Populisms in Dualized Welfare Regimes. The impact of Outsiders’ Social Movements on the Genesis and the Organization of Antineoliberal Populist Parties

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Introduction

The crises due to the failures of the neoliberal economic model, and the “orthodox”, austerity measures usually adopted in order to cope with them, have harshened the living condition of the most unprotected and poorest strata of the population of the countries involved, and increased socioeconomic inequality. The crises and the austerity measures – often implying huge cuts in public, social spending – have often led to social and political discontent, visible in social mobilizations taking very different forms. In the political-electoral sphere, some political projects, often labelled as “populist”, have born or have been able to increase dramatically their electoral supports, whereas other were not. In particular, the leftist side of the left-right political spectrum has been shaped in the early aftermath of the crises, producing major electoral realignments.

The goal of this long paper is to provide a theoretical framework in order to account for the very different political realignments within the national Lefts among a delimited set of countries, i.e. Latin American and Southern Europe dualized societies in the aftermath of the crisis of the neoliberal model. The initial theoretical inspiration of this project derives from the literature on welfare regimes dualization, which, generally speaking, argues for the conditional (i.e., depending on the characteristics of the national welfare regimes) effects of the labour-market status on the policy and partisan preferences, focusing on the divide between insiders (i.e., salaried workers with open-ended, full-time contracts) and outsiders (i.e., precarious and unemployed workers). Rueda (2005; 2007), looking at the process of interest aggregation, argued that, in dualized regimes, left-of-center parties and trade unions have historically represented the interests of the formers, in detriment of the latters.

In particular, according to this author, the corporatist defence of the social and labour rights by the left-of-center parties and the unions made even more difficult for the outsiders to enter into the “labor-market fortress”; at the same time, there has been poor or unsatisfactory progresses in order to correct the dualizing consequences of the welfare regimes and to implement universalist measures dealing with labour-market exclusion. In times of crisis, the access to the labour market has proved to be even more difficult, forcing increasingly broad constituencies into a situation of precariousness and/or unemployment. This scenario dramatically increased the risks of social exclusion, particularly in dualized welfare regimes. At the same time, the economic crises provoked the steady loss of credibility of the neoliberal ideology. Thus, the left-of-center parties and the unions had found themselves trapped between both “leftist” and “rightist” critiques: for one side, they had been accused of having contributed to implement “market-friendly” measures fostering precariousness. On the other hand, they had been criticized precisely for having over-protected “their” constituencies, thus preventing a more general labour market reform towards the “flexicurity” Nordic models and provoking the increase of the size of the outsider sectors, thus reinforcing their social exclusion (e.g., Beramendi et al., 2015).
The literature on dualization belongs to the enormous body of research on welfare regimes in advanced economies, having its roots in the well-known works by Esping-Andersen (1990; 1999) and his “three worlds of welfare regimes” typology, to which authoritatively Ferrera (1996) added a fourth category, the so-called “Mediterranean” regime, characterised by higher degrees of segmentation (according to the individual job status) in the social rights’ provision, by weak (or inexistent) universalist social transfer schemes and by weak state institutions, much more clientelism-prone than the other Continental European countries. Nonetheless, the stratifying effects of the welfare regimes have been widely analysed also for Latin America (e.g., Filgueira et al., 2013), sometimes with the aim of adapting the Esping-Andersen’s typology for the Latin American context (e.g., Barba, 2003; Gough et al., 2004; Barrientos, 2004). Recently, Rueda et al. (2015) have stressed the similarities, in terms of segmentation of the social provisions and the comparatively permanent higher employment protection existing in those welfare regimes built during the ISI (Industrialization through the Substitution of Importations) era, both in several Latin American countries and in the Southern European region. These authors also empirically show the positive relationship between permanent employment protection and the size of informal economy, as well as the strong resilience of the protective labor legislation even in the 1980-2000 period, when we would expect, in both regions, a stronger flexibilization of the labor markets, particularly in those economies facing the highest difficulties in adapting to the integrated financial and commercial markets. Consequently, these authors call for a cross-regional integration of the discussion of the political consequences of the dualizing regimes.

This precisely represents the main aim of this paper. I will use the “lens” of the insider-outsider divide in order to provide a novel interpretation of the rise of antineoliberal populist projects. I argue that this divide could have provoked consequences through two different levels, a micro and a macro one, which are interrelated but analytically very different. The first one is represented by the policy and partisan preferences of the insider and outsider groups at the individual level. This is the main focus of the literature on dualization (e.g., Hausermann and Schwander, 2010; Hausermann et al., 2015) and on social risks (e.g., Cusack et al., 2005; Rehm et al., 2012), which, starting from different theories and assumptions, aim at showing the impact of labour-market status on the individual preferences of the voters. The task, here, would be to assess if the discontent against the neoliberal model – with its attacks on labour rights – and its crisis (and the orthodox measures implemented in order to cope with it) amplified (or diminished) the differences between the preferences of the insider and outsider groups, both in terms of policy and (mainly) partisan preferences, conducing to new partisan alignments and favouring the emergence of new actors.

The second level of analysis represents the focus of this paper. It looks at the organizations involved in the interest aggregation process stemming from both the insider and outsider camps. The crises of the neoliberal model have triggered vast cycles of protests both in Latin America (during the Nineties and in the early 2000s) and in Southern Europe (since 2008). Along with some traditional actors, such as the trade unions, reacting against the public spending cuts and the further attacks on labour rights, we witnessed the emergence of new kinds of protests and protestors, with different goals, concerns, repertoires, organizational forms and membership profiles than the “mainstream” unions. These social mobilizations brought to the public debate several concerns that, albeit not necessarily contrasting with the unions’ goals, included different issues, sometimes more specific (in terms of their sectorial or geographical scope) and sometimes much more general (such as strong critiques against representative democracy and the current structures of political intermediation, including parties and unions). In some cases, these movements can be said to fully “belong” to the outsider camp, in terms of their demands and even of membership profiles. In other cases, they have tended to represent geographical, territorial constituencies, crosscutting the insider-outsider divide but focusing on issues that were clearly different from the job-related grievances advanced by the unions.
My aim, here, is to analyse how the existing and emerging leftist political parties have been able (or not) to adapt themselves to the social and political environments emerging from the anti-neoliberal mobilizations. I argue that, among other things, the sociological composition of their electorates, the kinds of linkages used in order to appeal to them, and their internal organization represented key factors in order to explain the successes and failures of the left-of-center political parties in the aftermath of the neoliberal crises.

I advance a causal argument that assumes the neoliberal crises represented a *critical juncture* (see, among others, Collier and Collier, 1991; Mahoney and Rueschemeyer, 2003) that shaped the leftist spectrum of the party systems analysed. I argue that a critical antecedent (Slater and Simmons, 2010) and a major causal factor offer the political opportunities for the (eventual) emerging and consolidation of Antineoliberal Populist Parties (APPs). I identify the critical antecedent in the (eventual) inability of the existing union-party hubs (Handlin and Collier, 2008) to represent a growing sector of the popular strata, and in particular the outsiders of the welfare regimes. The “major causal factor” shaping the political opportunity structure for the APPs is the characteristics of the main social mobilizations emerging against the neoliberal model.

In turn, the political projects that have capitalized the social and political discontent have been able to take advantage of these political opportunities through two winning strategies. First, they have positioned themselves as the representatives of the most affected social sectors through the proposals of universalist social platforms and of new forms of democratic participation, thus advancing several points of the agenda stemming from the social mobilizations. Second, they enjoyed (or created *ex novo*) an internal organization that was apt to successfully deal with the social mobilizations, thus attracting political cadres and/or “taking possession” of the main demands advanced by the latters. In sum, the antineoliberal “winning projects” adapted to the social and political environment generated by the crisis better than other political challengers did.

The article is divided into two main sections. In the first section, I will present the theoretical framework, which represents the main topic of the paper. I will discuss the different strains of literature that provided valuable arguments for my task of theory-building. I begin a discussion over the inadequacies of the political intermediaries typically associated with the Left (i.e., trade unions and left-of-centre political parties); then, I focus on a conceptualization of the different “patterns of social mobilization” emerged in the countries forming the scope of my middle-range theory. Later, I will provide a brief discussion over the “window of opportunity” for antineoliberal, populist political projects opened by the cycles of mobilization and by the eventual inability of the existing leftist organizations to lead, channel and take advantage from them. I argue that part of the broad literature on populism has identified several features of the populist phenomena that made them particularly likely to emerge as a viable alternative, given the social, economic and political conditions shaped by the neoliberal crisis in dualized societies. In particular, I stress how the call for the restoration of the popular (and national) sovereignty, the pretension of representing a “natural majority” of the society, the anti-hegemonic populist potential and the coexistence of both “centralizing” and “decentralizing” characteristics of the internal organizations of the populist phenomena made them particularly suitable for adapting to the socio-economic scenario emerged by the crisis.

In the second section I will offer a stylised – and necessarily synthetic – application of the framework to four national case-studies (Bolivia, Argentina, Italy and Spain), in which major realignments within the leftist side of the political spectrum in the aftermath of the neoliberal crisis occurred. In the conclusion, I will propose an even more synthetic discussion over the applicability of the middle-range theory in other Southern European and Latin American countries.
First Section. The Theoretical Framework.

The Political Opportunities generated by the Crisis

The Failures of the Existing Unions and Left-of-Center Parties in Dualized Societies. 

_Dualization_ is a concept stemming from the literature on welfare regimes. It refers to the stratifying effects of welfare regimes, and in particular to the broadening gap between sectors more and less protected by the existing welfare regimes. During the “Golden Age” of the Western European capitalism, we observed the expansion of the social rights provisions and long periods characterised by full employment, particularly in the Nordic and Continental “worlds of welfare states” (Esping-Andersen, 1990; 1999). Even in the much less developed Latin America, those countries following the ISI (Industrialization through the Substitution of the Importations) economic model develop a kind of “Bismarckian” welfare state (Filgueira et al., 2009), although the informal workers enjoyed much less improvements in the protection from social risks than the industrial and middle class sectors. Barrientos (2004) defined it as a “corporatist-informal” welfare state. The main working class organizations, i.e. the trade unions, experienced a huge increase in terms of membership and of political influences, often providing an “encapsulated” core-constituency⁠¹ (Gibson, 1997) to the labor-based parties (Levitsky, 2003) linked (programmatically and even organizationally) to the unions. One could argue that the Latin American labor-based parties, which represented the legacy, at the party level, of the populist regimes that incorporated the organized working class into the polity domain (Collier and Collier, 1991), were the functional substitutes of the European Social Democracies, in terms both of their core-constituencies and of their organizational linkages with the unions, albeit with a much less clearly defined ideology and a more heterogeneous sociological composition of their electorates (Dix, 1989).

The fall of the Berlin Wall and the triumph of the free market ideology, as well as the structural changes following the end of the Fordist era, put the European union-parties hubs (Handlin and Collier, 2008) in a very difficult position. In particular, the unions faced a much more atomized labor market, where collective action became increasingly more difficult to sustain and where the defence of the labor rights clashed with the necessity to cope with a deregulated international financial market. According to Przeworski and Sprague (1985) and Kitschelt (1996), the “winning strategy” for the European left-of-center parties was to “free” themselves from the union influence, to embrace economic liberalism and to differentiate themselves from the Right by emphasizing a second political dimension, the “materialist/postmaterialist” (Inglehart, 1977) or “authoritarian/libertarian” axis.

This would have meant the gradual “abandonment” of the “conservative” (in terms of values) blue-collar constituencies, destined to a quantitative reduction in the postindustrial era, and a “constituency switch” towards the middle, well-educated classes benefitted by the welfare provisions and oriented towards post-materialist issues. In fact, one could argue that this “constituency switch” entailed more a switch from a blue to a white-collar electorate than a “deunionization” of the left-of-center constituencies, typically employed in salaried, medium-to-high skilled jobs in medium and large enterprises and/or in the public sector, where collective action is easier. The trade unions shared with the left-of-center parties this growing white-collar constituency, but remained the only major actor defending the interests of a blue-collar sector constrained in a defensive position. Moreover,

¹ According to Gibson, the concept of core-constituency can be defined as “those sectors of society that are most important to [the party’s] political agenda and resources. The importance of the core-constituency relation for the path/trajectory of representation a party/movement can take, lies not necessarily in the number of votes they represent, but in their influence on the party's agenda and capacities for political action” (Gibson 1996: 7).
they faced huge difficulties in order to expand their membership among other sectors more difficult to organize.

In Latin America, Roberts (2014) notices that the old union-parties hubs found themselves in troubles when they had to implement neoliberal measures to deal with the strong macroeconomic disequilibria inherited by the “lost decade” of the Eighties. Archetypical examples of these “policy switches” (Stokes, 2001) – if compared with the traditional economic platform proposed – were represented by the presidential terms of Paz Estenssoro in Bolivia (1985-1989), Carlos Andrés Pérez in Venezuela (1989-1993) and Carlos Menem in Argentina (1989-1997), all of them leaders of political parties strongly linked with the local union peak confederation. Due to the high inequality existing in these countries, some kind of “programmatic” (such as the economic stabilization, the promise for a growth recovery or for an “incorporation through the market” of the poorest strata [Baker, 2009; Filgueira et al., 2013] or the eventual implementation of safety-net social policies), iden
tititarian or clientelistic linkages (Kitschelt, 2000) were available for these parties in order to keep their former core-constituencies, with mixed results. Nor a vast middle-class was available for these parties, in order to compensate the eventual electoral losses among the popular sectors. Everywhere, during the Nineties - the apex of the so-called Washington Consensus - the once powerful Latin American union movement weakened, both in terms of membership and of political influence.

The neoliberal model showed evident signs of exhaustion and of structural stress at the end of the Nineties in Latin America and since 2007 in the Western economies with the so-called “Great Recession”. I consider these crises as the critical juncture of my causal argument. The critical juncture finds the left-of-center parties and trade unions “trapped” in different positions, more or less promising in order to “gain dividends” from the crisis. I identify two main sets of factors explaining these different “starting positions”.

The first “set of factors” is the level of political discredit of left-of-center political parties and of the union organizations. Several causes can lead them to lose their “attractiveness”. The process of “cartelization” (Katz and Mair, 1995) favoured the transformation of leftist parties into “electoral-professional” parties (Panebianco, 1988) and the decline of their memberships. The decrease of union membership due to the process of deindustrialization and labor market deregulation has weakened the capacity of the unions to represent the working class in their entirety, particularly among the new “precariat” (Standing, 2009; 2011) occupied in the industrial and service sectors. Other well-known macro-phenomena had been at work, such as the processes of “de-ideologization”, the progressive disappearance of the old political “subcultures” and of the related intermediary organizations that once acted as powerful, party-based structures of political socialization (Rokkan, 1977; Lijphart, 1999).

The cartelization of the political parties have even increased the degree of autonomy of their élites, although it changed the locus of the power from the central offices to the party in the public offices. The common perception of the political parties as self-referential organizations, increasingly “isolated” from the social environment and scarcely open to the “civil society”, as well as the resilience of a poorly democratic pyramidal structure, have contributed to their declining legitimacy. In many cases, even the unions has experienced a kind of “cartelization”, as they sometimes accepted to give important concessions towards a more flexible labour market in change of the defence of their “organizational power” (Etchemendy, 2011), in terms of the disposal of public resources and of some influence on the polity domain, among other things.

All these processes affected the political legitimacy of the union-party hubs, as they helped to perceive them as entities “detached” from the society. Moreover, their political legitimacy was harmed also by their incapacity to deliver acceptable outputs to the society. I refer here to their poor capacity to deal with the crisis, or to their involvement in the government during harsh times or even before, when the neoliberal model was not fully displaying its “dark side”. Their eventual
participation in governments implementing austerity measures or judged as “culprits” of the bad
economic conjuncture negatively affected their evaluation by the citizens, even by those who formed
their social base. The centre-leftist parties were not able to differentiate their economic proposals
from the rightist ones, because of the ideological convergence and the strong economic constraints
they faced when in government. Said otherwise, these political parties could have not be able to “re-
attract” those strata most affected by the crisis when economic, “materialist” issues became
particularly salient, thus failing in taking advantage of the crisis in order to regain popularity among
those sectors.

Several unions also have represented the targets of several accusations, such as the eventual
“co-participation” in the implementation of the neoliberal model, a gradual loss of their autonomy
and a “benevolent stance” towards market friendly measure, particularly when carried on by “closer”
governments. To be fair, the political, economic and ideological context in which the union
organizations had to operate during the “neoliberal hegemony” was extremely difficult. They often
had to choose between a “combative” and a “conciliatory” strategy towards the governments and the
entrepreneurial representatives, and each strategy implied both positive and negative consequences.
To use the terminology by Hyman (2001), it was the classic choice between an understanding of the
unions as “economic”, “classist” or “social” actors.

According to the “economic” interpretation, the unions must pursue the interests of their
memberships, acting as a particularistic interest group. A “classist” union plays a more contentious
role, aiming at reaching the “class unity” among both salaried and unemployed workers, usually with
advanced political and potentially anti-capitalist goals. An understanding of the union as a “civil
society actor” implies that, apart from representing sectorial or classist interests, the organization
must take part of different kind of struggles and negotiations (in the cultural, social and political
realms) in order to contribute to the national “common good” through both pluralistic and corporatist
arrangements. Rightly, Hyman stressed the impossibility of approximating exclusively to one of these
ideal-types, as well as the tensions existing between the three different interpretations of what
unionism should be.

Those unions that chose the “combative” or “classist” strategy ran the risk of being excluded
from any form of “social partnerships” (when existing), condemned to irrelevance and potentially
unable to deliver “concrete”, if limited, results to their constituencies. Nonetheless, these unions could
position themselves in a better position towards the working-class and the civil society in the early
aftermath of the crisis than the “dialoguist” ones, as the “social dialogue” “had come to mean sharing
responsibility for the dismantling of many of the previous gains – acting as ‘mediators of
transnational economic pressures’” (Hyman, 2001: 52). Moreover, the unions mostly involved in
forms of corporatist bargaining ran the risks of being identified as “collaborators” of those parties
that embraced the neoliberal project, of focusing on sectorial gains and of abdicating to a more
encompassing defence of those workers excluded from the labour market.

In fact, the second relevant factor in order to understand the difficulties faced by left-of-center
parties and trade unions in dualized societies is the eventual inability to keep or reinforce their
linkages towards the outsider sectors. I define as outsiders the “unemployed, involuntary part-time
and/or fixed-term employed workers, as well as the vast (particularly in Latin America) masses of
workers occupied in the informal sectors, often in condition of self-employment”. Even the less well-
to-do strata of the European “petty bourgeoisie” can be included in the category. The central point,
here, is to identify a broad category including those sectors that are excluded from the (comparatively
generous) provisions of the segmented welfare regimes of Latin America and Southern Europe based
on the condition of full-time salaried workers in order to accede to the benefits.

According to Rueda (2005; 2007), the insider sectors (i.e. the full-time salaried workers with
open-ended contracts) would represent the core-constituencies of the left-of-center and labor-based
parties in dualized societies. With the increase of unemployment and precarious employment rates, the size of these core-constituencies has fallen, particularly among Southern European younger strata. In Latin America, the rise of job informality during the neoliberal period has also contributed to reduce the already limited size of the formal and salaried sectors. The parties committed to neoliberalism typically argue that the flexibilization of the labor market represents the solution in order to deal with the rise of unemployment. The left-of-center parties and the “aligned” unions sometimes have also favoured, or accepted, some kind of deregulation, although they usually protected the labor rights of the insiders – particularly in the Southern European countries and in Venezuela - thus “charging” the burden of the adaptation to neoliberalism to those temporarily outside (or situated at the “fringe” of) the labor market. Nor the insiders’ protection has been truly efficacious, as the economic dismissals following the crisis and the conditions imposed by the international financial and political institutions put them in an increasingly risky position.

In general, the European left-of-center parties have kept a “laborist” ideology, which defends the enjoyment of full social rights to the status of worker instead of the status of citizen. Social democratic parties aimed at promoting full employment – for example through active labour market policies (ALMPs) – instead of making social rights more universal, and at the same time they focused on the defence of insiders’ labor rights. In times of crisis, this strategy is likely to display all its weaknesses. Even radical leftist parties often defended a classist, “workerist” ideology, which seems increasingly poorly suited for dealing with the postindustrial society and its heterogeneous popular sectors. In Latin America, the adhesion of some labor-based or left-of-center parties (such as the Bolivian MNR and MIR and the Argentine PJ) to neoliberalism has been drastic, whereas in other cases they kept a more leftist profile (as in Brazil and Uruguay, taking advantage of their prolonged oppositional status).

If programmatic linkages between the left-of-center/labor-based parties and the outsiders were increasingly weakening, it is important to take into account the decline – or resilience - of other possible linkages, such as the identitarian and the clientelistic ones (Kitschelt, 2000). In fact, the retrenchement of the state during the neoliberal era – as well as the economic constraints emerged during the crisis and because of the implementation of austerity measures – was likely to diminish the “room of manoeuvre” that parties can enjoy in order to provide targeted and particularistic answers to the demands of the outsiders. Several Latin American and Southern European political parties have a long clientelistic tradition, through very different means, such as party-patronage, “flexible” use of social programs, and even delivering of material goods during electoral campaigns. In some cases, these clientelistic exchanges have strongly contributed to the consolidation of partisan identities and to strengthen the electoral appeals of left-of-center or labor-based parties among the popular strata in its entirety, thus across the insider-outsider divide, making of these parties a kind of “party of the poors”. In times of crisis, clientelist linkages are for obvious reason put in peril, and making use of them can even become counterproductive for political parties, in terms of “reputation”: as it has been often noticed by the literature (e.g., Morgan, 2011; Erlingsson et al., 2016), clientelism and corruption become salient issues particularly when the economic conjuncture is negative. At the same time, party identification, both for the effects of the macro-phenomena mentioned above and for the poor delivering of these parties during the declining neoliberal phase, is likely to weaken and to diminish its capacity of “voters’ retention”. Nonetheless, particularly among old-aged voters, this could act as an effective “buffer” in order to keep a strong electoral base.

My theoretical framework, therefore, strongly relies on the insider-outsider divide, as I argue that the outsider sectors became electorally crucial because their size enormously grew during the neoliberal era and as a consequence of the crisis. Moreover, as the neoliberal hegemony went delegitimising, it has become more difficult to argue, for the parties having embraced neoliberalism, that the outsider sectors would have found their protection from social risks through the private market, or a better access to the “labor market fortress” through its deregulation. At the same time, it
is evident that both categories of outsiders and insiders are internally heterogeneous, and many social sectors belonging to the insider camp have been exposed to growing social risks, thus possibly conducing to a convergence in term of political preferences.

In order to understand how the existing leftist parties were positioned when the crisis occurs, it is necessary to start with a fine-grained analysis of their main constituencies. By this way, it is possible to understand the “electoral opportunities”, both positive and negative, faced by these parties, as well as the constituencies more likely to “switch” and/or to be attracted by new political projects.

One could hypothesize that the left-of-center parties are generally more suited to retain the salaried middle or lower class constituencies enjoying higher protection during the crisis. These are, moreover, the most unionized constituencies: for them, union organization is easier, and these constituencies have much more interest in defending their status. Middle-class insiders less worried by the loss of their jobs, and even retired people, if the austerity measures do not highly affect their incomes, can represent a stronghold of the left-of-center parties. They form a “shared” constituency, by both left-of-center parties and unions, and partisan identification is likely to be stronger, particularly among the old-aged people.

Nonetheless, focusing on the protection of these sectors can represent a strong risk for parties and unions, as, in a context of scarce resources, other, most affected sectors are likely to search for other political projects more suitable for the representation of their interests. Those left-of-center parties involved in the implementation of austerity measures and/or having formed part of the “neoliberal consensus”, and “encapsulated” in their “protected” core-constituencies, are likely to suffer the deepest losses, particularly in a context of strong rise of the unemployment rates, and the unions that collaborated with them in the pre-crisis scenario are likely to lose much of their credibility as contentious actors. Their capacity of retention of broader sectors, as well as the electoral size of their core-constituencies, is crucial for explaining their electoral fortunes.

Nor leftist parties having played an oppositional role during the neoliberal phase are necessarily better positioned. This is particularly true when they still defend “classist” ideologies, poorly suited to attract the outsiders. The outsider category is extremely heterogeneous, in terms of socioeconomic position and educational attainment. In Southern Europe, it comprises many young people, often high-skilled and with an education above than average, as well as precarious or unemployed low-skilled workers and even many self-employed workers, a sort of “poor petty bourgeoisie”. In Latin America, outsider people are mainly unemployed or employed workers in the informal sector, as well as self-employed urban workers. Apart from their common precarious condition, these sectors are likely to be particularly hit by the tax increases and the public spending cuts (in areas such as education or health), thus developing stronger anti-tax stances, as they take reduced benefits from their dualized welfare regimes. They look for a rapid improvement of their social protection and of their net incomes, and this second goal is not necessarily targeted by the classic leftist proposals: universal social protection and a stimulus for the economic recovery represent the best platform for the entire outsider category (Oxhorn, 1998).

In times of scarce resources, universalist welfare measures could be seen as alternative (and not complementary) to the protections reserved for the insiders. In turn, expansionary economic proposals could potentially harm the interests of the middle-class, particularly when these proposals could imply an erosion of their incomes or their patrimony, through inflation or currency devaluation. In sum, the insider-outsider divide, during harsh times, when the mobility across the divide is almost only downward, is likely to be a divide between those having something to lose and those trapped in the “loss domain”. This, in turn, could explain the conservative (or overtly xenophobic) stances assumed by many insiders in Western Europe against immigrants and towards forms of welfare chauvinism (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013), whereas a progressive political project can exploit the possibility of “building a bridge” between the outsiders and those insiders increasingly
discontents against the “union-party hubs” because of the strong losses suffered during the crisis and of their dissatisfaction for the management of the crisis.

It is important to notice that the “tightness” between unionist and partisan organizations highly differ across countries. The degree of “union representativeness”, as well as the degree of the “entrenchment” between the unionist and partisan organizations, strongly vary. Union density is a good proxy for describing the “representativeness” reached by the union movement, and this indicator varies, due to historical reasons. Similarly, the “entrenchment” between unions and leftist parties (in terms of reciprocal support in the polity domain, and even of “double militancy” at all the hierarchical levels, even contemplating the provision of “reserved seats” for one organization with the national board – or the electoral lists - of the other one) can assume different degrees of strength. We can observe a tight relationship and even an organizational control of one actor over the other: the union can be a “transmission belt” of the party, or, at the other side, we can observe a pure labor-based party. In the middle, we can notice a “reciprocal influence”. Nonetheless, the party and the union can act independently, developing a more or less “friendly” relationship.

Moreover, the union movement can either be fragmented along ideological lines, or unified around a single peak confederation – and, eventually, more or less divided internally. As Murillo (2001) argued, these different configurations could have important effects in shaping the behaviour of the unions during a contentious phase, for example pushing some union confederations or factions to assume a more radical stance in order to compete for the control of the movement.

The different relational configurations between unions and parties, as I summarized in Table 1, play a central role in my argument. A labor-based party that constantly opposed the neoliberal model is well-positioned to result a winner in the post-crisis scenario, although it still needs to broaden its rootedness among the outsiders: this is particularly important when it holds links exclusively towards a minoritarian and radicalized fraction of the organized working-class. A labor-based party compromised with the “old model” is likely to suffer high losses: its survival depends on the ability of defending the insiders, as well as of the electoral size of the insider sectors and of the resilience of the identitarian linkages. If the entrenchment between the party and the unions is weaker, the party faces a more fluid scenario. In particular, if the party kept an “antagonist” stance during the neoliberal era, its position is promising, although it needs to build its own credibility as an actor involved in “materialist” issues.

One can hypothesize that the broader the union representativeness, the higher is the union movement’s capacity of playing an important role as a credible, contentious actor. The unions are organizations unexposed to the electoral volatility, and enjoy more possibilities to “survive”, although their eventual links with “compromised” political actors can affect their legitimacy as credible “contentious actors”. Nonetheless, they still need to weaken their links with “compromised” political parties in order to improve their image among the protesters, and thus to partially renounce to the advantages related with the former position, such as a direct and full inclusion in the policy-making process.
Table 1. Party-Union Alignments when Neoliberal Crisis occurs.

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<th>EXISTING LEFT-OF-CENTER PARTIES</th>
<th>PARTY &quot;COMPROMISED&quot; WITH NEOLIBERALISM</th>
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<td>NO</td>
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<td><strong>MAINSTREAM AND DIALOGUIST</strong></td>
<td>Leftist Party allied with Mainstream Union. <strong>OPPORTUNITIES:</strong> it needs to renew its message in order to be not perceived as an &quot;insider party&quot;. Its capacity of networking during popular mobilizations is also crucial.</td>
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<td><strong>UNION TYPE</strong></td>
<td>MEDIUM TO HIGH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MAINSTREAM AND OPPOSITIONAL</strong></td>
<td>Oppositional Union-Party Hub. <strong>OPPORTUNITIES:</strong> well positioned for an electoral strengthening and for acting as a major player in the popular protests. Through organizational and ideological resource it could expand towards outsider sectors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MINORITARIAN AND OPPOSITIONAL</strong></td>
<td>Leftist party with solid links with a radicalized fraction of the labor movement. <strong>OPPORTUNITIES:</strong> its electoral improvement depends on its ability to expand itself towards outsider sectors and to establish networks with the popular protests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TIGHTNESS OF THE UNION-PARTY RELATIONSHIP</strong></td>
<td>WEAK</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Social Mobilizations Against Neoliberal Model and Austerity. The popular reaction against austerity measures and the neoliberal model, identified as the major responsible of the crisis and of its “orthodox” management, has taken very different forms in the countries forming the “geographical scope” of the middle-range theory I propose here. I argue that the specific forms assumed by these mobilizations, along with the factors mentioned above, have decisively shaped the socio-political environment over which the existing parties needed to adapt, as well as the “political opportunity structure” for new parties to emerge, in particular on the leftist side of the political spectrum.

According to the classic definition by Tilly (1984: 306), social movements are “sustained series of interactions between power holders and persons successfully claiming to speak on behalf of a constituency lacking formal representation, in the course of which those persons make publicly visible demands for changes in the distribution or exercise of power, and back those demands with public demonstrations of support”. Moreover, Snow et al. (2004: 6) identified five central attributes: “collective or joint action; change-oriented goals or claims; some extra- or non-institutional collective action; some degree of organization; and some degree of temporal continuity”.

I differentiate here between “social movements” and “social mobilizations”. I define “social mobilization” as a campaign aiming at raising awareness and motivating people to demand change or to achieve a particular goal, typically by bringing together members of institutions, civic organizations, community networks and others in a coordinated way. It is a concept similar to the “protest cycle” one (Tarrow, 1998), although “social mobilization” tends to be closer to the point of view and to the agential activity of the protesters. A social mobilization can be animated by specific social movements, but it can also be originated by more or less “spontaneous” protests that became “critical protest events”. New social movements can flourish from the milieu generated by a social mobilization, in order to organize and sustain over time the mobilization. All the countries analysed here experienced different forms of social mobilization against the neoliberal regimes and their supposed consequences in terms of social exclusion, social rights and the quality of the democratic process, thus advancing both political and socioeconomic demands. Some of them even predated the full display of the economic effects of the crisis; other mobilizations were led by already existing social and political movements and organizations.

My argument relies on a simple statement: different kinds of mobilization shape the “political environment” in different ways. The task of the (old and new) antineoliberal political parties is to adapt to these new environments. It matters a lot if a country hosts a “scattered anti-austerity movement” (Mosca, 2015; Zamponi and Fernández, 2017), such as in Italy or in Venezuela (Hellinger, 1998), or a unifying mobilization such as the ones animated by the Spanish Indignados and the following Mareas. It matters a lot if those social movements able to establish strong roots in the territory and to achieve a considerable organizational strength, such as in Bolivia and – partially – in Argentina, are moreover capable to organize at the national level, as happened in the former but not in the latter case. The different socioeconomic profiles of the activists are also relevant, ranging from the poorer strata in Latin America to the “youth without future” in Spain or the “usual suspects” (i.e., the “already activated citizens”, typically holding leftist, post-materialist values) involved in non-institutionalized protests in Italy (Quaranta, 2013). It matters a lot if the movements are “territorially-based” (Handlin and Collier, 2008), struggling for local issues and/or providing “self-help networks” for the neighbours, without any necessary coordination with other groups focused on different issues, or if they are involved in contentious actions defending some common goods (such as the public education or health), or if they explicitly target the “core” of the neoliberal model, thus advancing a broad agenda including political, social and economic demands, such as the populist social movements (e.g., the Spanish and Greek Indignados) described by Aslanidis (2015).

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2 To my knowledge, the only comparative discussion over the “environmental linkages” established by the Radical Leftist parties in Southern Europe has been provided by Tsakatika and Lisi (2013).
An important body of literature on social movements has stressed the importance of the “political opportunity structure” (POS) in order to explain their rising, arguing that the existence of a favourable public opinion climate, or of potential “institutional allies”, increases the perceived probability of victory for social movements struggling for specific issues, thus favouring their emergence (Kriesi et al., 1995). In contrast, Della Porta (2015) has stressed the ability of social movements to shape the POS by themselves, contributing to open important “spaces” in the party system and to influence the public opinion. For instance, Aslanidis, in his recent contribution (2015) on populist social movements, defines them as “non-institutional collective mobilization which attributes currently suffered grievances to a society ultimately separated in two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, the overwhelming majority of ‘pure People’ versus the ‘corrupt elite’, and claims to speak on behalf of the former in demanding the restoration of political authority into their hands, as rightful sovereigns”. It is important to notice that the very absence of “institutional allies” is an important factor favouring not only the emergence of these movements, but also their eventual decision to build their own “political instrument” in order to take the power, or the creation of new parties aiming at advancing their demands at the institutional level.

The forms assumed by the social protests, of course, highly varied, both across and within the countries analysed. One important source of variation could be represented by the different “crises” against which the protesters mobilized. All of these crises are related, directly or indirectly, with the “overarching crisis” of the neoliberal hegemony, further contributing to it. Zamponi and Bosi (2016: 421), for example, identify four different “crises” in the Southern European context: “the global financial crisis, the public debt and austerity crisis, the industrial productive crisis, and the political legitimacy crisis”. Della Porta (2015) also underscores the entrenched but distinct sources of grievances fuelling contentious activities throughout the world in the last years. In the Latin American context of the end of the Nineties, the supranational dimension of the crisis was identified with the hegemony of the Washington Consensus, fuelling an anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist narrative.

In Latin American and in Western European progressive protests, we observed the gradual identification of the “neoliberalism” with the deepest cause of the failures of the political regime at the social, economic and political levels: this identification was sometimes advanced by the own protesters, whereas in other case it was provided by social and political leaders looking for a powerful and effective frame in order to link the different struggles.

Nonetheless, the concrete responses from the emerging contentious actors strongly diverged. We witnessed the emergence of anti-austerity movements against the cuts on public spending, as the Onda Anomala movement in Italy, or the different Mareas in Spain. These kinds of protests were not absent in Latin America. Nonetheless, it is noticeable that the very first strong social responses to the austerity were represented, in Argentina, by local protests struggling against the closing of public industrial plants and the reduction of public offices; in Venezuela, by generalized riots against the increases in public tariffs implemented by the government, originating a long and fragmented cycle of contention; in Bolivia, by a popular revolt in Cochabamba against the privatization of the local water public company and by the coca-growers’ resistances against the eradication’s policies imposed by the US government and violently implemented by the Bolivian forces.

The categorization of the social mobilizations that I propose is based on the distinction between universalist, sectorial and local demands advanced. Universalist issues, such as the level of social spending, or the struggles against corruption, or for gender equality, or for a more participative democracy, or calling for a general rejection of the current political class, address a broad public and typically target national and supranational institutions in order to influence the law-making process and/or to claim for a vast political change. I define them as universalist because they refer to broad constituencies, even the totality of the population, as they often refer to the defence of public goods (such as socioeconomic equality, public education and health, and democracy). The populist social movements that I mentioned above represent clear instances of universalist mobilizations focusing on
a harsh critique of the political class, whereas the Spanish Mareas – or the Argentine Frente Nacional contra la Pobreza [2001] – concentrated on the defence of the social rights. In turn, the mobilizations around local issues aim at provoking concrete and immediate changes or “answers” to some grievances emerging in a specific territory. These mobilizations still point their fingers on the neoliberal socioeconomic model, and often their targets are public (even national and supranational) institutions, but the activists pretend to speak in behalf of a geographically concentrated constituency. These mobilizations can flourish around very different issues such as contested public infrastructures, privatization of local public resources, inadequate responses to local unemployment or local dismissals, among other things. Finally, the sectorial demands are advanced by activists claiming to defend a constituency delimited on other bases than the geographic one. These conflicts could refer both to the production (as a conflict about wage increases of a specific job sector) or to the consumption sphere, such as a campaign against some tariff or rents’ increases. Both local and sectorial demands are usually more disaggregated, thus potentially more suitable for ad hoc solutions. I argue that those mobilizations advancing local and sectorial demands are even more interested than the universalist ones in looking for institutional allies to give an immediate solution for their concerns, although this does not imply that they tend to assume a less confrontational stance towards the public authorities.

I recognize that the border between universalist, sectorial and local demands and mobilizations is blurred. For instance, a strong social movement such as the Spanish PAHs (Plataformas de Afectados por las Hipotecas, Platform of Victims of Banks’ Evictions) is involved both in an universalist struggle for effective changes in the national legislation over the evictions and the housing rights and in the creation of local solidarity’s ties among the victims in order to prevent new evictions by the public authority. At the same time, albeit its universalist frame, the struggle could be interpreted as the defence of a specific constituency, against the interests of the homeowners. On the other hand, the Bolivian peasant social movements hold strong territorial control and legitimacy in order to settle local disputes among the affiliates, claiming also for the defence of sectorial interests in terms of – for instance – public allocation of resources. At the same time, they also showed a great capacity of consolidating alliances with other social movements involved in very different struggles, advancing their demands and fighting for a new Constitution and a new democratic regime, thus playing a leading role in a universalist kind of mobilization. The distinction, albeit more analytical than empirical, is useful to understand the different strategies available by the political parties in order to respond to the movements’ demands, but also the different motivations held by the activists in order to join the movements.

To be successful, a social mobilization must be able to sustain itself over time and to expand the number of its activists. The movements involved in it must be able to build alliances with other actors, both institutional and non-institutional, in order to improve the resources available for the struggle. Among other factors, I argue that the organization and the ideologization of the movements are critical. In particular, the organization of the movements sustaining the protests is directly linked with their sustainability over time, and that both horizontality and hierarchization represent a source of strength and of weakness for the movements. Some kind of hierarchization allows for a higher sustainability of the contentious activities over time, particularly in the case of the movements concerned with universalist issues, although it could limit the ability of consolidating alliances with other actors and the initial enthusiasm that animated the protests. When the social movements animating the protests achieve strong identification and ideological elaboration, this could conduces to “sectarianism”, to a lesser capacity or willingness to build “broader fronts” with other movements and organizations and to dilute the past identities with the new, inclusive collective identities potentially emerging from the mobilizations, thus limiting their concrete impact on the political domain. The most promising movements, in terms of direct influence of their mobilizations on the public sphere, are those combining a structured organization (conducing to a greater sustainability of
the protests) *with* the ability to develop some kind of “networking” with available (not necessarily institutional) allies, by adopting a pragmatic stance and inclusive frames.

The kind of organization assumed by the movements, and the issues they focus on, are also likely to affect the profile and the extension of their membership. For example, a horizontal or assembly-based decision-making process, after a brief “momentum” of collective effervescence, is likely to retain mainly “biographically available” segments (Giugni and Grasso, 2016), such as younger people, or more ideologically motivated activists, particularly when the issues of the movements are more universalist and less related with local (and “urgent”) demands. Said otherwise, these kinds of movements are more easily understood through the “resource-mobilization theory” (McCarthy and Zald, 1973; 1977; Tilly, 1978), as only (relatively) “resources-rich” activists are likely to help sustaining the mobilization over time. In turn, local issues are more likely to attract heterogeneous (albeit geographically concentrated) constituencies, and a process of organization and coordination helps lowering the costs of the sustainment of the mobilizations over time, thus contributing to the expansion of the membership (unless they fell in the “sectarian trap” mentioned in the previous paragraph). Local and sectorial issues concerned with the sphere of consumption are likely to be easier to sustain, as they are closely linked with the solution of the problem that triggered the protests: in this sense, the “grievance” or “deprivation theory” (e.g., Gamson, 1968; Wilkes, 2004; Kern et al., 2014) could show a stronger explanatory capacity than normally assumed.

It is important to recall that these “new new” social movements, as they have been sometimes described by European scholars (in order to differentiate them from the “new [postmaterialistic] social movements” of the previous decades) have not taken the streets alone. The so-called “old left”, i.e. the union movement, has been an important participant almost everywhere in the protests (Ancelovici, 2014). Nonetheless, the relationship between social movements and trade unions has been often difficult and suspicious. The latter have been often depicted as discredited or bureaucratised actors by the formers, who criticised not only the “conciliatory” stances sometimes assumed by the unions during the neoliberal era, but also their strong links with the left-of-center parties considered as a part of the old regimes. As central actors in the mechanisms of interest aggregation and representation, the unions have generally failed to advance the demands of those outsider sectors that many social movements pretended to represent.

In contrast, the unions have proved to be important institutional allies in order to sustain several protests over time, and still could claim to represent the majority of an impoverished and insecure working-class. Their organizational resources often allowed the unions for sustaining a less intermittent contentious action than the social movements, sometimes accused of lacking “political conscience”. The crisis gave to the union movement the possibility of “re-gaining” a prominent role in the public sphere, and, in some cases, the unions did take a leading position in the protests.

Once more, the distinction between universalist, local and sectorial mobilizations becomes crucial. If it could be argued that the union were better positioned in playing a central (and even leading) role in the mobilizations over sectorial issues, particularly when they referred to the sphere of the production – which, in fact, represents their core-business – their relevance in both local and universalist struggles strongly varied. Here, the degree of involvement of the mainstream unions in the past neoliberal phase is critical in order to understand the “attitudes” of the movements towards them. For sure, one should expect that a union that took part of the “social dialogues” during the past decades would not be a credible actor during a mobilization led by dismissed workers. One should expect that a union characterised by a strong entrenched with a centre-left liberal party will be targeted by a cycle of contention aiming at denouncing the crisis of legitimacy suffered by the political system and its self-referential attributes. The risk ran by the unions is to see their role even more clearly confined to the defence of the labour rights of their core-constituencies and to further weaken their legitimacy as (combative) “social actors”. In contrast, the unions could take advantage of the “opportunities” offered by the crisis, namely, the possibility of “renewing” themselves and of taking
a clearer and more oppositional stance towards the neoliberal and austerity measures. Crucially, the increases of economic dismissals of workers due to the negative conjuncture and to the relaxation of the labour legislations could give to the unions the possibility of “building a bridge” between the outsider and the insider workers, due – among other things – to the diminishing labour security of the latters.

To summarize, I argue that those unions less compromised with the previous “neoliberal regime” have been able to assume a central position in the most contentious phases, even in universalist mobilizations, as they were both credible and resource-rich actors in the struggle against neoliberalism. In contrast, when labor unions were particularly weak, compromised with the “neoliberal caste” and/or perceived as “purely insiderist” organizations, they represented, at best, a “suspicious ally” and, in some cases, even an enemy for the social movements emerged.

I identify two other macro-types of “patterns of mobilization” observable, apart from the “union-led” one (see Table 2). I refer to them as “unified” and “fragmented protests”. These mobilizations do have the social movements as their primary actors, but the characteristics of these social movements highly differ, opening the way to very different scenarios.

**Table 2. Patterns of Antineoliberal Popular Protests.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PATTERN OF THE ANTINEOLIBERAL POPULAR PROTESTS</th>
<th>UNION-LED</th>
<th>UNIFIED</th>
<th>FRAGMENTED</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>CHARACTERISTICS AND CONSEQUENCES ON THE SOCIO-POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT</td>
<td>The unions position themselves as the most important actors during the protests. It occurs when the prolonged oppositional status of the unions during the neoliberal era did not affect their organizational strength, instead providing them with a strong legitimacy as a contentious actor. In this pattern, the unions show not only their centrality in the campaigns for sectorial demands, but they are also able to channel the demands at the local level and - particularly - the universalist demands, thanks to their credibility as sociopolitical, antineoliberal actors.</td>
<td>It occurs when the social movements, albeit involved in different struggles, are able to build a close-knit alliance network advancing broad social, political and economic changes and supporting each others. This pattern achieve the strongest influence on the public sphere. A strong alliance network extremely rooted at the local level can opt for entering into the electoral arena by itself, particularly when it is not available any credible institutional ally. Alternatively, an existing party can exploit the socio-political environment generated by the mobilizations. In the absence of such an ally, or when the movements are not so rooted for starting an autonomous electoral project, or when they are simply unwilling to do so, they still leave open a political space for such a political project aiming at institutionalize their experience.</td>
<td>It occurs when the social movements remain highly fragmented along ideological or sectorial lines, and/or when their demands mainly concern local-territorial issues, in both cases without generating broader and durable alliances. More ideological claims are likely to be “unheard”, although they do contribute to shape the public discourse, while sectorial and territorial issues, which represent more concrete and urgent demands, look for institutional allies in order to be satisfied. In this pattern, both “unifying” and “decentralized” (as well as pragmatic) political projects are well-suited to adapt to the socio-political environment by articulating these demands.</td>
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</table>

Source: Author’s Elaboration.

The “unified pattern” is a broad cycle of protest where the different social movements are able to build a close-knit alliance network advancing broad economic, social and political changes. These social movements can have very different internal organizations and claims, both at the local or national (and even supranational) level, but are able to support each other, sharing a common frame that unifies their struggles against a (multi-faceted) enemy and advancing potentially converging agendas. This “common frame” can represent both the beginning and the result of the cycle of protest,
as the participation to the same protest events can contribute to the consolidation of the alliances, to a shared analysis of the political and social problems they face and to the creation of new collective identities.

In contrast, in the “fragmented pattern”, the social movements do not experience this process of convergence. They either mainly focus on local issues or on territorial claims for improving their immediate living conditions, without coordinating their demands at a broader level (and in some cases even confronting each other in order to gain a “preferential access” to some public, scarce resource), or find themselves divided along ideological lines. The movements lack the capacity or willingness to create stable alliances among themselves, although the less ideologized ones are more prone to look for some institutional allies in order to obtain some gains. This does not necessarily imply a “less confrontational stance” towards public institutions and political actors.

The Winning Strategies to Capitalize the Crisis

My argument heavily relies on the concept of populism, which I consider the most promising “alternative antineoliberal political project” in order to be electorally successful in dualized countries experiencing the harsh effects of a neoliberal crisis. Populism is “alternative” in the sense that the labor-based parties are not necessarily the “political victims” of the crisis. For sure, as I recalled above, everywhere in the countries forming the scope of this article, the “mainstream” unions participated into the popular protests against the austerity measures, as these directly affected the conditions of the working class and the job security of the workers. Nonetheless, I argue that only when we observed the “union-led pattern of social mobilizations”, the traditional Leftist structures of intermediation had been able to survive and even consolidate its support. In this sense, my argument is similarly to the Roberts’ one (2014): when the Left remained confined into an oppositional role during the implementation of neoliberalism and its crisis, the leftist spectrum of the party system did not face major changes.

Populism represents an important strategy in order to constitute a strong response to neoliberalism and to take advantage of the crisis of the Socialist and Social Democratic Lefts. I argue that four features of the populist phenomena, widely recognized in the literature, are crucial to understand the potential strength of an “antineoliberal populist political project”. These features are:

1. Its capacity of aggregating, around “empty signifiers” (Laclau, 2005), several, diverging and unsatisfied “popular demands”;
2. The intrinsic populist aspiration to “reach the power” (Weyland, 2001);
3. The “populist interpretation” of concepts such as representation, accountability and popular sovereignty;
4. Populism as a form of mobilising and participative process (Jansen, 2011; Collins, 2014) and its consequences in terms of organization of a populist party.

The first point refers to the “comparative advantage” enjoyed by the populist projects in order to aggregate different constituencies, socially and territorially heterogeneous, by linking their demands through a “chain of equivalence” (to use the Laclau’s jargon) or, more clearly, by “emphasizing their similarities and downplaying their differences” (Jansen, 2011). The notion of the People includes different meanings, as it can be intended as the ethnos, the plebs or the demos, thus emphasizing the common sharing of the same ethnicity, social positioning or entitlement of civil and political rights. The enemy of the People is usually identified by the antineoliberal populisms in a
neoliberal (and even neo-colonial: see Filc, 2015) élite and in those sectors enjoying supposedly illegitimate privileges thanks to their ties with the “establishment”. The populist discourse aims at “clarifying” that the élite is the supposed ultimate cause of all the different grievances emerging in the country.

The second point stresses how the populisms present themselves as disruptive and anti-status quo phenomena. In line with those understandings of the concept as “the redemptive side of politics” (Canovan, 1999) and as “democratic illiberalism” (Pappas, 2012), far from being pure demagoguery (Vasilopolou et al., 2014), the populist leaders, parties and movements pretend to speak in behalf of the totality of (their) People in order to occupy the public institutions and to decisively bring a political change, challenging the existing rules and the institutional (and often constitutional) constraints. They are vote-seekers and vote-maximizers par excellence: in contrast with other political projects aiming at representing the interests of specific interest groups and classes or specific ideological “niches”, or aiming at influencing the policy-making process, they present themselves since the beginning as a “natural majority”.

They consequently tend to refuse alliances with other forces, and, at the same time, they make clear their willingness to govern, and not just to represent. In contrast with other leftist forces, populist projects underscores the centrality of the nation-state and of the public institutions, as well as their usefulness in order to implement concrete changes. By considering themselves as a “natural majority” ready for governing, the populisms aim at providing a solution to the “coordination dilemma” faced by new and/or small political parties (Cox, 1997). As Morgan (2011) stressed, the choice of an “alternative force” is favoured by a centripetal party system, a contemporaneous crisis of the existing linkages and an increase of social distress: in particular, the identification of the “centripetal parties” as the main enemy helps to discursively put the “mainstream alternatives” into the same box.

The third point stresses how populism, far from being an “ideology” (e.g., Mudde, 2004; Stanley, 2008) pretending to be the best suited in order to “fix” the problems of the country, is particularly interested in who should be govern (i.e., the People) and to the decision-making process better suited to make the Voluntad del Pueblo effective. Populisms are surely concerned with the outputs of democracy, but they are also (and even more) concerned with its input side, offering very different (and even contradictory) responses. The populist phenomena usually start from a strong critique of the “politicians”, pointing on their unresponsiveness towards the People and on their closeness and/or belonging to the hyper-demonized elite. To avoid these consequences, populisms often advance a radical rejection of the “formalistic” (Pitkin, 1967) interpretation of the representative democracy, proposing, in turn, new and diverging solutions in order to assure the “true representation” of the People and to restore its sovereignty.

These solutions span from a full delegation to someone who pretends to personify and “really understand” the People to a full control of their representatives, through proposing a sort of “imperative mandate” for the MPs. New mechanisms of direct and participative democracy and of candidate selection are also commonly suggested. Anti-populist thinkers and politicians rightly underscore the potential perils of these tools, which are intended to strengthen the vertical accountability of those elected in the public offices, often in detriment of the institutions devoted to the horizontal one (O’Donnell, 1994). Populist leaders and followers, in turn, argue that they fight for shortening the distance between the citizenry and the elected representatives, thus offering the concrete realization of the principle of the popular sovereignty.

It can also seem paradoxical that populist movements and parties, which pretend to restore the popular sovereignty and to allow the People to make its voice heard, often show an extremely high degree of concentration of power around their leaders. This is surely true, but reducing populism to authoritarianism or to an absolute delegation of the power to a “strong leader”, through the popular vote, would be a big mistake. This way to understand the concept of “representation” is true for what
I call *electoral-delegative populisms* (Padoan, forthcoming), which in fact mainly aims at offering a solution to the *poor outputs* of the representative democracies. Nonetheless, other populist political projects argue that these “poor outputs” are the direct consequences of the scarce involvement of the People in the decision-making process. Therefore, the solution would lie in the mobilization and in the *active political participation* of the citizens, and particularly of the popular sectors.

This entails, in varying degree, a higher influence of the organized bases towards the own leader, who, in any case, kept strong resources in order to defend her/his autonomy. In the *participative-mobilising populisms* (Padoan, forthcoming), the relationship between the leader and the followers is much more complex, as the former carries on a unifying function, particularly necessary due to the enormous heterogeneity of the populist constituencies, and can rely on the active mobilization of the followers for the achievement of political victories. The specific organization of these populist projects is likely to vary, as it needs to adapt to the kind of political environment mentioned in the previous sections.

**Universal Social Platforms and New Forms of Democratic Participation.** New political projects need to deal with both the political and economic demands provoked by the crisis and advanced by the social mobilizations. The rising of unemployment leaves growing segments of the population particularly exposed to social exclusion and the austerity measures further diminish the public resources devoted to social spending. At the same time, the deregulation of the labor market during the neoliberal era (even accentuated during the “phase of adjustment”) displays all its effects, increasing the risks faced by the own insiders. Progressive political projects need to think about new social platforms targeting the most affected strata, underscoring the inadequacy of the segmented welfare regimes in a context of growing exclusion and unemployment. Social mobilizations often put to the public attention the feelings of exclusion and precariousness of vast strata of the population, thus making visible the necessity of alternative solutions.

This is not to say that the insiders have been necessarily considered as part of the “privileged” sectors. An analysis of the problem of dualization can lead to “neoliberal” diagnoses, as the problem of the unemployment can be linked to the rigidity of the labor market, thus conducing to its further deregulation. Nonetheless, the cuts in social and public spending often allowed for the creation of a vast coalition of potential beneficiaries of the universal reforms proposed, while the economic dismissals provoked by the crises contributed to lowering the “social security” enjoyed (and perceived) by the insiders. For sure, during harsh times, when public resources are particularly scarce, the regime of social protection is also likely to be seen as a zero-sum game, which could contribute to a “corporatist” reaction by the unions and even to proposals of *welfare chauvinism* (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013). A progressive political project should aim at emphasizing the similarities between the conditions suffered by both insiders and outsiders in order to be successful, downplaying the differences provoked by class-based and sectorial interests.

A progressive political project must also deal with a depressed economy and, consequently, to sketch an alternative economic platform in order to gain credibility as an actor fostering economic growth. In fact, most of the outsider category in Latin America is composed by self-employed people, mainly occupied in the informal sectors, who can take advantage of either a more “universalist” social platform or a consistent economic growth. The same applies for many self-employed workers in the Southern European countries, although their economic status is much more heterogeneous. These categories, which traditionally fear an increase of the tax revenues – particularly in countries with regressive fiscal systems (Fernández-Albertos and Manzano, 2015) – are more likely to appreciate an expansionary monetary policy. Thus, putting a strong accent in the necessity of a more independent macroeconomic policy can result very attractive.

Apart from advancing a programmatic response to the crisis, an antineoliberal political project must be effective in providing answers to the demands of political participation and of social change.
stemming from the social protests and/or in channelling them towards institutional avenues. In some cases, already existing political parties can display a good mobilising and inclusive capacity – even in alliance with the union movement - thus contributing to the political stability and to their own consolidation as “viable alternative” to neoliberalism. This, in turn, depends on the configuration of the “critical antecedents” discussed above.

Otherwise, as I detailed above, strong social mobilizations are likely to surge independently from the existing parties and unions. In these cases, the political projects willing to capitalize the political opportunity structure created by the social mobilizations have to gain their legitimacy as credible alternative to the old political system. As I explain in the next paragraph, the internal organization of the political project and its strategies towards the social mobilizations are crucial for its eventual success.

Adapting or Creating Ex Nove an Internal Organizational Structure Able to Adapt to the Political Environment Generated by the Social Mobilizations. As I discussed in the paragraph concerning the social movements, different “patterns of mobilization” require different strategic adaptations. I argue that the internal organization of a political party is highly relevant because it contributes to a successful adaptation, as well as its strategic stance towards the independent social mobilizations.

The social movements – particularly the universalist ones - often pose questions going much beyond the specific issues over which they struggle. They often challenge the existing political system due to its closure, and normally refuse the attempts of co-optation from institutional actors, defending their autonomy. At the same time, in order to favour popular participation, the movements have to downplay the internal ideological differences, which moreover eases their activity of networking and of alliance building and, consequently, their potential political influence. I argue that the same holds for those parties and movements willing to transform the social protests into institutional change: they must avoid ideological sectarianism and “vanguardist” pretensions towards the movements.

In order to reinforce the ties with the movements, the political parties must have or develop either a decentralized organization or a strong “linkage strategy”. Decentralization, along with “ideological flexibility”, is particularly important in a context characterised by a fragmented pattern of antineoliberal protests. A party refusing ideological sectarianism and whose local sections are relatively free to recruit membership and to advance their own agenda is better suited to dialogue with these movements and to be perceived as a “loyal institutional ally”. Low barriers to join in the party, in turn, favour its diffusion in the territory, whereas the involvement of the party members in the organization of the social mobilizations – without any pretension to “lead” them - can help to forge the ties between the party and the social movements’ milieu, contributing to booster the “popularity” of the party among the protesters and to position it as a credible supporter of the movements’ proposals. Finally, ideological flexibility can help to defend and deepen the “organizational linkages” of the party, i.e. the links towards both social movements and trade unions, easing the creation of a “broad popular network” in which the political party plays a nodal role.

At the same time, decentralization must be accompanied by a strong cohesion at the top of the party’s pyramid, in order to avoid the formation of partisan factions (along both ideological or personalistic lines) struggling for the leadership. Other aims of the process of “leaderization” are to provide the party with a mediatic resource and to reserve a great “room of manoeuvre” for tactical adjustment in a fluid context.

The availability of a political party or movement with all these characteristics is not assured. If such an institutional ally is absent, it is likely that a newly born political project will take advantage of the political opportunity structure (POS) created by the crisis. I argue that in such a case, the
influences of the POS will display even more clearly their effects on the internal organization, the electorate and the political-economic stances of the new, successful party.

I identify the interplay of two main variables as the explaining factors for the conformation of the successful political project. These two variables are, as already anticipated, the political strength and alignment of the mainstream union movement, and the “pattern of mobilization” observed in the social sphere. This “pattern of mobilization”, as we saw, varies according to the organizational strength and extension of the social movements, the social sectors they mobilize, as well as their capacity of “alliance building” among themselves (see table 2).

I argue that, in a context of “unified” mobilization, if the movements are particularly rooted and powerful, they can aspire to create their own “political instrument”, i.e. a party directly controlled by themselves: a sort of “speaker” of the movements. In such a case, the union movement will play a secondary role both in the mobilisations and in the political project that follows. One could argue that, in a hypothetical scenario where the unions were aligned with the “old parties”, they would find themselves excluded by (and even opposed to) the new political project. If, in turn, the unions had been strongly antagonist towards the “old regime”, the ability or willingness to establish alliances with the mobilised outsider sectors is critical in order to explain the conformation of the new political project and the eventual alignment of the unions to it.

A different scenario implies the presence of broad and unified social mobilizations at the national level, mainly animated by outsider sectors and composed by social movements unable or unwilling to “institutionalize” themselves, preferring an “assemblearian” style. This is probably the most horizontal way to express the grievances of the outsider sectors, but also the less capable to sustain over time, both in terms of temporal continuity and of popular participation, as only the “richest” activists (in terms of resource, such as time and ideological motivation) are likely to engage in the protests for a long time. The union movement could serve as an “institutional ally” accompanying the protests, but it is likely to be considered as a “target” itself of the movements’ grievances, particularly if it showed a “collaborationist” attitude with leftist parties compromised with the neoliberal regime.

Therefore, I argue that this subtype of the “unified” pattern of mobilization will leave in the public sphere several “floating and unsatisfied” demands in search for a new political project willing to advance them in the institutional arena. In the absence of an existing party willing and able to connect with the movements, there is a great opportunity for a new political project to emerge. This new political project will have to include both the democratic and the social claims advanced by the “horizontal” social movements, in order to transform those activists in “militants”, but it will need also a centralized decision-making process, in order to avoid fragmentation and inefficacy. As this political project will primarily address to the social movements’ milieu, it seems likely that it will have a less “plebeian” and more “sophisticated” electorate.

The “fragmented” pattern of social mobilization, and the absence of an existing political party able to successfully “channelize” the protests towards the institutional sphere, will open the way for a more autonomous populist political project, fulfilling the task of articulating the very heterogeneous demands stemming from the social mobilizations and from the excluded sectors. In order to achieve this goal, a good strategy will be, again, to rely on both a centralized and decentralized internal organization. Low barriers to membership, ideological vagueness and a strong leadership can represent the characteristics for dealing with this difficult political environment: the first two factors will allow the new party to “collect” successfully the heterogeneous unsatisfied local or sectorial demands, whereas a strong leadership will provide it both a mediatic resource and a “political articulator of last resort”.

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This populist project will need also to show a very “rupturist” stance against the existing political actors “compromised” with the neoliberal model, in order to be perceived as the credible alternative to the current state of affairs. This will be affect its relationship with the “mainstream” union movement. In contrast with the “unified pattern of mobilization”, in its “horizontal” variant, this “fragmented” scenario is likely to open the way to a much more “plebeian” – and less ideologically sophisticated – political project, according to its proposals and to the electorate it will attract.
Second Section. Empirical Application: Comparing Anti-Neoliberal Populist Parties in Latin America and Southern Europe

The middle-range theory I described above has one main advantage. It allows for a broad comparison of the drastic changes that several Latin American and Southern European party systems had faced in the aftermath of the crisis of the neoliberal model. I will first apply my framework on four selected countries where I conducted an extensive fieldwork, consisting in one-hundred in-depth interviews with party’s representatives, social movements’ and unions’ leaders and country experts in Bolivia, Argentina, Italy and Spain. The primary sources collected favoured a deeper comprehension of the four successful anti-neoliberal political projects emerged in the aftermath of the neoliberal crisis, and particularly of their internal organizations, their relations with the movements and the unions. In the conclusion, I will briefly discuss how the argument can apply to other political realities of the same regions.

Bolivia. The Outsiders in Power: the rising of the “political instrument” of the Bolivian peasant social movements

Critical Antecedents. The Bolivia’s neoliberal era began with the promulgation of the Presidential Decree 21060 by the President Paz Estenssoro in 1985 (Farthing and Kohl, 2006; Silva, 2009). Paz Estenssoro was the historical leader of the MNR (Nationalist Revolutionary Movement), the party that led the 1952 Bolivian Revolution and built a corporatist state, following the ISI model with the support of the industrial and peasant unions (Klein, 2011). 33 years later its first presidential election, Paz Estenssoro assumed again the presidential office in an hyperinflationary economic context, provoked by the disastrous policies implemented by the exiting left-of-center government, which, in turn, had to deal with the huge external debt inherited by the Bolivian dictatorships of the Seventies. The Presidential Decree 21060 inaugurated the NEP (New Economic Policy), an orthodox macroeconomic policy that dollarized the economy, freeze the wages and reduced public spending through massive dismissals of workers in mining and educational sectors, among others. The implementation of these and other measures suggested by IMF and the World Bank favoured a “benevolent” attitude from these institutions, which, in turn, accepted an important reduction of the Bolivian foreign debt.

The Paz Estenssoro’s last presidential term inaugurated the so-called “Pacted Democracy” (1985-2003), i.e. a series of coaltional governments including at least two of the three main Bolivian parties: the MIR at the centre-left, the MNR at the centre-right and the ADN at the right of the political spectrum (Ibáñez Rojo, 1999; Van Cott, 2005). The Bolivian party system became increasingly centripetal, as all the parties involved were committed to the consolidation and extension of the neoliberal model (Alenda, 2003). The once powerful Bolivian left entered in a long crisis. The peak union confederation (the COB) found itself in an isolated and weakened position, as its leading branch (the mineworkers’ federation, FSTMB) was particularly affected by the cycle of privatizations, as well as violently repressed and disarticulated by the neoliberal governments (García Linera et al., 2004; Farthing and Kohl, 2006).

While the size of the sectors traditionally represented by the COB (the public sector, the tiny industrial working class and the miners) strongly decreased, during the Nineties new, marginalised sectors – such as the minifundistas peasants of the Highlands, the rural settlers’ of the Lowlands and the coca growers’ of the central regions – acquired a more radical attitude towards the national governments (Yashar, 2005). In particular, they reacted against the insufficient progresses of the
agrarian reform and against the violent eradications of the coca crops, led by the Bolivian army and its US allies. Moreover, the organizations of the indigenous minorities led a vast cycle of marches and demonstrations throughout the country, claiming for the recognition of their civil and social rights. The Bolivian traditional, Marxist Left was not able to articulate these organizations, as it remained highly fragmented and committed to a “vanguardist” and paternalistic attitude towards them (interviews with Sarela Paz and Juan de la Cruz Villca).

The governing parties reacted through a mix of repression and attempts of co-optation of the numerous Bolivian popular organizations, both in the urban and rural areas. They aimed at “institutionalizing” the indigenous discontent, through the co-optation of indigenist leaders, while reinforcing the traditional clientelistic networks – particularly in the urban areas – and inaugurating, since the mid-Nineties, extended – if modest – universalist social transfers for the poorest strata of the Bolivian population, like the BONOSOL, financed through the revenues of the privatizations (Farthing and Kohl, 2006; Lazar, 2013; Arria, 2014; interview with Walter Limache). Nonetheless, this popular social programs was early suspended, due to the fiscal constraints deepened by the 1997-98 Brazilian crisis that further limited the modest Bolivian economic recovery of the previous years (Farthing and Kohl, 2006).

The pattern of social mobilizations. As mentioned above, several popular demonstrations and marches were led, during the Nineties, by the Bolivian indigenous organizations and peasant unions. Differently from the unions forming the backbone of the COB, the coca-growers’ and peasant unions, in Bolivia, are composed by small landowners, living in extremely precarious conditions. The tasks of these rural unions go much beyond the strict defence of the sectorial interests of the members: in many cases, they act as a functional substitute of the weak Bolivian state, compelling their members to actively participate in communitarian works and projects and including quasi-judiciary powers in order to solve the eventual internal contrasts of the community (García Linera et al., 2004; García Yapur et al., 2014; Grisaffi, 2013). The peasant unions (i.e., the CSUTCB – particularly strong in the Bolivian Highlands, the “Bartolinas” – the Women Peasant Federation – and the CSCB – formed by the rural “colonizers”, mainly rooted in the Eastern region, as well as the cocaleros) are organized through a multi-level, pyramidal structure, although the local level kept a considerable autonomy (García Linera et al., 2004). All of these unions enjoy a high internal participation, including practices of deliberative democracy, while the delegates are conceived as little more than “speakers” of the bases, at all the geographical levels (interview with Martiriano Mamani).

The long phase of contention in Bolivia represented a clear instance of the “unified” pattern of mobilization described above. The Bolivian social movements showed both very high mobilising skills and the ability of establishing alliances with several other local or sectorial actors emerging during the Nineties against the neoliberal governments (interviews with Eduardo Córdova and Fernando Mayorga). In particular, the coca-growers’ unions, menaced by the coca eradication programs violently implemented by the Bolivian army and by its US allies, played an important role, in alliance with the local movements, during the uprising in Cochabamba (2000) against the privatization of the local water company (Linsalata, 2015), while both the Highlands unions and the coca-growers actively participated in the violent protest in La Paz and El Alto (2003) against the selling of the Bolivian gas to Chile (Lazar, 2013), leading to the resignation of the MNR’s President Sánchez de Losada. The main Bolivian social movements, i.e. the CSUTCB, the CSCB, the “Bartolinas”, as well as the indigenous organizations from the Highlands (CONAMAQ) and the

3 Researcher at the University of San Simón.
4 Former member of the CSUTCB’s National Direction and co-founder of the MAS-IPSP.
5 Director of NINA Program (NGO working in indigenous leadership’s formation).
6 Representative of the MAS-IPSP in the Bolivian Parliament.
7 Researcher at the University of San Simón.
8 Professor at the University of San Simón.
Lowlands (CIDOB) even forged a formal alliance in 2003 – the “Unity Pact” – struggling for the convocation of a Constituent Assembly to draft a new Constitution including the recognition of the cultural and social rights of the minorities, as well as the implementation of instruments of direct and participative democracies (Garcés, 2010).

The Winning Project: the Rise of the MAS-IPSP. The MAS-IPSP (Movement Towards Socialism – Political Instrument for the Sovereignty of the Peoples) was created in 1995, as an “organic decision” of the main Bolivian peasant and coca-grower unions and social movements (García Yapur et al., 2014; Burgoa Moya, 2016). According to the well-known Panebianco’s (1988) typology, it is an example of “externally legitimated party”, as it is conceived as a “political instrument” of the founder organizations in order to run electorally and elect their representatives in the institutions. The process of candidates’ selection at all the levels should be entirely delegated to the social movements, through multi-tiered internal elections; in fact, at least since the decision of reserving some posts to “invitees” figures (typically technocrats and intellectuals closer to the project) in order to expand the party’s support in the urban areas, the leader Evo Morales and his inner circle have acquired a growing (albeit not unlimited) decisional power even in this issue (Anría 2014; interview with Marité Zegada9).

The decision of creating their own “political instrument” stemmed from the necessity of stopping the successful attempts of co-optation of the movements’ leaders by the “neoliberal parties” that dominated the centripetal Bolivian party system during the so-called “Pacted Democracy”, and even by the fragmented Marxist Left and its “vanguardist” and paternalist attempts to lead an eventual Bolivian revolutionary process (interviews with Juana Quispe10 and with Juan de la Cruz Villca).

The MAS-IPSP remained a minoritarian political actor during its first years, as its electoral successes were concentrated in its stronghold, the Chaparean, cocalera region, from which the leadership of Evo Morales emerged. When the economic crisis deepened, Bolivia entered into the most contentious phase (2000-03), and the social movements forming part of the MAS-IPSP showed all their strength in terms of mobilization and alliance building with other, local or sectorial actors. The “antineoliberal” and “anti-imperialist” frame, as well as the high rootedness and combativeness of the movements, represented crucial tools in order to cement a vast and durable cycle of contention. Moreover, differently from other political projects (such as the MIP – Pachakutik Indigenous Movement), the MAS-IPSP avoided ideological extremism, thus being able to gradually improve its attractiveness in the urban centres (Madrid, 2008), also thanks to a pragmatic strategy of co-optation of the urban unions (particularly those stemming from the outsider sectors, such as the street vendors and the self-employed transport workers), as well as to the inclusion of intellectuals and technocrats into its lists (Anría, 2014; several interviews).

Although the MAS-IPSP has opened to the participation of many other grass-roots organizations (such as the industrial and miners’ unions, the self-employed miners organized through cooperatives, the urban vendors’ and transport workers’ unions, the Highlands and Lowlands indigenous organizations, all of which form part of the still ruling social coalition: several interviews. See also Mayorga, 2010; Tassi et al., 2012), the “political instrument” is still dominated by the founders’ organizations, the so-called trillizas11 and the coca-grower unions. It is common to hear from the own MAS-IPSP’s leaders that the party “does not exist”, being a mere political brand in order to run electorally12, as the “real power” would belong to the social movements.

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9 Professor at University of San Simón.
10 President of the MAS-IPSP parliamentary group.
11 The trillizas (‘triplets’) are the CSUTCB (the Peasant Federation), the CSCIOB (the Rural Settlers’ Federation) and the ‘Bartolinas’ (the Women Peasant Federation).
12 My interviews with the MAS-IPSP’s MP Manuel Canelas and with the Vice-Presidency officers Juan Pinto.
Fully in line with the well-known motto *Ruling by Obeying*, the social movements’ bases intend their representatives as mere “speakers” of their (both sectorial and territorial) constituencies (interview with Martiriano Mamani). At the same time, they are expected to faithfully obey to *their* government, which, notwithstanding the “participative”, bottom-up rhetoric, keep the true initiative power under the unchallenged leadership of Evo Morales (interviews with Juana Quispe and with the MAS-IPSP’s MP Shirley Suárez). Nonetheless, it would a big mistake to downplay the power of the social movements, which increasingly acts as corporatist organizations struggling for the access to the public resources, while the President acts as a “decider of last resort” of the multiple and contrasting demands. The Bolivian system of interest intermediation under the *masistas* governments must be understood as a complex “chamber of compensation” between the contrasting demands of the heterogeneous – and well-organised – social sectors taking part of the *Process of Change*.

The “anticolonial”, anti-imperialist and “indigenous-communitarian” discourse of the origins has been gradually substituted by a statist, “developmentalist” (*desarrollista*) project aiming at fostering economic growth and investing in vast social (such as the universalist social transfers known as *Bonos*) and development programs. The old pluralist, neoliberal (as well as clientelistic and corrupted) regime has thus been substituted by a statist-corporatist one, in which the old clientelistic networks – particularly in the urban centres – are now exploited by the ruling party, while the different organizations aligned with the government are often involved in opaque negotiations. Nonetheless, the mobilising capacity of the different social movements is still very high, and can be used as a resource for the negotiations within the ruling coalition, but also in order to back the governmental campaigns.

The COB (i.e. the main organization of the “insider” sectors) acts as a “critical friend” of the MAS-IPSP’s governments (interview with Orlando Gutiérrez, current leader of the FSTMB [the Bolivian mineworkers’ federation]). I would not define its support as “conditional”, because, in fact, the MAS-IPSP still represents the “best option” for the salaried workers; but it is not their “political instrument”. In fact, some salaried sectors (as the urban teachers), inspired by “Trotskyist” ideologies, are overtly opposed to the MAS-IPSP, which reacts pointing on their “selfishness”, “laziness” and “corporatism” (interviews with Shirley Suárez and Juana Quispe). In the last years, the COB did assume a more critical stance, in order to recover the support of their bases, unwilling to go on backing any governmental measures in exchange of public charges for their leaders and little improvements for their constituencies. The numerous corruption scandals that involved rural leaders eased this new transition towards an “autonomist” stance by the COB, while the statist, “developmentalist” inspiration of the Morales’ inner circle does have some points in common with the COB Marxist ideology. However, the other side of the governmental project, skewed towards agribusiness, extractivism and “productivity”, and aiming at favouring the true core-constituencies of the MAS-IPSP, composed by “plebeian” self-employed people (Do Alto and Stefanoni, 2010) – both in rural and urban areas – still push in other, less “Marxist” or “classic Leftist” directions.

*Argentina. The Outsiders’ Incorporation (or Co-optation?): the Kirchners’ Governmental Experience.*

**Critical Antecedents.** Similarly to Bolivia, the political party that implemented the structural adjustments in order to abandon the old ISI model and to embrace the neoliberal one was the political expression of the labor-based populism of the Fifties. The candidate of the Peronist PJ (Justicialist Party), Carlos Menem, won the 1989 presidential elections, in the middle of an hyperinflationary crisis following the failure of the heterodox measures implemented by the former President Alfonsín (belonging to the centre-left Radical Party – UCR). Alfonsín did try to advance some austerity
reforms, but his attempts were stopped by the Peronist parliamentarian majority and by no less than thirteen general strikes organised by the CGT, the peak union confederation, strongly linked with the PJ (Etchemendy, 2011).

Despite a “traditionally Peronist” electoral campaign (Stokes, 2001; Ostiguy, 2009), Menem soon began a cycle of neoliberal reforms that successfully stabilized the country, albeit provoking huge social costs that soon became apparent. The very first moves of Carlos Menem were telling. He appointed consecutively, as Ministries of Economy, two former CEOs of Bunge y Born, one of the most important Argentine business groups, and promulgated two “emergency” laws, the State Reform Law (Ley de Reforma del Estado) and the Emergency Economy Law (Ley de Emergencia Económica). The first law inaugurated an impressive cycle of privatization of the most important public-owned companies, in multiple sectors (Etchemendy, 2011). The second one strongly reduced subsidies and highly protective trade tariffs in the overprotected Argentine economy. However, the stabilisation of the macroeconomic indicators was not achieved until 1991, when the new Ministry of Economy Domingo Cavallo implemented the “Convertibility Plan” (Plan Convertibilidad), which pegged the Argentine peso to the US dollar and implied the renounce to manage autonomously the national monetary policy.

The immediate effects of the Convertibility Plan were an impressive economic growth (which came after almost fifteen years of stagnation and three years of recession), the huge reduction of the inflation rate (which dropped from an astonishing 13439% in 1990 to 84% in 1991 and 3.9% in 1994: Beccaria and Maurizio, 2005: 54), but also a progressive increase in the unemployment rate, due to the privatization process and to the greater competition that the once protected Argentine firms had to cope with in the tradable sectors. Moreover, the Mexican crisis in 1994 contributed to provoke the first recessionary period during the Menem’s terms, when the GDP dropped of 4.4% and the unemployment rate (which never was a big concern in the Argentine economy) reached an impressive 18%.

During the Menemist era, the PJ experienced strong internal transformations. Apart from its ideological turn, the party consistently limited the unions’ influence over it, fully transforming into a “clientelistic electoral machine” (Levitsky, 2003). It made use of the state resource – notwithstanding the “retrenchment” due to the austerity measures – in order to keeping its linkages towards the popular sectors, also enjoying the resilience of the traditional Peronist identity.13

Notwithstanding the PJ’s neoliberal turn, the CGT backed the Menem’s governments, thanks to political exchanges that made possible the reforms and that preserved most of the organizational resources of the unions, such as the maintenance of both the CGT’s legal monopoly of representation

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13 The PJ, the most important partisan expression of Peronism, is rooted in the territory through an impressive network of loosely structured and connected sections, the “Basic Units” (Unidades Básicas), led by local “political intermediaries”, the punteros. Most punteros are affiliated to agrupaciones (Levitsky, 2003), informal groups that respond to some local, PJ’s “strong man”, usually the mayor of the municipality, or some “challenger” that attempts to dispute the power to the local caudillo. During the Nineties, when unions gradually lost their influence over the party and their representational capacity (also due to the extensive unemployment that affected the area), the number of punteros skyrocketed, becoming the main linkages between the party and the territory. The punteros represent the backbone of the extended clientelistic machine built by PJ throughout most of the country. The PJ’s control over the local administration represented both the cause and the consequence of its party patronage and clientelistic practices that, along with strong identitarian factors, can explain the resilience of a mass-party that, during the Menemist era, clearly abandoned its “classic Peronist” goals (Independencia Económica, Soberanía Política y Justicia Social) and embraced neoliberalism. The strength of the punteros’ network (red punteril) relies on a kind of “affective clientelism” (Pereyra and Svampa, 2003) which has been extensively studied (e.g., Auyero, 2001; 2004; 2007; Levitsky, 2003; Zarazaga, 2015). The punteros typically “take care” of multiple, concrete necessities of their neighbours (which can range from the “easy access” to some social program or to the delivery of food and basic goods, to even the organization of birthday’s parties for poor, elderly people), making the presence of the party “visible” in the daily aspects of their lives.
and of its administration of the welfare funds (Murillo, 2001; Etchemendy, 2011). This, in turn, occurred in detriment of the own working class interests, and particularly of the poorest sectors; in fact, the neoliberal reforms provoked a huge dualization of the Argentine labor-market and welfare regime, as well as a highly regressive income distribution, with the active complicity of the CGT’s leaders (Etchemendy, 2011).

While the Argentine Socialist Left remained confined in the middle-class progressive sectors, another political project, the FREPASO (*Front for a Solidary Country*), led by dissident Peronists, positioned at the centre-left and seemed able to capitalize the discontent against the neoliberal turn (Ostiguy, 2005). Nonetheless, the FREPASO chose to ally with the Radicals in the 1999 presidential elections in order to defeat the Menem’s successor, Duhalde. The new President, the Radical Fernando De La Rúa, moved immediately to the right, even deepening the structural adjustments required by the IMF in order to deal with a worrying socioeconomic scenario, leading the country towards the 2001 collapse (Silva, 2009). Moreover, the FREPASO always remained confined to the city of Buenos Aires, with poor electoral achievements – also due to its middle-class rhetoric - in the popular districts, the traditional Peronist strongholds (Garay, 2010). In December 2001, after the governmental decision to freeze the bank accounts (the infamous *corralito*) in order to limit the capital flight, the eruption of interclassist protests led to the resignation of De La Rúa, the alternation of five presidents in fifteen days and the declaration of the public debt default, while the GDP fell by 15%, the unemployment rate reached the 20% and the poverty rate the 50%.

The pattern of social mobilizations. In Argentina, the popular protests against neoliberalism can be fully included in the “fragmented” category proposed above. The fragmentation was along territorial, social and ideological lines. Social unrests were shocking the country since the mid-Nineties, when several local movements, mostly formed by unemployed and public sector workers enrolled in radical unions, began organising road-blockages (*piquetes*) and popular uprisings (*puebladas*) throughout numerous provinces, firstly in the *Interior* and then in the Buenos Aires’ Province (PBA), demanding the reversal of the austerity measures and the distribution of unemployment subsidies (*planes*) (Pereyra and Svampa 2003). Moreover, the union movement lost its unity, as it emerged a new challenger within (the MTA, the faction led by the truck drivers’ union, opposed to the Menemist faction: see Benes and Milmanda, 2012) and outside the CGT, i.e. the CTA, initially close to the FREPASO, mainly rooted in the public sectors and able to establish strong links with the unemployed workers’ social movements (Pérez and Armelino, 2003; Retamozo and Morris, 2015; interviews with Carlos Sánchez 14, Héctor Cabrera 15). When the 2001 crisis erupted, even the middle-class, more progressive sectors began organizing themselves through horizontal, assemblearian movements in the city of Buenos Aires (Mauro and Rossi, 2015).

The *piqueteros* were not able to build a common front, as they were highly fragmented through territorial and ideological lines (Boyanovsky, 2010). In fact, there was a tough competition between different movements – and between them and the PJ - in order to obtain the public *planes* (which were assigned in a collective form, thus favouring the co-optation of the local movements), along with ideological divisions, particularly between the Marxist, revolutionary movements and those closer to the Peronist *milieu*, thus potentially more likely to reach some kind of agreement with the PJ, the dominant electoral organization among the popular sectors (Boyanovsky, 2010; interview with Daniel Menéndez 16).

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14 Member of the FTV’s Secretariat (FTV stands for *Federación Tierra y Vivienda*, one of the major territorial social movements of the Province of Buenos Aires).

15 Member of the CTA’s Secretariat (*Segretario Gremial*).

16 Member of the National Direction of *Libres del Sur – Barrios de Pie* (a political party emerged from the *piqueteros*’ movement).
The Winning Project. The Kirchnerism. Néstor Kirchner reached the presidency in 2003, when the “Argentine unemployed people outnumbered his voters”, as it is often remarked. He then was a poorly known governor of a remote Southern Argentine Province: he could win thanks to the endorsement by the exiting interim President, the right-of-center Peronist Duhalde, who chose to support him in order to prevent his archi-rival Menem from winning again the elections (Ostiguy 2005).

In this unpromising scenario, Kirchner began a polarizing, nacional y popular discourse, claiming against the “old political class”, “neoliberalism” and the “Fatherlands’ enemies”, putting in the same box the neoliberal governments of the Nineties and the reactionary military dictatorship of the 1976-1983 period (Arzadún, 2008; Panizza, 2014). Concretely, he adopted a tougher stance and an anti-imperialist rhetoric towards the international economic institutions and the country creditors. At the same time, he began working for the prosecution of the army’s officers involved in the human rights’ violations during the Argentine dictatorship. Kirchner called for the recuperation of the traditional Peronist goals (“Economic Independency”, “Political Sovereignty” and “Social Justice”), claiming for the consolidation of a “National Capitalism” and dialoguing with the bulk of the piquetero sectors and with both the CGT (favouring the victory of the MTA’s faction against the Menemists) and the CTA (interviews with Carlos Sánchez and Héctor Cabrera; Etchemendy and Collier, 2007; Rossi, 2015). At the same time, he did not definitively break with the “Peronist old guard”, being able to conduct the majority of the Peronist politicians to his side, “freeing” himself from the Duhalde’s control and leaving him in an isolated position (interview with Juan Manuel Abal Medina17). The least voted President of the Argentine democracy soon was able to inaugurate the most stable governmental “era” in the modern times.

The Kirchner’s main ability was to presenting himself as a progressive figure – thus attracting vast middle class sectors, also thanks to the rapid economic recovery, as a product of his heterodox measures – and to retain the traditional Peronist popular constituencies (and, crucially, the majority of the Peronist local leaders). At the same time, he was able to incorporate (even offering governmental posts) into his coalition the most “dialoguist” (and Peronist) social movements’ and unions’ leaders, through both programmatic and clientelistic exchanges (Boyanovski 2010; interview with Fernando Esteche – Leader of the Movimiento Popular Quebracho, a far-left Peronist group). These organizations soon would have formed the true “social bases” of the Kirchnerist project, “its most faithful allies” (interview with Sebastián Etchemendy, former officer at the Minister of Labour). This would have been evident during the so-called Conflicto del Campo (2008), which saw the government of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner opposed to the big rural landowners (backed by the political opposition) around the governmental attempt to raise the fiscal imposition of the soybeans’ exports (Boyanovski 2010).

Argentina was a typical dualized country at the critical juncture moment. Nonetheless, there was a party holding a sui generis political strategy to deal with the outsider sectors. The linkages between the PJ and the outsider sectors were a mix of clientelism and identitarian factors. These linkages did not avoid the eruption of the piqueteros’ movements, but they crucially contributed to the electoral resilience of the PJ, along with the opposition status held by the party during the final collapse (which the same Menemist policies had contributed to provoke).

At the same time, in the union camp, the position of the CGT as a “purely insiderist” union was partially counterbalanced by the emergence of the MTA. However, the “indecent” CGT’s behaviour during the Menemist phase directly provoked the emergence of the CTA, an “insider-outsider” union that actively contributed to the organization of the outsiders. Still, the CGT kept a considerable “organizational power” (Etchemendy, 2011) during the neoliberal phase, as well as its

17 PJ’s senator.
(weakened) links with the PJ. In sum, the CGT was highly delegitimized, surely weak, but in no way condemned to the irrelevance.

The PJ and CGT’s “eternal resilience” explains the elements of continuity between the pre and post-Kirchner era. Nonetheless, Kirchner also included in the governmental coalition the CTA, many piquetero leaders, and pushed for the victory of the MTA’s faction inside the CGT. The reasoning of the piqueteros incorporated into the government was fully in line with the statist, Peronist Argentine tradition (interviews with Fernando Esteche and with Santiago Cafiero18). They conceived the State as a “battle field” to occupy in order to obtain concrete results for them and their organizations. It was not a very different conception than the Kirchner’s one, as the President, since the beginning, conceived the outsider incorporation as a matter of inclusion in the labor-market and of organizational links with the social movements, instead of a matter of “universalist rights” to offer to the population. Of course, the economic recovery achieved by the heterodox, anti-neoliberal Kirchner measures (Kulfas, 2016) played a key role for the consolidation of Kirchnerism, as it provided the government with some consensus among the middle-class sectors and with growing public resources for delivering vast social programs and particularistic funds to the PJ’s electoral machine.

Italy. Antineoliberal, non-Leftist Populism. The Rise of the M5S.

Critical Antecedents. The Great Recession found the Italian Left fragmented. In the 2008 elections, the Radical Left failed to reach the 3% threshold and to achieve any parliamentary seats, while the centre-leftist PD (Democratic Party) lost its governmental position, occupied by the centre-right coalition led by Berlusconi. The internal divisions within the government and the dramatic economic crisis, which began provoking serious social consequences and a worsening macroeconomic scenario, led to the resignation by Berlusconi and the formation of a technocratic government led by Mario Monti, backed by both the PD and the Berlusconi’s PDL, while the far-right Northern League and the centrist IDV opted for opposing the new government. Both these populist parties were involved into corruption scandals that affected their credibility as alternative actors, while the Monti’s executive implemented harsh austerity, unpopular measures, including, among other things, relevant cuts to the social spending, the increase in the retirement age and relevant tax increases.

The recession and the austerity measures provoked an increase in the unemployment rate, particularly among young people, and in the poverty rate, showing the ineffectiveness of the Italian welfare regime, particularly skewed towards old age people and based on contributory unemployment insurance schemes, thus lacking any meaningful form of universalist social protections. In fact, Italy stood out for the weak debate around the implementation of “safety-net” policies before the crisis. Lynch (2006) identified the historical causes conducing to the consolidation of the segmented and unfair Italian welfare regime in the combination of several political factors. First, the segmented linkages that Christian Democrats (DC) established with their core constituencies: DC had a “benevolent” attitude towards the widespread tax evasion among the self-employed and small entrepreneurs, while they created a vast party patronage system (through the offering of public jobs and the delivery of illegal pensions), particularly in Southern Italy. After the collapse of the DC, Berlusconi and the Northern League inherited most of the former Christian Democrats’ voters. This particularistic regime, in turn, provoked for long time the opposition, by the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and trade unions, to the implementation of universalist safety-net policies, because they would

18 PJ’s leader in San Isidro (Buenos Aires Province).
have affected their core constituencies (i.e., the formal, salaried workers), the only ones that practically contributed to the welfare state through their pay-rolls.

The PCI (and its political “descendants”) and the trade unions, thus, have traditionally defended a “laborist” ideology, claiming for the inclusion of the outsiders in the formal, salaried sector, in order to allow them to enjoy the same rights of the insiders. Nonetheless, the need for a “flexibilization” of the labor-market, in order to create new employments, reached a discursive hegemony at least since the Nineties (Mattoni and Vogiatzoglou 2014), notwithstanding the growing discontent for the loss of social rights among the precarious – and mostly young – workers. It is telling that the very first labor market and pension reforms were implemented by center-left governments (Rueda 2007), charging the younger generations with the burden of “adapting” to the new, precarious job conditions, while the insider sectors remained almost untouched by the reforms.

The Italian mainstream trade unions tend to represent the “labor aristocracy” and the pensioners, thus offering to the outsiders an insufficient channel of representation. The CGIL (Italian Workers’ General Confederation) is the most leftist among the three main union confederations. Notwithstanding its strong attacks against job precariousness, the CGIL’s branch reserved to the precarious and unemployed people (NIDIL) was (and is) weak and underfunded (Choi and Mattoni 2010). Moving to the political-electoral arena, in 2008 general elections (the last one before the crisis), the unemployed people voted overwhelmingly for center-right coalition, considering it the fittest for promoting an economic recovery that would have brought new employments. In turn, the precarious workers – who effectively experience the perils of job precariousness - were overrepresented among the (reduced) far-left electorate (ITANES, 2008), while the insider sectors clearly represented the core-constituencies of the center-left coalition.

The most important peak union confederation, the CGIL, did assume a critical stance against the market-friendly measures implemented at least since the mid-Nineties in the Italian labour market. Nonetheless, the links between the CGIL and the political Left remained quite strong, even (and particularly) with the PD. In fact, during the last two decades, the CGIL opted for participating into some form of national “social dialogue” only under the centre-left governments (1996-2001 and 2006-08), while several former CGIL’s leaders became prominent figures of the party.

The pattern of social mobilizations. Differently from the Spanish and even Greek cases, where a unifying social movement such as the Indignados and the Aganaktismenoi emerged, in Italy we observed a “scattered anti-austerity movement” (Mosca, 2015; Zamponi and Fernández, 2017). We did observe a renewed mobilization by the trade unions, and particularly by the CGIL and by its most radical branch (the Fiom, i.e. the metalworkers union), for examples against the “Fornero Law” (which consistenly raised the retirement age) and the “Decreto Salva Italia”, which included several pro-business measures. We observed also the eruption of university students and researchers’ mobilizations (such as the Onda Anomala – Anomalous Wave) against the cuts in educational spending, which already had begun under the Berlusconi’s government. Another important campaign was built around the popular referendum against the privatisation of the water public companies (2011), while several local movements emerged around specific source of grievances, typically related with unpopular public infrastructures (such as the High-Speed Train in Val di Susa, a US new

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19 This is not to say, however, that there was a lack of debates among the Left about the implementation of universalist social policies and a more equitative reform of them. In 1997, a ministerial commission (known as Commissione Onofri) drafted an influential study recommending several proposals, including the creation of a basic income (reddito minimo di cittadinanza). This kind of policies were experimented, at the local level, at the end of the Nineties. However, these experiments were stopped by the center-right governments led by Berlusconi in the 2001-2006 legislature. Some trade unions were quite supportive of these policies, although the issue never gained the priority; in contrast, the struggle in order to defend the article 18 of the Workers’ Statute (that imposed the rehiring of those workers dismissed without a “fair cause” – and applicable only to the enterprises with more than 15 employees) was much more central, particularly for the CGIL.
military infrastructure in Sicily, or the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline in Puglia). Nonetheless, all of these mobilizations remained quite isolated, thus without generating the impact on the national public sphere observable in other Southern European countries.

This could seem quite surprising, as Italy hosted the most combative and widespread Global Justice Movement during the 2000s, formed by a galaxy of social movements, ideologically heterogeneous but clearly positioned on the left, which lead the protests against neoliberalism and called for a “social Europe” and for a new international economic order. The PRC (Communist Re-Founding Party) positioned itself as the closest to the social movements’ milieu, at least until 2006, when it accepted to form part of the Prodi’s centre-left government, thus gradually weakening its links with the movements. The Italian social mobilizations of the 2000s did follow an “unified” pattern, focused on universalist demands, while the post-crisis scenario seemed dominated by both sectorial and local demands (Caruso, 2010). As Zamponi (2012) argues, the Italian social movements participating in the Global Justice Movement reached high levels of ideological sophistication and managed to build new, strong collective identities, two factors that, while favoring the long-term organizational sustainability, turned to be a disadvantage when they could have attracted different, heterogeneous new constituencies affected by the crisis. Nor these movements had been able to truly mobilize the outsider sectors, with the exception of some workplace-based movements and of some sectors that enjoyed more “political consciousness” and social capital (as the case of the Onda Anomala: see Choi and Mattoni 2010), thus remaining confined to the “richest” (in terms of motivational and ideological resources) activists.

The Winning Project. A Post-Ideological Populism: the Rise of the M5S. The M5S’ (Five Star Movement) origins remounted to the network of local civic groups organized through the social network MeetUp and coordinated at the national level through the Beppe Grillo’s website. A strong focus on environmental issues, along with a powerful anti-corruption rhetoric, represented, since their origins, the main focuses of the local groups, which were invited by Grillo to form electoral lists (“certified” – i.e., formally allowed to use the “Beppe Grillo’s Friends” brand) in order to run for local elections.

In 2009, the formal foundation of the M5S meant the transformation of the loose MeetUp-based network in a national “non-party”, marking its supposed difference with the traditional political parties. The number of the militants gradually incremented, thanks to the recurrent political campaigns (for example, the referendum against the privatization of the water public companies, or local initiatives attacking the privileges of the “political caste”), the organization of “critical events” convoked by Beppe Grillo, such as the V-Days (popular rallies denouncing the rampant political corruption in the country) and the same decision to participate to the local and regional elections (Biorcio, 2016; interviews with several M5S’ regional councilors). In the early years, the M5S attracted mainly militants and voters from the Far Left and Greens parties (Bordignon and Ceccarini 2013). Nonetheless, since the first electoral victories at the local level, it seemed clear that the Grillo’s movement was able to attract much broader constituencies, from very different social strata and ideological backgrounds (Corbetta and Gualmini 2013; Biorcio and Natale 2013). At the beginning, the M5S obtained above-than-average electoral results in the Central-Northern regions, particularly where the leftist subculture is more rooted (Pinto and Vignati 2012). However, after the deepening of the austerity measures and the economic distress, the M5S experienced a dramatic growth in the South.

In the 2013 legislative elections, the M5S resulted the most voted Italian party (although it did not achieve the parliamentary majority and opted for playing an oppositional role, refusing the PD’s proposal for a coalitional government). The M5S was clearly overrepresented among young people and outsiders (both precarious and unemployed), as well as among the petty bourgeoisie. The M5S’ voters also showed the highest variance in terms of left-right self-placement, while reporting, as their main reasons to vote for the M5S, the willingness to “protest against political parties” and the
demand for “pro-poor policies” (Diamanti 2013). Interestingly, if we analyze the 2013 M5S’ political program (Caruso 2016), labor issues were almost nonexistent; in contrast, the M5S actively backed the introduction of a basic income program, in order to fight the social exclusion due to long-term and youth unemployment.

The M5S puts a strong emphasis on the direct participation of its militants in important activities such as the elaboration of the political programs and the selection of the partisan candidacies, among many other issues. Moreover, it stresses the centrality of the party-on-the-ground, as the M5S’ local “sections” are expected to focus on territorial issues in a strongly autonomous way, although the respect of the M5S’ basic principles and of the membership’s on-line decisions is always and strictly required. It is precisely the peculiar internal organization, and its evolution through “diffusion” more than through “penetration” (Panebianco, 1988), that allowed the M5S to present itself as a heterogeneous “aggregator of unsatisfied demands” (to use the Laclau’s jargon) at the national and local level, often working side-by-side with local movements (Mosca, 2015; interviews with Davide Bono20 and with an activist of the NO-MUOS movement in Sicily). Similarly to the MAS-IPSP, the M5S advances a drastic critique of the representative democracy per se, defending the introduction of an imperative mandate for their “speakers”, i.e. the party’s representatives in the public institutions. By this way, the M5S aspires to distinguish itself from the “old political parties”, by advancing strong attacks against the “Political Caste” and the “transformism” of the Italian MPs (i.e., the recurrent “switches” from a parliamentary group to another one).

One obvious difference is that, while the MAS-IPSP is conceived as the instrument of the organised bases, the M5S’ representatives are expected to fully adhere to the political program (“our Bible”, as several interviewees defined it), whose legitimacy derives from the “constituent power” of the (individual) citizens. The activists’ profile is extremely heterogeneous: notwithstanding, a crucial point to stress is that the M5S has been able to attract many “disenchanted” citizens, with poor (or null) previous political experiences. The M5S’ membership profile is very distinct than the antagonist social movements’ one: in fact, the M5S often claims for having contributed to strengthen the descriptive representation of the Italian Parliament, through the election of “ordinary People” (gente comune). Its pretension to represent the “general will of the People” clearly emerges from statement like this: “You asked me if we opened ourselves to the “civil society” [during the process of the formation of the first electoral lists for the Sicilian elections]. Well, we did not need to do that, because we are the civil society ” (Giancarlo Cancelleri, M5S’ candidate for the Sicilian governorship in 2013, my interview). Also thanks to these features, as well as to the programmatic contents of its program in terms of universalist social policies – and to their harsh critiques against the “Caste” – the M5S has been much more effective in attracting the popular sectors, and particularly the outsiders, than the Italian Left.

The relationship with the insiders’ organizations par excellence, i.e. the unions, is particularly difficult. The M5S has often backed local (or even national) initiatives of the unions against dismissals or denouncing job precariousness (several interviews with regional councillors). It even provided political support to those workers that opted for taking the control of bankrupted firms, transforming them into cooperative factories (interview with Tiziana Ciprini, M5S’ MP). Nonetheless, the M5S’ public representatives often points their finger at the “politicization” of the “mainstream” trade unions: in particular, they often denounce the links between the unions and the political parties of the Left, which would have provoked a “benevolent” attitude of the formers towards several market-friendly measures, when implemented by “their” political referents (interview with Alice Salvatore, M5S’ Regional Councillor).

Moreover, the “mainstream” unions are generally considered as a part of the “political caste”, as well as exaggeratedly attentive to the corporatist over-protection of the insiders, in detriment of

20 M5S’ regional councilor in Piedmont.
the outsiders’ interests and, more generally, of the “common good” (interviews with Dario Violi and Paola Macchi, M5S’ Regional Councillors). The M5S’ representatives often display, at least rhetorically, some sympathies towards the antagonist unions (such as the Co.Bas. – *Base Committees*: interview with Valentina Corrado, M5S’ Regional Councillor), which, nonetheless, seem much closer to the Radical Left than to the “post-ideological” M5S. In general, the M5S’ representatives tend to flaunt a kind of “pragmatism” towards the unions and their demands, differently from the other parties, which are alleged of having a predetermined, “ideological” stance towards them. As Alvise Maniero (one of the first M5S’ mayors, elected in 2012) reported to me, “*we are ab-solutus, we are free from any kind of particularistic interest group*”: once more, the pretension to represent a Rousseaian volonté générale clearly emerges.

Of course, this would be an ingenuous and idyllic portrait of the concrete functioning of the M5S. Its detractors rightly underscore, among other things, the power asymmetry between the leader (the “political guarantor” of the Movements’ principles, or the “megaphone” of his People, to use the own Grillo’s rhetoric) and the bases in terms of the resources owned by the former in order to “address” the internal debates towards already established positions (Tronconi, 2015). According to the former M5S’ MP Zaccagnini (my interview), the own creation of the current “party’s elite” (i.e., those MPs that enjoy a higher visibility in the mass-media) clearly responded to a top-down process of selection of the most “faithful” followers of the leaders among the elected representatives of the Movement. These accusations have been fully confirmed by another “dissident” of the M5S, the European MP Zanni (my interview). The latter also stressed that, in contrast with the M5S’ representatives that I interviewed – who stress their political autonomy, both at the national and local level, and their exclusive devotion to the “program” and to the “activists” - the own political agenda would be fully controlled by the “Communication Group”, i.e. the (unelected) staff devoted to communicational issues. The latter belongs to the private firm (the *Casaleggio Associati*) owned by the co-founder of the M5S, Gianroberto Casaleggio (and, after its death, by his son, Davide, who inherited his father’s key role in the M5S’ hierarchy). The Communication Group basically has the last word on the M5S’ communicational strategy, which has to be understood in its broadest sense: in fact, this office does not just contribute to improve the communicational skills of the M5S’ representatives, but even decide what kinds of issues must be underscored (or downplayed) in the public discourse\(^\text{21}\), according to an analysis of what opinion polls would suggest.

Bordignon and Ceccarini (2015) rightly defined the M5S as a “franchise party”, in which the legal owner of the brand (Beppe Grillo) keeps the ultimate power of allowing (or not) the activists to speak and act in behalf of the Movement, and to propose (or block) the expulsion of the representatives. Moreover, since 2015, at the local level, only the party-in-office is recognized as the unique legal user of the party’s brand, in order to avoid the proliferation of eventual MeetUps contrasting with the official political line of the Movement. This, in turn, has provoked the further empowerment of the M5S’ representatives *vis à vis* the party-on-the-ground, in partial detriment of the commitment to the direct democratic ideals.

The coexistence between centralising and decentralising features in the internal organization of the M5S has shown all its effectiveness in the last years, decisively contributing to its electoral success. The M5S has been able to channel several grievances, both at the national and local level, around few “empty signifiers”, through an antagonist – and, by purpose, vague – discourse that proved to be much more successful than the traditional, Far-Leftist one. The PD, in turn, was able to retain most of its insiderist core-constituencies, whose size remain all but negligible – and, in fact, even majoritarian, due to the national socio-demographical composition.

\(^\text{21}\) A point confirmed, albeit put in positive terms, also by Cozzolino (M5S’ MP).
Critical Antecedents. The Great Recession hit Spain after two decades of sustained economic growth, boosted by the uncontrolled expansion of the construction sector. The explosion of the housing bubble brought serious consequences on the Spanish economic and society, conducing to a dramatic increase in the unemployment rate (particularly among the young workers) and to a huge crisis of the financial sector, which required a major public intervention in order to avoid its entire collapse. The intervention of the *troika* led to the implementation of severe austerity measures, first by the Socialist government and then – after the Zapatero’s decision to call for early elections in 2011 – by the right-of-centre Rajoy’s executive.

The very high Spanish unemployment rate (25% - and close to the 50% among the people younger than 35) coexisted (and still coexists) with the European highest percentage of fixed-term contracts among the employed people (nearly the 30%, according to OECD data, and again affecting particularly the youth). This represented the direct effect of the adaption of the uncompetitive and protected Spanish industrial sector to the international markets, as a consequence of the European integration process, begun under the González’s governments (Sapelli, 2011). In order to cope with this problem, the Spanish governments (both the centre-left and the centre-right ones) have generally opted for a gradual de-regulation of the labor market, through pro-business measures easing the diffusion of fixed-term contracts and diminishing the employment protections for the recently hired workers (Rueda, 2007; Pérez, 2014). The evolution of the Spanish labor market legislation caused the diffusion of job precariousness during the economic expansionary phase – mainly led by the tourist sector and by the real estate bubble – and of the unemployment during the Great Recession, mainly due to the diminished rate of the renewals of the temporary job contracts at their natural expiration date (Pérez, 2014; Picot and Tassinari, 2014).

During the last 20 years preceding the Great Recession, the behaviour of the Spanish unions towards this evolution has been ambivalent. In Spain there is a sort of “bisindicalism”, as the union movement is dominated by two main peak confederations, the UGT, strongly linked with the PSOE, and the CC.OO. (*Workers’ Commissions*, once close to the Communist Party, although this “entrenchment” has gradually weakened since the Eighties). Together, they express more than the 70% of the workers’ delegates in the Firms’ Committees (Pérez, 2014). While the Spanish labor confederations had a low membership rate, they draw their strength from workplace elections (in which about 80 per cent of workers take part) and from the legal framework for the collective bargaining, as it assigns to the “most representative unions” at the regional level the authority for signing sectorial agreements, whose provisions are extended to all the workers employed in the specific economic sector. Only the UGT and the CC.OO. enjoy the status of “most representative union” in nearly all the sectors and regions (Etchemendy, 2011).

In 1988, the UGT broke the “pact of unity” with the PSOE and organised with the CC.OO. a successful general strike against the Socialist government of that time (González and Bouza, 2009). Nonetheless, both the confederations gradually assumed a less “militant” stance, aiming at having a strong influence on the policy-making process, particularly after the victory of the centre-right coalition led by Aznar (Pérez, 2014). The first Aznar’s term (1996-2000), as his government did not enjoy the parliamentary majority, was characterised by quasi-institutionalised tripartite negotiations (including the national employer association), which would have lasted until the Rajoy’s term, apart from its interruption during the second (and more skewed to the right) Aznar’s term. During the decade preceding the Great Recession, the “Spanish social dialogue” led to the consolidation of a (not particularly generous) pay-as-you-go pension system (based on a public and a private pillar) along with the provision of a non-contributory minimum pension, while the measures taken in order to limit the diffusion of fixed-term contracts proved to be highly unsuccessful (Pérez, 2014). In general, the
Spanish welfare regime remained highly dualized, while the means-tested social transfers, albeit more effective and generous than in Italy, were left to the regional initiative.

Although Spain devotes a not negligible social spending to this kind of social programs – which, differently from the Italian unemployment insurance schemes until 2012, are extended also to the outsiders – the interregional differences, in terms of generosity, are particularly high. In fact, more than a half of the “universalist” social transfers are concentrated in Basque Country and Navarra, i.e. two relatively well-to-do regions, disposing sufficient resources to implement an extended scheme (Malgesini Rey, 2014). Thus, we can observe the lack of meaningful means-tested schemes precisely in the most backward regions, where social exclusion is higher and the public resources are lower.

The different forms of “social dialogue” allowed the unions for achieving a strong influence on the polity domain, and for obtaining important successes for their core-constituencies, such as relevant wage increases (particularly during the Zapatero’s governments) during the economic bonanza and the substantial maintenance of the employment protection for the insiders. Nonetheless, the efforts in order to diminish the insider-outsider divide were not as strong and successful as the unions’ ability of improving the economic conditions of the insiders. Moreover, the involvement of the unions in the social concertation proved to be a double-edged sword: when the “Spanish economic miracle” came abruptly to an end, due to the same contradictions that fostered the bonanza phase, the unions were considered as part of the “political clique” that brought Spain into the most dramatic recession since the Transition to the democratic regime. The links with the Spanish Leftist parties, as well as several corruption scandals and the inability of representing a channel of representation for the outsiders’ demands, contributed to the loss of legitimacy of the unions to the eyes of the Spanish population (interviews with Antonio Estany22 and a Podemos member of the Basque Parliament).

The leftist side of the national political spectrum was dominated, since the Transition, by two main political parties: the majoritarian centre-Left PSOE and Izquierda Unida (IU, United Left), a cohesive coalition dominated by the Communist Party. The PSOE, in this sense differently from the Italian PD, was able to occupy a hegemonic position among the popular sectors, through both identitarian and clientelist linkages in the least economically advanced regions, such as Extremadura and Andalusia (Watson, 2008). IU was gradually confined to some regional strongholds (such as Asturia), as well as overrepresented among well-educated socioeconomic strata, and remained trapped into a minoritarian position, with a gradual loss of militants and uncapable of renewing its ossified organization and ideology. At the same time, its participation in several ruling leftist coalition at the regional level affected its credibility as an “alternative” actor (interviews with Emilio León23 and Laura Haba24).

The pattern of social mobilizations. The most important social mobilization in reaction to the socioeconomic crisis and the austerity measures in Spain, in terms both of number of participants and of its resonance in the public sphere, has been, without any doubt, the Indignados’ movement (Hughes, 2011). It has been rightly argued (Portos, 2016) that the social mobilizations that shaped the Spanish society, particularly in the 2011-2013 period, stemmed from a social milieu having its roots in several, pre-existing movements (such as the okupas, the Global Justice Movement, those involved in housing rights’ issues, or the student mobilizations against the EU “Bolonia Plan”, as confirmed by several interviews with Podemos’ representatives). Nonetheless, the assembly-style, horizontal demonstrations that occurred since the 15th March 2011 in Puerta del Sol (Madrid), Plaça Catalunya (Barcelona) and several other Spanish cities, came as a surprise even for the own, “old-guard” militants that animated the previous – and far less widespread – Spanish social mobilizations (several interviews with Podemos and unions’ leaders). The occupations (acampadas) of the main Spanish

22 Podemos’ member of the Valencian Country Parliament.
23 Podemos’ member of the Asturian Parliament.
24 Member of the Podemos’ Direction in Catalonia.
squares by “common citizens” that voluntarily organized into several, issue-based assemblies in a participative and deliberative way responded to an on-line viral campaign animated by a few small collectives, such as Direct Democracy Now! And Youth Without Future (Guedán, 2016).

It could be argued that the influence of the pre-existing social movements was higher during the following phase, when several local assemblies were created as a “follow-up” of the 15-M, and when new social campaigns emerged, such as the different Mareas (waves) protesting against the cuts on education and public healthcare, among other issues. One of the most important and participated movement has been represented by the PAHs, a network of local movements defending the rights of those families suffering from banks’ evictions – following the explosion of the housing bubble - through the direct organization and empowerment of the own victims (Colau and Alemany, 2012; Flesher Fominaya, 2015; interviews with PAHs activists in Barcelona). The organizational fragmentation of the Spanish social movements has been counterbalanced by their ability in forging strong alliances between them, benefitting from (and contributing to renew) the collective effervescence that erupted from the 15-M (Portos, 2016).

This “unified” (and unifying) cycle of protests mainly advanced universalist demands, which included not only an appeal for ending with the austerity measures and the implementation of strong public responses to the social emergency, but also a call for the restoration of the popular sovereignty, “stolen” by an economic elite and the political class in its entirety, alleged of being attentive and accountable to other, more powerful interests than those of the People. The 15-M represented the prototype of what Aslanidis defined as populist social movements, along with the “Occupy Wall Street” movement and the Greek aganaktismenoi. Nonetheless, after the initial effervescence, when the 15-M crystallised in the local assembles and in the Mareas, the social mobilizations seemed to take a more traditional form, in which the most committed militants – sometimes in a (suspicious) alliances with more or less “institutional” or well-organised actors, such as the unions (both mainstream and antagonist) and some far-Left groups – mainly contributed to the sustainability of the protests over time (several interviews with Podemos’ leaders and with Ermengol Gassiot25; see also Portos, 2016). Crucially, the commitment of respecting the horizontal ésprit that animated the 15-M prevented the movements from assuming more institutionalised forms: this, in turn, limited their mobilising capacity over time and was incompatible with the building of a bottom-up electoral project aiming at entering into the institutions and achieving more stable results than those obtained through unconventional means (Guedán, 2016).

The Winning Project. The Podemos’ “Sophisticated Populism”. Podemos does not aspire to represent the 15-M, and does not conceive itself as the “political instrument” of any social movements. Nonetheless, the “hypothesis” that led a few political scientists to the decision of creating a political party was based on the change in the Spanish political environment by the protest cycle inaugurated by the demonstrations in the Puerta del Sol square. Said otherwise, Podemos represents the attempt of bringing into the institutions the main demands of several horizontal movements such as the 15-M, the Mareas or the PAHs (Platforms of the Victims of Banks’ Evictions), which achieved a strong resonance in the public sphere. The “hypothesis Podemos” relied on the belief that the public institutions and the own nation-State still keep an extraordinary potential for promoting social change, notwithstanding its power erosion in favour of supranational and financial institutions (Errejón and Mouffe 2015).

Almost all the Podemos’ leading figures, both at the national and regional levels, have an academic background and/or have taken part of the cycle of mobilizations before and later the 15-M. Even at the grassroots levels, and differently from the M5S, the double militancy (in the party and in civic associations or social movements) is majoritarian, according to the interviews I collected in different Podemos’ Territorial Circles in Barcelona and Madrid and with several Podemos’ members

25 General Secretary of the CGT’s Catalan branch.
of regional parliaments. Podemos, thus, has been able to become the “political space” to which many militants and “activated” citizens converged, due to the inclusive and populist frame elaborated by the partisan leaders.

Said this, the Podemos’ project is mostly a top-down one. Since its origins it was centred on the charismatic and media-friendly figure of Pablo Iglesias, whose face represented the first party’s brand in the electoral ballots for the 2014 European Parliamentary Elections. At the First Citizens’ Assembly (i.e., the Party’s Congress) held in Vistalegre (October, 2014), the party adopted a strongly hierarchical organogram, in order to build a smooth and efficient “electoral war machine” instead of a more horizontal internal organization (even according to almost all the judgments reported by the Podemos’ interviewees). For sure, each internal office must be elected through the vote of the party’s members. The low barriers to membership and the use of on-line voting procedure allow for high levels of participation of the bases: for instance, over than 150,000 members participated to the voting procedures for the Second Citizens’ Assembly (February 2017). Moreover, Podemos, similarly to the M5S, strongly relies on the social media for its communicative strategy, and it has created several web-based tools in order to allow its membership for advancing legislative and programmatic proposals, although the relevance of these initiatives have remained quite limited (interview with Sergio Arroyo).

Nonetheless, the party’s elite (the inner circle led by the Podemos’ founders) opted for a procedural voting system favouring the victory of “its” candidates in the elections for the First Citizens’ Congress (i.e., the Party’s internal “Parliament”). At the same time, the elections for the main offices at the regional level saw the victory (with some exceptions) of those lists that received the “endorsement” of the national Directive Committee, thus increasing the “homogeneity” of the party’s elites throughout all the different levels (interviews with Rodrigo Amirola – Member of the Podemos’ Political Secretariat – and with Luis Alegre – Former General Secretary of Podemos Madrid). Since the promising results achieved in the European Parliamentary Elections, the number of the Podemos’ Circles (i.e., partisan sections, territorially or issue-based, which do not require to be a Podemos’ member in order to join) skyrocketed: nonetheless, the centralising process for the local elites’ selection approximates the construction of its organization to a process of territorial penetration more than diffusion, to use Panebianco’s terminology. In turn, the Circles have seen their relevance diminished, as their militants do not enjoy more “voice” in the Podemos’ internal functioning than the “on-line” members of the party.

This potential lack of incentives to the off-line participation has been partially addressed through the implementation of the party’s program Impulsa, which provides financial resources for the social, political and cultural initiatives organised by the Circles (interview with Sergio Arroyo). Moreover, during the lively debate for the internal electoral campaign for the Second Citizens’ Assembly (held in Vistalegre on February, 2017), it emerged the idea of strengthening the Circles through the destination of financial resources, in order to help building, thanks to the activities at the grassroots levels and in collaboration with the movements, that National and Popular Movement that Podemos aspire to be.

Therefore, in Podemos coexists a typically populist, polarising and interclassist rhetoric against the “political and economic caste”, a strong, centralised leadership and a lively bottom-up participation of the bases. There is a clear tension between the willingness of “respecting” the spirit of the 15-M and its call for a socially progressive and democratic regeneration of the ossified Spanish democracy, with the need for building and consolidating a powerful and ambitious electoral project leaving a high room of manoeuvre for tactical adjustments to the party’s elites. The Municipalist Platforms joined by Podemos and ruling in Barcelona, Madrid and several other Spanish cities make

26 Member of the Podemos’ Secretariat of Participation.
the aspiration of facilitating the active citizens’ involvement in the decision-making process even clearer.

The Podemos’ militants and party’s elites generally offer critical judgments about the Spanish mainstream unions. Differently from the M5S, the UGT and the CC.OO. are not accused of “over-protecting” particular sectors, although there is some recognition about the lack of attention paid by the unions to the problem of job precariousness. In my interviews, I have mainly collected “leftist” critiques towards the mainstream unions’ behaviour. The critics often point at the system of public funding to the unions and at the strong links existing between the Leftist traditional parties and the union organizations, which would affect their capacity of acting as “autonomous” actors exclusively devoted to the defence of the workers (interviews with two Podemos’ regional councillors in the Basque Country). Several Podemos’ representatives have stressed the gradual transformation of the unions into “corporatist” organizations, which would have abandoned their social and political role and mainly dedicated to bureaucratic tasks (*sindicalismo de servicios*), thus losing any meaningful capacity of mobilising their memberships in broader political campaigns. Particularly during the Podemos’ earlier phase, there was a strong critique against the Spanish “bisindicalism”, whose elites were fully included into the political caste dominating the country in detriment of the People. Many interviewees have expressed their preferences – as a “model” of what syndicalism should be – towards some radical, minoritarian unions, particularly active in specific regions, such as ESK (Basque Country), the SAT (Andalusia), as well as the CGT. In fact, several militants – and even local leaders – come from the rank-and-files of these minoritarian organizations.

According to Bruno Estrada, a Podemos’ advisor in economic issues and a major figure of CC.OO., many of the tensions arisen between Podemos and the unions were due, to a certain extent, to the fact that the 15-M was a post-industrial phenomenon emerged from outside the workplaces, the typical “battlefield” of the unions. This, in turn, would have led to a sort of “misunderstanding” about the role and the tasks of the big unions, which, in turn, at the beginning assumed a “suspicious” stance towards the movements. According to Rodrigo Amírola (member of the Podemos Political Secretariat), the relationships have gradually improved also thanks to the influence by Podemos on national politics, thus pushing the unions to a more militant and combative stance.

The Spanish union leaders that I interviewed claimed for having strongly backed the Podemos’ proposals for new, universalist social policies, such as the introduction of a national basic income, in contrast with the behaviour of the Italian unions, more committed to policies aiming at the goal of full-employment. Nonetheless, Julen Bollain (a Basque regional councillor, one of the most important Podemos’ politician working on these issues) has offered quite a different portrait, accusing the “mainstream” unions of having offered a timid support, due – in his opinion – to their eventual loss of bargaining power that would derive from the introduction of such a measure. Interestingly, he also recognised that the behaviour of the Podemos’ elite has been particularly moderate: while the Podemos base consistently and repeatedly backed the introduction of the basic income into the party program, the national leaders have willingly downplayed this issue, considering it as a potential source of critiques by the political competitors.

As the survey data from the CIS (Center of Sociological Research) I analysed (and not reported here) clearly show, the electorate of Podemos is younger and more educated than the average. Podemos is well rooted in the urban areas, while it generally failed to attract vast consensus in the rural areas, whose leftist constituencies are still dominated by the PSOE. Interestingly, Podemos is overrepresented among the middle and middle-upper classes, although its voters tend to underestimate their self-placement in the social pyramid. Once controlled for age, it seems that the outsiders (both precarious and unemployed workers) are not overrepresented in the Podemos electorate, while opposite holds for the PSOE’s voters. It could be argued that, while the linkages between the PSOE and the popular sectors have resisted, particularly in the rural areas, Podemos has
been able to attract the constituencies more likely to identify with the spirit and the demands stemmed from the cycle of mobilization began with the 15-M.

Izquierda Unida clearly failed to take advantage of that contentious phase. Similarly to the unions, their leaders and militants “did not understand” what it was occurring in the Spanish squares. Its ossified, pyramidal and bureaucratic internal organization, its ideological sectarianism, its involvement in several regional alliances with the PSOE and its awkward attempts of co-optation of the libertarian and horizontal 15-M movement decisively affected the possibilities of IU of achieving a durable and consistent electoral growth. IU was not perceived as an alternative actor able to respond to the demands of democratic regeneration that the demonstrators were advancing. The party remained confined to its traditional constituencies, the middle-class, progressive sectors, typically occupied in the public sectors and in big firms, where the union density is much higher.

**Conclusion. Discussing the External Validity of the Model.**

The argument proposed in this long paper can shed new light on the major changes, at the party system level, triggered by the crisis of the neoliberal model and by the popular mobilizations in dualized societies. The argument helps also to explain why certain political projects were able (or not) to take advantage of the new socioeconomic and political contexts emerged in the aftermath of the crisis. Apart from the four cases synthetically described above, I argue that the theoretical framework can be useful to understand, with a comparative perspective, other national evolutions of the leftist side of the political spectrum, both in Latin America and in Southern Europe.

In neither of the case-studies described here the union organisations played a leading role in the antineoliberal mobilizations, with the partial Argentine exception. In contrast, at least in two cases we could observe a “union-led pattern of social mobilizations” against the neoliberal model. I refer to the Uruguayan and Portuguese cases. In both cases, we observed the resilience of an “oppositional union-party hub” (see Table 1), whose political expression were the Frente Amplio (FA, “Broad Front”) in Uruguay and the Communist Party (PCP) in Portugal.

The Uruguayan Frente Amplio (FA) was already enjoying a gradual but constant electoral growth in the decade before the 2001 crisis (Lissidini, 2002). The Uruguayan peak union confederation (PIT-CNT) traditionally holds a high degree of autonomy (Collier and Collier, 1991; Doglio et al., 2004); still, the FA is clearly the political referent of most the unions' militants. There is a historical 'brotherhood' (hermandad) between the unions and the party (Lanzaro 2004). During the Nineties, when the two traditional, catch-all Uruguayan parties (the “Whites” and the “Coloureds”) attempted at implementing several market-friendly reforms, the FA and the PIT-CNT consistently opposed them, also by calling on several popular referenda against the measures. The retrenchment of the Uruguayan state, in turn, limited the access to the public resources for clientelistic purposes to the traditional parties, thus weakening the historical linkages between them and the Uruguayan outsiders (Luna, 2014).

The Uruguayan unionism is historically characterised by high union density, both a cause and a consequence of the most advanced (albeit highly segmented) Latin American welfare state. The weight of the PIT-CNT in the FA’s internal decision-making and electoral mobilization is undeniable, particularly thanks to the links between the unions and the Socialist Party, one of the many fractions composing the FA (Handlin and Collier 2008; Lanzaro 2011). The FA is also a party enjoying a strong participative culture, and a high degree of grass-roots capacity of mobilization; its presence

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27 The rise of the PT in Brazil shares several common features with the case of the Uruguayan Frente Amplio, and could be easily interpreted through my framework. For the sake of space, I opted for not analysing it here.
among the urban informal workers, once negligible, got bigger during the Nineties, mainly thanks to the party’s fraction led by Mujica (Movimiento por la Participación Popular – MPP, ’Movement for the Popular Participation; see Luna 2004).

Once in government, the FA not only tended to incorporate the PIT-CNT in the polity domain, allowing for important wage increases and further empowering the unions, but also implemented universalist social policies and fiscal reforms highly skewed towards the poorest sectors (and somewhat detrimental to the middle and lower-middle classes, which represent the bulk of the FA electorate: Lanzaro 2011).

Similarly, in Portugal the persistent oppositional role played by the Portuguese Left (divided into the PCP and the ‘Leftist Bloc’ [BE]) and by the majoritarian peak union confederation (the CGTP, strongly linked with the PCP) allowed for the political continuity. As in Uruguay, we did not observe the irruption of any, new political challenger: instead, the existing leftist political parties improved their electoral strength, jointly reaching one fifth of the popular vote and becoming, for the first time, essential allies for the election of a left-wing government led by the Socialists (De Giorgi and Santana-Pereira, 2015). As in Uruguay, the main union kept an antagonist stance, consistently refusing to enter into the forms of social dialogue developed in the pre and post-crisis periods (Campos Lima and Artiles, 2011; Costa and Estanque, 2012) and playing a major mobilising role during the anti-austerity popular mobilisations (Ramos Pinto and Accornero, 2013). According to Baumgarten and Carmo Duarte (2016),

“A strong anti-austerity civil society started to be a reality in Portugal in 2011. However, even though these new projects or networks succeeded in mobilising civil society between 2011 and 2013; about one year after the Troika has left the country, only some of them remain. The Portuguese social movement-based protest returned to silence, and mobilisation has almost exclusively become the resort of trade unions”.

In fact, all the studies quoted above agree with the centrality assumed by the CGTP and by the two Portuguese leftist parties even during the apex of the protests. Within all the major social movements emerged during the 2011-2013 phase, such as Geração à Rasca, the M12M movement, Que se Lixe a Troika or the coordinating platform “Democratic Congress for Alternatives” (CDA), the majority of the organisers were also militants of the CGTP, the PCP or the BE (Ramos Pinto and Accornero, 2013). The most extended and stable organizations was the Inflexible Precarious Workers movement (“Precarios Inflexiveis”, PI), whose leaders and militants mostly belong to BE. The Communists, after an initial phase marked by some “suspicions” towards the new movements – each of them stressed their “non-partisan” character – finally opted for a greater collaboration with them. In the Portuguese case, the movements found two institutional and “loyal” allies, one of them with strong links with the major Portuguese union. The Portuguese leftist parties were able to channel (and even to mobilise) the civil society, contributing to the stability of the party system and to their own electoral strengthening.

The major difference between the Portuguese and the Uruguayan cases is represented by the presence of two political parties occupying the Radical Leftist space. The Uruguayan FA, through its different fractions, has been able to subsume the insiders and the outsiders into its electorate. In contrast, the two Portuguese leftist parties established a de facto “division of the tasks”. The Communists’ electorate is on average much older, more rural and more unionised than the Leftist Bloc’s one. Arguably, BE was more able to take advantage of the mobilizations in order to gain visibility and experience a major electoral growth, while the PCP’s growth was more modest. In turn,
the modest presence of BE in the workplaces confined it to the representation of the most progressive segments of the younger cohorts (Lisi, 2013). Albeit its “compromission” with the very first measures imposed by the Troika, the Portuguese Socialists (PSP) have been able to retain most of their voters. The heterogeneous character of its constituencies, as well as the progressive political positions assumed since 2012, helped the PSP to keep its centrality in the national party system (Lisi, 2016).

In contrast with the Portuguese and Uruguayan main unions, the Venezuelan and Greek ones played a very different – and complex – role during the contentious phases experienced by these two countries since the critical juncture represented by the neoliberal crisis. In both countries, the main peak union confederations were closely linked to a Social-Democratic party (AD – Democratic Action – in Venezuela and PASOK in Greece) that symbolised the “old regime”. The unavailability of any reliable institutional ally, and an extremely fragmented “pattern of mobilization”, paved the way for the emergence of Chavism in Venezuela, while in Greece, in this sense similarly to the Argentine Kirchnerism, the social movements found an existing party that – through ideological and organizational resources – was able to dialogue successfully with them, becoming their referent party.

Venezuela was ruled since 1958 by a duopolistic partidocracia, composed by two typical cartel parties (the left-of-centre AD and the Christian-democratic COPEI), which governed the country in a consociative way, through their control of the public institutions (which resulted in an extensive spoil system) and their influence over almost all the Venezuelan intermediate bodies. The monopolist peak union confederation (CTV) did not represent an exception: apart from having a strong influence in the polity domain, the CTV enjoyed strong links with both the major parties, and particularly with AD.

The CTV actively reacted to the neoliberal measures that all the governments since 1988 tried to implement in order to correct the economic recession and the out-of-control public debt (Murillo, 2001). Nonetheless, both the unions and the employers’ associations had strong incentives to the maintenance of the consociative system (Ramos, 2002). As Crisp (2000: 173) argued, the dominant parties and interest groups “became a frozen status quo,” with institutional safeguards that allowed them to “control policymaking, exclude new groups from participating, and keep new issues off the agenda indefinitely”.

In 1989, the popular neighbourhoods in Caracas were shocked by the Caracazo, i.e. extended and violent riots and lootings – harshly repressed by the army - triggered by huge tariff increases established by President Carlos Andrés Pérez (the historical AD leader). The Caracazo represented the turning point of the recent Venezuelan history, inaugurating a cycle of large, fragmented and poorly organised social protests (López Maya, 1999; 2005), both among popular and middle classes, triggered by the governmental inefficiency in dealing with the economic decline, by the extensive cuts to the social spending and by numerous reported corruption scandals (Hawkins, 2010). As Roberts (2003: 50) put,

“an increasingly complex and diversified civil society was largely excluded from traditional corporatist consultative institutions (Crisp 2000), while the labor and business associations that did participate [in the protests] came to be perceived as narrow, politically compromised interest groups whose rent-seeking demands clashed with the realities of dwindling public resources, market reforms, and technocratic policymaking.”

The ‘ideal’ conditions for a populist entrepreneur appealing to the outsiders – the majority of the population, as well as the most affected and lacking institutional channels to expose their
grievances (Morgan, 2011) – were present. Chávez took advantage of this situation by advancing a populist discourse against the “old regime”. His biography, his antagonist stance and his ideological vagueness – particularly during his early political trajectory – attracted the Venezuelan popular sectors in an unprecedented way. At the beginning, Chávez replaced the party-based intermediation between the society and the state with a direct, personalistic relationship, although, when in government, he soon began building new, highly militant, territorial-based grass-roots organization backing his political project. Once in government, he implemented ambitious, pro-poor social policies – making extensive use of the intermediation of his organised bases - in order to counteract the ‘institutional bloc’ and to change the Venezuelan institutions towards a plebiscitarian direction (Coppedge, 2005; Ellner, 2008; Gómez et al., 2010).

During the Nineties, an autonomous and vibrant ‘civil society’ (mainly diffused among the upper strata: Ramírez, 2003) developed, claiming for transparency and the end of the partidocracia. Moreover, the CTV’s monopoly was challenged by alternative trade unions (known as Nuevo Sindicalismo: Hellinger, 1996), born among metal and textile workers and led by a new leftist party (La Causa R, Radical Cause) that attempted to take the place of AD as the main social-democratic party, enjoying a brief electoral zenith.

However, none of these parties and organizations appealed successfully to the growing informal and unemployed sectors, who, while sharing with the formal workers and the upper strata a strong rejection of the ‘old parties’, lacked the resources of the latters, in economic and political terms (Levine, 2002). La Causa R, despite some attempts, failed to appeal to the popular sectors and became the expression of the “enlightened” middle class (Hellinger, 1996), showing a ‘responsible’ attitude that rapidly compromised its pretension of being a ‘new’, ‘different’ party (Ramírez, 2003).

In sum, the Venezuelan evolution has several parallels with the Italian one. The Chavist grass-roots organizations, differently from the M5S’ ones, were created in a second phase, while the ideological position of the Chávez’ movement – particularly since 2002 – clearly moved to the left. In Venezuela, moreover, we observed an even tougher position assumed by the populist project against the labor movement, due to its entrenchment with the partidocracia. Nonetheless, the political processes conducing to their rises were strikingly similar: in a context marked by fragmentary – across territorial and sectorial lines – popular mobilizations, both the Chavez’ and the Grillo’s movements were able to articulate most of the popular demands around an unifying frame (the rejection of the political parties and of the corrupted practices), an ill-defined ideological position and a centralised and poorly institutionalised internal organization, appealing particularly to the outsiders.

Finally, I argue that the Syriza’s rise presents several similarities with the Kircherist experience. As in Argentina, the Greek major parties have a long tradition of party-patronage and clientelistic practices (Pappas and Aislanidis, 2015). In particular, the PASOK resembled in many aspects the Argentine PJ: a populist party, both socialist and nationalist during the Eighties, able to reach an hegemonic position in the Greek party system thanks to both identitarian and clientelistic linkages and to its strong control over the peak union confederations (GSEE and ADEDY, representing respectively the workers occupied in the private and in the public sectors) (Lefeber, 1990; Sotiropoulos, 1994; Afonso et al., 2015).

The unions played a complex role in the Greek popular mobilizations. Albeit their links with the ruling parties (and particularly with the PASOK), the unions – fully in line with their confrontational tradition – strongly protested against the implementation of the austerity measures and, in general, the end of the Greek social dialogue that provided them with a strong voice in the polity domain (Kousis and Karakioulafi, 2013). Notwithstanding their participation in the protests and their comparatively high union density, the Greek unions found themselves highly discredited among the population, due both to their links with the “mainstream” parties and to their lack of representativeness outside their core-constituencies (white collars, civil servants and firms with more
than 20 employees: see Kousis and Karakioulafi, 2013; Vogiatzoglou, 2014). Still, their decision for assuming a confrontational stance decisively contributed to limit their “loss of popularity”.

Although the Greek cycle of contention experienced some moments of convergence between the different political groups and parties, social movements and labor unions (both “mainstream” and antagonist) protesting against the Troika and the national governments, the pattern observable seemed highly fragmented. In fact, the movements involved spammed from the sectarian and vanguardist Communist Party (KKE) – along with PAME, its “unionist arm” – to the extra-parliamentary Left, and from the aganaktismenoi (the Greek Indignados, a multiclassist and non-partisan movement: Rudig and Karyotis, 2013; Simiti, 2014) to the Nazi party Golden Dawn.

Within this fragmented scenario, Syriza was the only major actor able to play a “nodal” role in the protests (Tsakatika and Eleftheriou, 2013; Kanellopoulos and Kostopoulos, 2013), in fact contributing to diminish this fragmentation. Contrarily to the sectarian KKE, the Syriza’s grass-roots were able to establish strong connections with both antagonist and mainstream trade unions and social movements, obtaining a ‘respected’ status among the social movements’ militants. By abandoning the old “leftist discursive toolbox” and embracing a more inclusive, antagonist, “anti-colonialist” (Stavrakakis and Siomos, 2016) discourse, Syriza was able both to dialogue with most of the mobilised organizations and to expand its electoral appeal.

Once a party mainly attractive for young, urban, well-educated and “postmaterialist” voters, Syriza became the major Greek party, clearly overrepresented among the most affected sectors (Teperoglou et al., 2015). The PASOK was confined to single-digit electoral percentages and to the representation of middle-upper classes fearing a Grexit and of its most “loyal” (and older) constituencies. Differently from the Argentine PJ, the PASOK opted for assuming a “responsible” position, which caused huge political costs. It could be said that the PASOK’s reliance on purely clientelist linkages proved to be fatal, once they became unsustainable due to the economic conjuncture.

Syriza has been described (Tsakatika and Eleftheriou, 2013) as a loose coalition of small, leftist parties that, under the Alexis Tsipras’ leadership, assumed a clearly populist rhetoric, ‘owning’ the anti-austerity appeals in the institutional arena. Although the Syriza’s grass-roots actively participated in the popular struggles, the party’s internal structures remained quite isolated from the movements (Kouki, 2015), while Tsipras began centralizing the political decisions at the peak level. Thus, the party offered a charismatic leadership to the impoverished middle classes, a ‘militant’ side to the antagonist movements, while, at the same time, it did not refuse to play in the institutional arena, both in the parliamentary and in the syndical fields. It could be argued that, while Kirchner articulated his alliances from the institutions, Syriza did that in the streets. Both these political projects made use of anti-imperialist, progressive and inclusive discourses and took advantage of the “openness” (in terms of ideology and strategy) of the partisan structures.
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