, founding in

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1994; Dimitris Charalambis, *Clientelist Relations and Populism. The extra-institutional consensus in the Greek political system*, Exantas, Athens 1989 (in Greek); Aggelos Elefantis, *In the Constellation of Populism*, O Politis, Athens 1991 (in Greek); Christos Lyrintzis, & Michalis Spourdalakis, ‘On Populism: A Synthesis a propos of the Greek Bibliography’, in *Greek Political Science Review*, no. 1, 1993, pp. 133-162; Nicos Mouzelis, Thanos Lipowatz, & Michalis Spourdalakis, *Populism and Politics*, Gnosi, Athens 1989; Nicolas Demertzis, ‘Populism and resentment. A contribution of the (political) sociology of emotions’, *Science & Society*, issue 12, spring 2004 (in Greek), online at [http://www.media.uoa.gr/sas/issues/12\\_issue/ndemert.html](http://www.media.uoa.gr/sas/issues/12_issue/ndemert.html); retrieved 9 March 2011.

<sup>35</sup> Michalis Spourdalakis, ‘2007 Greek elections: signs of major political realignment, challenges and hopes for the left’, *Studies in Political Economy*, vol. 82, 2008, p. 172.

<sup>36</sup> See Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, International Publishers, New York 1971..

<sup>37</sup> PASOK has stayed in power from 1981 to 1989 and from 1993 to 2004. After a five year ‘break’ (ND government 2004-2009), it rose again in power in October 2009.

<sup>38</sup> Spourdalakis, ‘2007 Greek elections’, p. 172.

<sup>39</sup> From petit-bourgeoisie to middle-classes and self-employed and of course the broad masses that descanted from the *National Liberation Front* (EAM), the largest resistance group during the Axis occupation, (1941-1944), which was consisted of socialist and communist Greeks whom after the civil war were put in a ‘semi-outlaw’ state and were excluded from the main political arena, even from working in the public sector unless they officially denounce the Left, via the so called ‘*certificates of social beliefs*’. ‘Its defeat in the Civil War (1946-49) meant that the Left had no place in the context of an escalating Cold War. The Communist Party was banned in 1947 and *leftists of all stripes* were prosecuted. Law 509 of 1947 enabled the police to take action against anyone suspected of left-wing activities, while public sector employment presupposed the production of a ‘certificate of social beliefs’ that denounced communism and left-wing ideological convictions’; Dimitris Tsarouhas, ‘Explaining an Activist Military: Greece until 1975’, *Southeast European Politics*, vol. 6, no. 1, July 2005; emphasis ours.

<sup>40</sup> Yannis Voulgaris, *The Greece of the Metapolitefsi, 1974-2000*, Themelio, Athens 2002 (in Greek), p. 127.



this way the ‘people’ to the ‘nation’. That is why PASOK’s populism was better described with the term ‘*national-populism*’.<sup>41</sup>

PASOK’s populism was never seriously challenged until 1996, when Constantinos Simitis succeeded Andreas Papandreou (whom by then was facing major health issues that shortly after proved to be fatal) as head of the party. To some commentators this change in leadership and an obvious shift in PASOK’s discourse and political style signaled a passage ‘from populism to modernisation’.<sup>42</sup> Of course, signs of ‘crisis’ in PASOK’s early national-populism were shown already by 1989 when its leader got involved in a major scandal of corruption and PASOK didn’t manage to form government in the elections of the same year. Right after 1990-1993, the short break of a rather weak ND government under Konstantinos Mitsotakis,<sup>43</sup> clearer signs of *change* in the ways political parties and political discourse operate in the Greek political system were already starting to show. By 1993, the ‘tones of political competition were more subdued’,<sup>44</sup> the role of mass media in pre-electoral mobilization was significantly increased, passionate politics and clear-cut differences in discourses and in program between the left and right (as far as the two main parties are concerned) were blurred, and PASOK, when in power again, steadily abandoned its socialist past moving towards a third-way (neoliberal) logic, following its British and French socialist homologs.<sup>45</sup> To put it briefly, the ‘modernisation’ vision was based on a political program of mass privatizations,<sup>46</sup> a technocratic and rather pragmatist style of politics (and discourse), a vision of europeanization of the political system and the subjection of politics to the logics and rules of the market. In Christos Lyrintzis’ words:

The ‘modernisation’ period (...) marked *a shift from the socialist-populist period to one characterised by pragmatism, a managerial discourse and a technocratic approach* all packed in a project for the modernisation, rationalisation and Europeanisation of the Greek society and economy. The PASOK governments under Simitis accomplished the main task, which was the stabilisation of the economy according to the Maastricht criteria and the subsequent entry of the country into the European Monetary Union.<sup>47</sup>

So, the goal of entering the European Monetary Union (EMU) became the ‘key’ objective of the ‘modernisation’ governments and formed the new national-political strategy. An abstract vision of a new ‘powerful Greece’ came to condense this goal.

The ‘modernisation’ discourse came (or claimed) to transcend old divisions (political, social etc.) and to construct a new political subject on the basis of a

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<sup>41</sup> Andreas Pantazopoulos, *For the people and the nation. The moment Andreas Papandreou*, Polis, Athens 2001 (in Greek).

<sup>42</sup> Christos Lyrintzis, ‘The Changing Party System: Stable Democracy, Contested ‘Modernisation’’, *West European Politics*, vol. 28, no. 2, March 2005, p. 249.

<sup>43</sup> A declared neoliberal politician and former ‘comrade’ of Andreas Papandreou at the Center Union political party led by his father, Georgios Papandreou, in the 1960s.

<sup>44</sup> Michalis Spourdalakis, ‘PASOK’s second chance’, *Mediterranean Politics*, 1(3), 1996, p. 321.

<sup>45</sup> See Michalis Spourdalakis, ‘PASOK’s second chance’, p. 322.

<sup>46</sup> See George Pagoulatos, ‘The Politics of Privatization: Redrawing the Public-Private Boundary’, *West European Politics*, vol. 28, no. 2, 2005, pp. 358-380.

<sup>47</sup> Christos Lyrintzis, ‘The Changing Party System: Stable Democracy, Contested ‘Modernisation’’, p. 250; emphasis ours.

pragmatic pursuit of ‘progress’ (which appeared to be *one-way*). The emphasis on a *consensus* at the centre, shared also by ND, blurred the differences between the two major political parties. The repression of collective passions that were mediated in the mainstream political arena and the dominance of a technocratic discourse (the ‘*expert’s word*’)<sup>48</sup> eventually led to the accumulation and channeling of these passions in other directions, often in a distorting or even a violent way. Occasional ‘explosions’ of collective passions shouldn’t be regarded here as a coincidence, but rather as a ‘*filling*’ of the gap that is left by the absence of politics, or from the passage to a post-political field. As Andreas Pantazopoulos has shown, the ‘retreat’ of politics and the seizure of the space left by passions, by an ‘anti-political constellation of a Greek national-democratic *soul*’ reveals the emergence of a ‘democracy of emotion’.<sup>49</sup> Let us recall the display of such collective passions in the last 10-15 years in various occasions: (1) the massive gathering and celebrations at the center of big cities when Greece won the European Football Championship (Euro) in 2004;<sup>50</sup> (2) the celebrations (minor, but not insignificant), some months later, when Greece won a European song contest (Eurovision); (3) the massive rallies (‘*laosynakseis*’) organized by the Greek orthodox church as a reaction to the exclusion of religion from identity cards in 2000; (4) the massive and rather heteroclitic rallies for Abdullah Otsalan (February-March 1999); and last, but not least (5) the various nowadays attacks on immigrants and the recent election in the municipality of Athens of an extremist-right fascist councilor.<sup>51</sup> And these of course are only a few examples. In such ‘celebrations’/gatherings, or violent outbreaks – forms of collective passionate expression– the individualized (post-)modern subject/citizen, being alienated from other collective forms of participation and expression and with a dislocated identity, seems to desire what is lacking; *a concrete identity*. And sure enough the national or religious imaginary offer in this case a well tested and well grounded easy way out; *back to basics*.

<sup>48</sup> ‘*L’expertocratie*’, as Pierre-André Taguieff names it in his article ‘Le populisme et la science politique’, p. 18. The excess or circumvention of *politics* in a managerial logic through the prevalence of technocratic elites and ‘experts’, was clearly shown in the choice of Simitis to use non-parliament ministers to cope with central policies planned by his government. Such cases were the professor Michalis Stathopoulos, as Minister of Justice (March 2000-October 2001) who was assigned to address the so called ‘*identity crisis*’ of 2000 and the also professor Tassos Giannitsis, who was Minister of Labour and Social Security (April 2000-October 2001), Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs (October 2001-February 2004) Minister of Foreign Affairs (February-March 2004), and who had the task to handle the social insurance system reform in 2001. A similar case is Nikos Christodoulakis, who was Deputy Minister of Finance from 1996 until March 2000 and then was elected MP of PASOK at the elections of 2000, to become Minister of Development until 2001, and then Minister of Finance until 2004’ he was one of the ‘key’ persons of the modernisation project and its main objective of joining the EMU.

<sup>49</sup> Andreas Pantazopoulos, *Democracy of emotion*, Polis, Athens 2002 (in Greek), p. 149’ emphasis ours.

<sup>50</sup> For some interesting observations see Charitini Karakostaki, ‘The emergence of a collectivity in the state of individualism. A sociological approach of ‘Euro 2004’’, *2nd LSE PhD Symposium on modern Greece: ‘Current Social Science Research on Greece*’, 10 June 2005. Of course Karakostaki’s note that in those ‘celebrations’ we didn’t encounter a nationalistic danger is rather problematic, since the discourse of the celebrating mass was articulated clearly around the signifier of ‘the nation’ and moreover it turned against or even *lynched* groups of immigrants that thought they could celebrate side by side with Greeks in June 2004 (first of them were the Albanians who form the largest population of immigrants in Greece). See Tasos Kostopoulos, Dimitris Trimis, Aggelika Psara, Anta Psara, Dimitris Psaras (‘*Virus*’ team), ‘The blackshirts of the Greek police’, *Eleytherotypia*, 10/02/2008 (in Greek).

<sup>51</sup> We are referring here to the case of Nicos Michaloliakos, leader of the right-wing extremist organization ‘Chrysi Avyi’, who managed to get elected as a municipal councilor at the Athens City Council gathering the 5,3% of the votes.

This ideological and practical political shift didn't mark only PASOK's discourse and practices, since the other of the major political parties in Greece, namely ND, also gradually changed its discourse and program and moved towards a *center-right* politics in which the signifier of '*consensus*' holds a central position. It is characteristic that its new strategy, which eventually brought the party to power in 2004, was called the '*middle-ground*' project,<sup>52</sup> signaling in this way a focus on '*median*' politics. So, the passage from the 'modernising' PASOK to the 'reformist',<sup>53</sup> ND took place in a rather '*soft*' manner. Therefore it is not a surprise that by 'the end of the 1990s both major parties had developed a moderate, managerial and minimalist political discourse reflecting a clear convergence',<sup>54</sup> which by the elections of 2009 hadn't changed significantly; not even to this day, that the unprecedented crisis that Greece is going through would be expected to have forced the two major political parties to shape distinct alternative policies and articulate discernible discourses. The *a-political struggle* between the two parties led eventually to a *moralization* of politics<sup>55</sup> with the party of ND promising to do away with corruption once and for all when in office and 'baptizing' Costas Simitis as the 'archpriest of corruption'. ND's pivotal claim was that it would manage things *in a better way*; that it would administrate everyday living in a better way than PASOK. However, behind the epiphenomenal antithesis there was no actual political content.

It is indicative to what was previously said that in the past few years the party of '*nobody*' is gaining ground in the various opinion polls as to which one is more suitable to lead the country.<sup>56</sup> Being unable to discern essential political and ideological differences between the two major parties, the citizens/voters are almost left without a choice; we could even name it '*Thatcher's revenge*'. When frustrated by the policies of the past (give or take) 15 years –which leads to a frustration by politics in general–, when both parties were in office, it shouldn't seem strange to prefer a '*nobody*' for government; '*nobody*' here signifies an unprocurable *alternative*.

### **Populism: condemned, discussed and debated**

Today, 20 years after the decline and the eventual corrosion/disappearance of PASOK's first historical leader Andreas Papandreou's ideal-type populism (1974-1989), which proved to be decisive in many respects, and the rise of the technocratic project of 'modernisation', followed by its descendant 'reformism' project, as it was briefly described, populism continues to play a vital role in public social and political life of contemporary Greece. Populism's crucial role is shown both as a *phenomenon* (particular manifestations) and also as a crucial part of political discourse, used either as an *alibi* or as an object of *denunciation*. The term 'populism' is used and debated extremely often in the public discourse of post-authoritarian Greece by politicians,

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<sup>52</sup> This strategy was the inspiration of a Greek media-expert named John Loulis. See John Loulis, *The end of a domination: How and why PASOK lost at the elections*, Livanis, Athens 2004 (in Greek).

<sup>53</sup> The term 'reforms' became a nodal point in ND's discourse (a nodal point which operated as an 'empty signifier'), replacing the term 'modernisation' that PASOK used to describe its program and vision for a 'new Greece'.

<sup>54</sup> Christos Lyrintzis, 'The Changing Party System'. p. 254.

<sup>55</sup> For the moralization of politics as a symptom of post-politics and for its dangers for democracy see Chantal Mouffe, *On the political*.

<sup>56</sup> See the latest opinion poll by *Public Issue*, 'Political Barometer', February 2011 (in Greek), in which '*nobody*' gains 44% of the answers when the people are asked of whom is the most suitable to be prime minister.

journalists and academics, who are using and misusing it to refer to and identify (as populist) policies, ideologies, strategies, gestures etc. A rough indexing of the daily press at a random moment of the past years would easily reveal the picture we are describing.<sup>57</sup> Populism is mentioned so often that some might even justifiably conclude that everything can be reduced to populism. Of course, if we reduce everything to populism, then the term loses all of its content and is reduced to nothing specific. Today, under the shadow of the ‘debt crisis’, populism has re-emerged as a ‘great plague’, some sort of cancer that has infected every aspect of our democracy and even threatens to ‘*destroy the country*’.<sup>58</sup>

In the past few years we have repeatedly heard, the former Prime Minister (2004-2009) and President of ND Costas Karamanlis, stressing the basic dilemma for the country as such: ‘*reforms or Populism*’. This dilemma, only slightly changed, was even chosen as a central *stake* for the campaign for the early national elections on the 4<sup>th</sup> of October 2009: ‘*responsibility or populism*’ asked the posters in the central streets of Athens and other cities of Greece. The dilemma which arose in Kostas Karamanlis’ view (then Prime Minister of Greece) was very clear: ‘the strategic options are two: either we succumb to populism, or we dare make some tough decisions’<sup>59</sup>. As if populism were a permanent *temptation* for any political entity or subject, a continuing and persistent ‘*stimulus*’ to derogation from a mainstream ‘rational’ policy conceived as a one-way inevitable and neutral process; in one word ‘*progress*’. It is worth remembering that a few years ago, during the eight years of PASOK’s ‘modernisation’ project (1996-2004), the dominant dilemma seemed to be condensed in the phrase ‘*modernisation or populism*’, condemning in the same way any opposition to the government’s policies and ideological direction in general; whoever opposed the various faces of the ‘modernisation’ project was *a priori* stigmatized as a reactionary populist. So, in PASOK’s discourse of the period in question, populism took the meaning of conservatism, the risk of inaction and/or regression. While the ‘anti-populist modernisation’ acquired the meaning of a rational/pragmatic and progressive dynamic of pursuing a neo-cosmopolitan vision of prosperity for Greece, which was condensed in the goal of the Greek entrance to the European Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), which would somehow magically ‘modernise’ Greek society and political culture.

To put it in other words, those very political forces that presented themselves in recent years as the leaders of an ‘*anti-populist*’ *campaign* (PASOK and ND) are the

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<sup>57</sup> Paraphrasing Ghita Ionescu and Ernest Gellner, who in 1969 were paraphrasing Karl Marx in the introduction of their well known work *Populism: its meanings and national characteristics*, we could alternatively state here: ‘A specter is haunting modern Greece: the specter of populism’.

<sup>58</sup> As it was noted at the front-page of a conservative newspaper in Greece (*Hestia*, 3 November, 2009). Similar statements have been made in several Greek newspapers during the past months: ‘Greece today is threatened by something worse than bankruptcy; it is threatened by an unprecedented explosion of populism. An explosion which, by using the combustible material of accumulated frustration, can lead with mathematical certainty, to economic bankruptcy and also in far more uncontrolled and dangerous situations’ (Yannis Pretenteris, newspaper *To Vima*, 16/01/2011); ‘If populism was a religion, then Greece would be Pakista’ (Stefanos Kassimatis, newspaper *Kathimerini*, 09/22/1010). Similar references here could be numerous.

<sup>59</sup> Speech by Prime Minister Kostas Karamanlis to the Representatives of Producer Groups in the 74th Thessaloniki International Trade Fair (T.I.F), 05 September 2009, Prime Minister’s press office (in Greek).

same political forces that played a central role in the conversion/transformation of the Greek political system towards a post-democratic orientation.<sup>60</sup>

So, it seems then that there are indications of interconnection between those post-political/post-democratic directions and the emergence of a plethora of new populist phenomena in the country. Empirical examples from the last decade are indicative. Some of them are the following: the *religious populism* of the then Archbishop Christodoulos in response to the ‘identity crisis’ in 2000;<sup>61</sup> the political discourse articulated by the leader of ND Costas Karamanlis during the pre-2004 period, which constituted a rather atypical ‘*anti-modernisation*’ *populism*;<sup>62</sup> the *xenophobic right-wing neo-populism* of Georgios Karatzaferis, leader of the party LAOS (acronym for Laikos Orthodoxos Synagermos/Popular Orthodox Rally, a party similar in many ways to the respective European right-wing neo-populist cases such as Front National in France or the FPO of Haider in Austria); the radical-left populism of a political coalition called SYRIZA (acronym for Synaspismos Rizospastikis Aristeras/Coalition of the Radical Left).<sup>63</sup> And of course PASOK’s newfound populism which is expressed in its leader’s George A. Papandreou discourse (emerging in the internal election for the party’s leadership in November 2007<sup>64</sup> and continuing since today with new contents; a rather ambiguous mixture of patriotism and populism).

The term populism then, in contemporary Greece, when used in public debates and within a specific kind of polemics is rather *hazy* and often interrelated (sometimes arbitrarily), with a wide range of policies, ideologies, relationships and gestures. Hence, populism sometimes is in effect a misuse or a metonymy of the terms demagogy, or nationalism, neo-statism, clientism, and smears the ideas of the social welfare, or even anti-capitalism. The only certain thing is that populism is always used in the sense of *blame*, as an unacceptable quasi-political ‘crime’. And what is more crucial is that it is used by the governing elites to characterize any form of opposition. Rancière’s remarks couldn’t be more relevant:

Populism is the *convenient name* under which is dissimulated the exacerbated contradiction between popular legitimacy and expert legitimacy, that is, the difficulty the government of science has in adapting itself to manifestations of democracy and even to the

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<sup>60</sup> For the post-democratic/ post-political transformation of the Greek political system see Alexandros Kioupiolis, ‘Foreword’, in Colin Crouch, *Postdemocracy*, Ekkremes, Athens 2006 (in Greek); Nicholas Sevastakis, *Trivial Country. Facets of Public Space and the Antinomies of Values in Today’s Greece*, Savalas, Athens 2004 (in Greek); Andreas Pantazopoulos, *The democracy of emotion*.

<sup>61</sup> See Yannis Stavrakakis, ‘Religion and Populism in Contemporary Greece’, in Francisco Panizza (ed.), *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*, Verso, London 2005, pp. 224-249; Nikos Chrysoloras, ‘Religion and Nationalism in Greece’, paper presented at the *Second Pan-European ECPR Conference Standing Group on EU Politics*, Bologna, 24-26 June 2004; Lina Molokotos-Liederman, ‘Identity crisis: Greece, orthodoxy, and the European Union’, *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 18(3), 2003, pp. 291-315.

<sup>62</sup> Andreas Pantazopoulos, ‘The arrogance of progress’, *Eleytherotypia*, 20/9/2008 (in Greek); Michalis Spourdalakis, ‘Greek Democracy in the Post-Euro Era’, *Relay, A Socialist Project Review*, issue 15, Jan/Feb 2007, pp. 42-45.

<sup>63</sup> For some preliminary thoughts on SYRIZA’s ‘youth-populism’ see Giorgos Katsambekis, ‘SYRIZA: some thoughts on the occasion of December’, in *Contemporary Issues*, issue 106, 2009, pp. 9-11 (in Greek).

<sup>64</sup> Papandreou was even called a ‘postmodern populist leader’. See Andreas Pantazopoulos, ‘PASOK in a long transition’ in Christoforos Vernardakis (ed.), *Public opinion in Greece 2007*, Savalas, Athens 2008, pp. 203-217 (in Greek).

mixed form of representative system. This name at once masks and reveals the intense wish of the oligarch: *to govern without people*, in other words, without any dividing of the people; *to govern without politics*.<sup>65</sup>

### **Anti-consensus populism?**

As we earlier mentioned, until the early 1990s, PASOK seemed to be the sole *carrier* of the ‘people’s voice’, *the epitome of Greek populism*. As PASOK moved away from its populist guise, the so called ‘old PASOK’ of Andreas Papandreu, to its new ‘modernising’ one, we witnessed the appearance of new *claimants* of ‘the people’s voice’. The first reaction (summer of 2000), with a clear ‘anti-modernisation’ prospect/view, was the religious populism of the then Archbishop Christodoulos. Reacting to the government’s plans to remove religion from the ID cards, the Greek church, under the charismatic leadership of Christodoulos, raised massive rallies and even gathered about three million signatures<sup>66</sup> ‘asking for a referendum on the optional inclusion of religion in Greek identity cards’.<sup>67</sup> Christodoulos condemned the ‘atheist’ and ‘corrupt’ elite of the modernisers as an anti-popular and antinational oligarchy in great distance from ‘the people’ and presented the church as a true way out, as a real alternative against the politicians that betrayed ‘the people’. Christodoulos’ populism was *a-political* (or even *anti-political*) in terms that it called for a withdrawal from politics and a return of the people to the church’s flock, re-defining ‘the people’ as ‘the people of God’, and substituting the legitimization of representative institutions with that of *godly authority*.<sup>68</sup> Key signifiers in Christodoulos’ discourse were ‘the nation’ and ‘the people’ which were defined as ‘the Orthodox Christians’.<sup>69</sup>

Another claimant of ‘the people’s voice’ came to fill a ‘gap’ in the Greek political system, that of a radical-right populist party. In Greece, because of the still ‘fresh’ traumatic experience of the seven year military Junta, the ideology, discourse and practices of the extreme and/or the radical Right were largely *delegitimized*; a *delegitimization* that was intensified even more by PASOK’s passionate *anti-rightist* discourse,<sup>70</sup> which became hegemonic right after the fall of the Junta and to an extent preserves a part of its validity since today. It’s not a coincidence that since recently<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Jacques Rancière, *Hatred for democracy*, p. 80; emphasis ours.

<sup>66</sup> 3,008,901 signatures to be precise.

<sup>67</sup> Yannis Stavrakakis, ‘Religion and Populism: Reflections on the ‘politicised’ discourse of the Greek Church’, *Discussion Paper* No. 7, The Hellenic Observatory, The European Institute, London School of Economics & Political Science, May 2002, p. 11.

<sup>68</sup> For more details on Christodoulos’ populist discourse see Yannis Stavrakakis, ‘Religion and Populism: Reflections on the ‘politicised’ discourse of the Greek Church’; Nikos Chrysoloras, ‘The Political Discourse of the Greek Orthodox Church’, *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora*, vol. 30 (1), 2004, pp. 97-119; Andreas Pantazopoulos, ‘Differentiating populism. From the ‘populism of the ancients’ to the ‘populism of the moderns’: the orthodox mobilization for the identity cards, June 2000’, *Nea Hestia*, issue 1778, May 2005, pp. 879-907 (in Greek).

<sup>69</sup> See Nikos Chrysoloras, ‘The Political Discourse of the Greek Orthodox Church’, p. 110.

<sup>70</sup> See Voulgaris, *Greece from Metapolitefsi to globalisation*, Polis, Athens 2008 (in Greek), p. 75-79.

<sup>71</sup> This changed after the change in leadership from Kostas Karamanlis to Antonis Samaras (autumn 2009), former Minister of Foreign Affairs in the ND government of 1990-1993, with clear rightist/nationalist ideas, who came to mark a ‘turn to the ideological key values and the identity of the Right’.

even the party of ND, the dominant party of the centre-Right, seemed to disavow its rightist identity and past, projecting itself as a party of the ('colorless', almost a-political) *center*, beyond right and left divisions, emphasizing more on its (neo)liberal face and a focus on 'progress'. Georgios Karatzaferis –a former deputy with the party of ND– became the founder and, since today, the leader of a new party named LAOS and articulated an almost ideal-type neo-populist right-wing discourse, following his European ancestors like Le Pen or Haider.<sup>72</sup> Karatzaferis' style and discourse can be vividly described by quoting a passage written about ten years ago to describe Le Pen:

[he] brings to the political debate ingredients that have long been banned from the scene: passion, conflict, wit, playfulness, exaggeration, a willingness to name the enemy (...) and a mixture of literary references with pure vulgarity, physicality and action. By comparison, politicians of the Centre Left and Centre Right look cautious and wooden, devoid of genuine feeling...<sup>73</sup>

LAOS claimed again<sup>74</sup> 'Greece for the Greeks'<sup>75</sup> and called the people for a 'pan-national rally' against alien and inland elites, against immigration, (recently) against the 'Islamic danger' and so on. LAOS presents itself as a party 'in rupture with all the parties which ruled our country in recent years and [that] seeks to overthrow the current two-party system that reflects the failure of politics and is leading the Greek society in a state of decadence'.<sup>76</sup> LAOS thus is articulating an *anti-establishment, anti-consensus discourse* demanding the power to be brought back to the 'common people'; and of course in its discourse the signifier 'the people' means also the Greek nation. The core signifiers around which LAOS' discourse is articulated were 'the people', 'the nation', 'Greece', 'orthodoxy'. Apart from the nationalistic danger that is easily discernible, we should recognize the existing 'gap' of post-politics, through which LAOS can gain a considerable ground of legitimization, since in a party system where the two major political parties are articulating similar discourses and have applied political programs with more elements in common than differences, 'the

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<sup>72</sup> It's not a coincidence here that Karatzaferis was the only Greek MP to declare his solidarity and sympathy to Haider for EU's reaction to his participation in the Austrian government; see 'LAOS... with relatives', newspaper *Ta Nea*, 12 September 2000 (in Greek). The EU reacted then 'by declaring (...) that bilateral relations with Austria would remain solely at the technical level as long as the FPÖ participated in government or did not change its nature'; Wolfgang C. Müller, 'Evil or the 'Engine of Democracy'? Populism and Party Competition in Austria', in Yves Mény and Yves Surel (eds.), *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*, Palgrave, Basingstoke 2002, p. 156.

<sup>73</sup> Sebastian Budgen, 'The French fiasco', *New Left Review*, issue 17, 2002, p. 45.

<sup>74</sup> The same demand was put forth by PASOK and Andreas Papandreou in the 1970s.

<sup>75</sup> Georgios Karatzaferis hardly ever misses the opportunity to make this statement. See Interview of the president of LAOS, Georgios Karatzaferis, at the airing 'Good morning' of the TV channel ALPHA, 31/12/2008 (in Greek); Interview of the president of LAOS, Georgios Karatzaferis, at the TV channel ALTER and the journalist G. Aftias, 28/09/2009 (in Greek); Statement of the president of LAOS, Georgios Karatzaferis, after the national elections of 2007 (in Greek) (<http://ekloges.dolnet.gr/2007/news/article.asp?lngInstID=5&lngEntityID=832409&lngDtrID=-1>; retrieved 9 March 2011). It should be noted that this specific banner is also used today by extremist or fascist right-wing organizations in Greece, such as the Xrysi Avgi (see <http://xryshaygh.wordpress.com/2009/04/22/%C2%AB%CE%B7-%CE%B5%CE%BB%CE%BB%CE%AC%CE%B4%CE%B1-%CF%83%CF%84%CE%BF%CF%85%CF%82-%CE%AD%CE%BB%CE%BB%CE%B7%CE%BD%CE%B5%CF%82%CE%BB/>; retrieved 9 March 2011).

<sup>76</sup> From the official site of LAOS (<http://www.laos.gr/laos.asp>; retrieved 9 March 2011); emphasis ours.

people' is left without a choice.<sup>77</sup> To put it in Chantal Mouffe's words (which apply perfectly in the Greek case, though they are not referring to it): 'the attraction exerted by right-wing populist discourse is the very consequence of the 'end of politics' Zeitgeist which prevails nowadays'.<sup>78</sup> Of course, this political 'gap'/vacuum isn't susceptible only to right-wing discourse and can be filled by discourses of all kinds of orientations (and not in all cases dangerous to democracy). The question here should be: does this discourse present a real alternative to the government's (or the political elite's) plans? LAOS' concurrence with the government in today's circumstances and its call to consensus indicates that its 'oppositionalism' was rather shallow and opportunistic.<sup>79</sup>

Such a different type of populist reaction to the post-political two-party establishment appeared in a radical left guise after 2003 when there was a leadership change in the party of Synaspismos (Coalition of Left, Movements and Ecology) which was a key component in the electoral alliance called SYRIZA, which consisted of 'several parties and organizations from the extraparliamentary left'.<sup>80</sup> Alekos Alavanos, a former member of the European Parliament,<sup>81</sup> was elected president of the party and consequently leader of SYRIZA. In his very first public interventions, as a candidate for Synaspismos' presidency, it was clear that he was going to adopt a more *passionate* and rather *populist* discourse than his ancestor Nikos Konstantopoulos, who was a more toned-down leader with a rather technocratic style. Alekos Alavanos, probably the most charismatic leader of this part of the Greek left originating from the so called euro-communist part of the 1968 break of the Greek communist party, called for a *popularization* of the party, a 'return to the people'.<sup>82</sup> Strategically crucial in this task was, according to Alavanos, the connection of the party and the coalition in which it operates, with 'the youth' conceived as a *new political subject*. So the 'return to the people' acquired the meaning of a 'turn to the country's youth', rendering the later synonymous to 'the people'. The 'Youth', in this specific discourse, became the *particular signifier* that 'without entirely abandoning

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<sup>77</sup> When having to choose 'between Coca-Cola and Pepsi-Cola', it's not really a matter of choice; see Interview with Chantal Mouffe: 'Pluralism is linked to the acceptance of conflict', <http://www.barcelonametropolis.cat/en/page.asp?id=21&ui=438>; retrieved 25 March 2011.

<sup>78</sup> Chantal Mouffe, 'The 'end of politics' and the challenge of right-wing populism', in Francisco Panizza, (ed.), *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*, p. 51.

<sup>79</sup> Karatzaferis' latest consensual gesture to the government speaks for itself: 'When the prime minister is on a national mission to save the country, some people have to shut up', he answered to the various voices of opposition; 'Support of Karatzaferis to Papandreou', newspaper *Proto Thema* (web only edition), 11 March 2011 (in Greek) (<http://www.protothema.gr/politics/article/?aid=110704>; retrieved 13 March 2011). For Karatzaferis' support to the government see also the English online edition of the newspaper *Kathimerini*, 'Karatzaferis sidles up to PASOK', 11 March 2011 ([http://www.ekathimerini.com/4dcgi/w\\_articles\\_wsite1\\_1\\_11/03/2011\\_382546](http://www.ekathimerini.com/4dcgi/w_articles_wsite1_1_11/03/2011_382546); retrieved 13 March 2011).

<sup>80</sup> Costas Eleftheriou, 'The uneasy 'symbiosis'. Factionalism and Radical Politics in Synaspismos', paper prepared for presentation at the *4th Hellenic Observatory PhD Symposium*.

<sup>81</sup> Elected first with the Communist Party of Greece (1981-1984) and then with Synaspismos (1989-2004).

<sup>82</sup> In his words a '*repatriation*' of the party to its 'historical and class coordinates, (...) with the articulation of a discourse that will combine again the passions, the grievances, the expectations of popular strata with the values of the Left'. See Alekos Alavanos, 'With Synaspismos for the revolutionary socialist humanitarian values. For an alternative pole of the Radical Left. For solidarity as a core value in our actions', article/political manifesto published before the party's 4<sup>th</sup> regular Congress of December 2004 on the official website of Synaspismos on 7 November 2004: <http://www.syn.gr/gr/keimeno.php?id=5682>; retrieved 3 March 2011.



its own particularity’, was expected to start also functioning as a signifier representing a certain chain of equivalences (in which we find workers, unemployed, welfare claimants, pensioners, petit-bourgeoisie, immigrants) as a *totality*.<sup>83</sup> The common ‘enemy’ of the people is the *political establishment of the two-party system*, which is part of a supra-national establishment, that of the forces of neoliberal globalization. The articulation of a populist discourse by the radical left was accompanied by an unprecedented rise in the percentages of the party in the periodical opinion polls. Probably what differentiated more SYRIZA’s populism to other populist discourses was that the main object of cathectic investment in its discourse wasn’t ‘the nation’. The core signifiers around which SYRIZA’s discourse was articulated were ‘the youth’, ‘movements’, ‘social resistance’, and ‘socialism’.

Three years later, Alavanos’ ‘turn to youth’ found its incarnation in the face of Alexis Tsipras, a 33 year old civil engineer and member of the municipal council of Athens who had ran for the municipality of Athens during the 2006 local elections gaining the rather impressive 10.51% of the Athenian vote. Tsipras (Alavanos’ personal choice) succeeded Alavanos as president of Synaspismos and leader of SYRIZA at the party’s 5<sup>th</sup> regular congress on February 2008, becoming the youngest ever president of a Greek parliamentary political party. This change in leadership gave an additional boost to the percentages of the party (which were already rising) in the opinion polls reaching the 17% of the estimated vote for SYRIZA if there were elections to be conducted.<sup>84</sup> SYRIZA’s discourse didn’t change significantly under the leadership of Alexis Tsipras and until the end of 2008 there seemed to be an harmonious relation between him and his predecessor. A turning point for SYRIZA’s ‘*youth-populism*’ was to be shown at the events of December 2008 and the violent riots that broke out in Athens and other major cities of Greece after the assassination of Alexandros Grigoropoulos, a fifteen year old teenager, by a police officer.<sup>85</sup> The December riots were, first of all a reaction of the youth, that according to various commentators reflected its disaffection with current ruling political forces and the ‘stagnant’ sociopolitical system that seemed to block any perspective for a ‘better future’ (or a future at all). Right after the events of December and the dramatic drop of SYRIZA’s performance on the opinion polls, the relations between Tsipras and Alavanos took a rather bad turn leading Alavanos out of Synaspismos. An internal conflict about the way the party (SYN) and the coalition (SYRIZA) handled their appeal to the rioters and the youth during the ‘days of December’ was to cast a shadow on the coalition for several months. Its initial identification with December’s uprising was regarded from a large part of the party as shallow and/or harmful. It’s not in our intentions though to investigate here which part in SYRIZA was right or wrong.

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<sup>83</sup> On that operation, considering populist discourse, see Ernesto Laclau, ‘Populism: What’s in a Name?’, p. 39.

<sup>84</sup> See the opinion poll by *Public Issue*, ‘Political Barometer’, June 2008, in which SYRIZA is estimated at the 17% of the ‘vote intention’.

<sup>85</sup> On the December riots see Spyros Economides & Vassilis Monastiriotes (eds), *The Return of Street Politics? Essays on the December Riots in Greece*, The Hellenic Observatory, LSE, London, May 2009; John Karamichas, ‘The December 2008 Riots in Greece’, *Social Movement Studies*, vol. 8, no. 3, August 2009, pp. 289-293; ‘Grèce, l’ impasse d’ un «mouvement», l’ implosion d’ une société’, interview of Michel Vakaloulis with Andreas Pantazopoulos, Fondation Gabriel Péri, <http://www.gabrielperi.fr/Grece-l-impasse-d-un-mouvement-l>; retrieved 20 March 2011.

## Enter the crisis: the limits of neoliberal consensus and the obscure return of populism through patriotism

As we have seen, the decline of PASOK's first/archetypal populism and its 'shift from the socialist-populist period' to a 'modernising' one<sup>86</sup> was followed by the rise of various anti-establishment (anti-tow-partyism, anti-consensus, or anti-political) populist reactions. In our paper we referred to three specific moments that mark distinct types of populist discourse and which of course aren't the only cases of populism in the period. However those cases are populisms *in opposition* and not in power. These reactions can be seen as the 'nemesis' of consensual post-politics, a *return of the repressed* in the guise of a populist rupture. Such a 'return' cannot be a priori regarded as bad or good, as democratic or anti-democratic, since its particular contents depend on the specific signifiers (*nodal points*)<sup>87</sup> around which it is articulated; and so it can have a right-wing orientation, a radical-left one, or even a religious one; not to mention of course the possibility of a 'median populism', or a 'post-political populism', such as the one articulated by the ND when in opposition especially during 2000-2004, or PASOK's current *postmodern national-populism* which can also be conceived as *postmodern patriotism*.<sup>88</sup>

So, today, populism, although condemned and denounced by all political parties seems to run through almost any political force of the political system and especially the two major political parties that in their desperate effort to hold on to their social/popular base which is to a great extent disappointed with the policies of the last fifteen years, turned again to 'the people' (with both of them articulating this turn with the elements of patriotism and nationalism).

Antonis Samaras, when being a candidate for the ND presidency claimed that ND was the party that identified 'the nation with the people, our homeland with its people'<sup>89</sup> and called for a return to its historical identity as a party of the (center)Right. Several months later, and after being elected as president of ND, Samaras' populism would show in an even clearer way its *nationalist denominator* when dealing with the issue of a piece of legislation that a government wanted to pass concerning the legalization of immigrants that lived and worked in Greece. Samaras stated then: 'The Greeks are *a people*, not a 'population'. And what transforms 'geographical space' into a unified country and the 'local population' into a people is *its identity* (...) we shouldn't be afraid to talk about 'greekness'.<sup>90</sup> So 'the people' re-emerges through its national identity which is characterized by a specific perception of 'greekness'.

And of course we should mention George's Papandreou populism whom at the pre-election period of 2009 called on the people for 'a new beginning, a course of a national uplift' towards a 'Greece of our dreams (...) based on values, on principles of

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<sup>86</sup> Christos Lyrintzis, 'The Changing Party System', p. 250.

<sup>87</sup> On the operation of 'nodal points' in a given discourse see Marianne Jørgensen & Louise J. Phillips, *Discourse analysis as theory and method*, Sage, London 2002, p. 26.

<sup>88</sup> This term belongs to Antonis Liakos; see Takis Kambylis, 'The last (;) resort', *Kathimerini*, 13 June 2010 (in Greek).

<sup>89</sup> Speech of Antonis Samaras at an open appearance at the city of Kalamata, 25 October 2009 (in Greek).

<sup>90</sup> Statement of Antonis Samaras, president of ND, about the draft of law of the Greek government concerning the legalization of immigrants, 11 January 2010 (in Greek); emphasis ours.

Justice. With respect for the citizen, respect for his rights'.<sup>91</sup> George Papandreou declared that his government would be one 'for the people', 'with the people' and 'for the very people to be sovereign',<sup>92</sup> promising raises in wages and condemning ND's austerity program. Several months later and when in office, George Papandreou launched the most cruel austerity program (or in the way PASOK calls it, an 'adjustment program') that Greece has ever seen in its democratic history since 1974, coming under a strict supervision of its new *lenders* and to an extent '*rulers*' (IMF, EU, ECB, or the so called '*troika*'). Now, and with the fear of mass social reactions and social unrest Papandreou's populist call had to acquire a more solid base; so the interpellation of 'the people' was supplemented by that of 'the nation', calling for a national-popular struggle against those 'speculators' who are attacking 'our country'. The signifier of 'national responsibility' becomes central in calling the people to unite against the 'alien enemy' and our 'inner bad selves'.

With populism running through the political system arises the question of significance of the term and the role of political theory and political analysis when investigating relevant issues. As we saw, populism as a *logic* isn't some kind of pathology of democratic politics, but instead it is located at the very heart of democratic politics (even in its post-political guise). If we consider it as an ever present possibility, as another aspect of politics or even as a 'shadow' of democracy,<sup>93</sup> a fruitful path for future analysis could be the investigation of the –today hegemonic– *anti-populist* discourse and its relation to the post-democratic course of western democracies and of course the repression of 'the people' itself, 'the specific subject of politics',<sup>94</sup> which in lack of a *truly 'oppositional'* discourse may deviate to extremist or right-wing channels of expression.

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<sup>91</sup> Speech by George A. Papandreou at an open demonstration for the celebration of the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary since PASOK's creation, Thiseion, 3 September, 2009 (in Greek).

<sup>92</sup> Speech by George A. Papandreou to the Representatives of Producer Groups in the 74th Thessaloniki International Trade Fair (T.I.F), 05 September 2009 (in Greek).

<sup>93</sup> Margaret Canovan, 'Trust the People! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy', p. 10.

<sup>94</sup> Ernesto Laclau, 'Can Immanence Explain Social Struggles?', p. 3.