ephemera: theory & politics in organization

# Unpacking party organizations

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*ephemera* is an independent journal, founded in 2001. *ephemera* provides its content free of charge, and charges its readers only with free thought.

**theory**

*ephemera* encourages contributions that explicitly engage with theoretical and conceptual understandings of organizational issues, organizational processes and organizational life. This does not preclude empirical studies or commentaries on contemporary issues, but such contributions consider how theory and practice intersect in these cases. We especially publish articles that apply or develop theoretical insights that are not part of the established canon of organization studies. *ephemera* counters the current hegemonization of social theory and operates at the borders of organization studies in that it continuously seeks to question what organization studies is and what it can become.

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**organization**

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Emil Husted, Mona Moufahim and Martin Fredriksson

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# Welcome to the party

Emil Husted, Mona Moufahim and Martin Fredriksson

## Introduction

As an organizational species, political parties seem to face impending extinction. No matter what yardstick we use to measure their vitality, political parties currently display an undeniable image of terminal crisis. Party membership is approaching rock bottom in most corners of the world, particularly in countries like France and the UK where less than two percent of the population are registered as rank and file (van Biezen et al., 2012). Similarly, voter turnout has plummeted worldwide since the middle of the twentieth century, currently reaching a level well below 70 percent (Solijonov, 2016). Voters' tendency to identify with specific parties is likewise declining due to the reconfiguration of class-consciousness and the emergence of more 'liquid loyalties' in the electorate (Ignazi, 2017: 201). Finally, people's trust in political parties is at an all-time low, with politicians deemed less trustworthy than complete strangers and more dishonest than second-hand car dealers (Newton et al., 2017). As such, it seems fair to conclude, as many have recently done, that the party is over (e.g. Holloway, 2002; Day, 2005; Rosanvallon, 2008; Castells, 2012; della Porta, 2013; Tormey, 2015; Hardt and Negri, 2017).

However, to paraphrase Mark Twain, the reports of the party's pending death are greatly exaggerated. Financially at least, political parties have never been stronger. Owing particularly to a significant increase in public funding since the 1980s, parties are today more resourceful than ever before. In fact, most

European parties receive more than two-thirds of their income from state subsidies alone (Falguera et al., 2014). This tendency has given rise to the much-debated 'cartel party thesis', which extends the seminal work of Robert Michels (1915) by suggesting that party organizations are increasingly becoming dependent on the state – and not members – for their survival (Katz and Mair, 1995; Katz and Mair, 2009). On top of this, a range of countries are currently going through a process of 'constitutionalizing' political parties, thereby acknowledging them legally as 'desirable and procedurally necessary for the effective functioning of democracy' (van Biezen, 2011: 187). The combination of growing public discontent and state consolidation have thus created a paradoxical situation in which political parties are powerful as ever yet increasingly seen as illegitimate representatives of common interests (Ignazi, 2017).

Within the past decade, however, a wave of young radical contenders has sparked a sense of party revitalization. *Podemos* in Spain, *Movimento 5 Stelle* in Italy, *SYRIZA* in Greece, *The International Pirate Party*, *En Marche* and *France Insoumise*, the *MAS* in Bolivia, the *Feminist Initiative* in Sweden, *The Alternative* in Denmark, and the pan-European *DIEM25* figure here as prominent examples. Inspired by 'new global revolutions' like the Occupy movement and Los Indignados (Mason, 2013), these parties have sought to restore the legitimacy of party politics by introducing a number of organizational innovations meant to increase membership participation. For instance, *Podemos* has redefined intra-party democracy by structuring its organization around local 'Circles' where members and non-members can deliberate about various policy issues in the absence of formal hierarchies (Pavía et al., 2016). Similarly, *The Alternative* has constructed its entire political program through a bottom-up process inspired by the open-source community (Husted and Plesner, 2017), while Jeremy Corbyn and the Momentum movement have managed to turn Britain's *Labour Party* into one of the biggest membership parties in Europe (Seymour, 2017). Toward the other end of the political spectrum, parties like the extreme-right *Alternative für Deutschland* and the arch-populist *Movimento 5 Stelle* have reconfigured national politics by relying heavily on Internet technology for mobilizing support and coordinating events (see Gerbaudo, 2019), whereas the Dutch

anti-Islam *PVV* has gone the opposite direction by creating a party with only one member (Mazzoleni and Voerman, 2017).

Such organizational innovations point to the need for a deeper understanding of how political parties have traditionally organized, and how this new wave of contenders challenges the dominant mode of coordination within institutionalized party politics. However, despite the abundance of research on political parties, we still know remarkably little about the inner-life of parties, as the scope of research is often limited to questions of formal structure, candidate selection, financing, and membership modalities. This means that classical organizational themes like culture, collaboration, identity, learning, strategy, decision-making, and management have been surprisingly underprioritized if not entirely neglected by the literature on party organization (see Barrling, 2013; Heidar and Koole, 2000; Lawson, 1994). In the mid-1990s, the renowned party scholar Peter Mair argued that, while there is a number of 'surprisingly evident lacunae' within the 'ever-growing cumulation of knowledge' relating to political parties, the 'empirically grounded study of parties as organizations (…) has long constituted one of the most obvious of these lacunae' (Mair, 1994: 1-2). Today, 27 years later, this lacuna persists as our knowledge of how party organizations work, change, and adapt remains frustratingly limited.

The absence of empirical studies of 'parties as organizations' is particularly surprising given the fact that classical texts on political parties emphasize precisely the question of organization as crucial to understanding party politics. For instance, Robert Michels (1915) famously characterized his iron law of oligarchy as a problem of *organization*, rather than of ideological dispositions. Similarly, Maurice Duverger (1954: xv) argued that modern parties are distinguished not by their actual policies or by the composition of their membership base, but by the 'nature of their organization'. Of course, such arguments have not gone unheard (see Dalton et al., 2011; Katz and Mair, 1994; Scarrow et al., 2017), but most contemporary studies of party organization approach the topic through quantitative methods and by relying almost exclusively on official sources of data like organizational charts, statutes, budgets, or membership statistics (Bolleyer, 2016; Gauja and Kosiara-Pedersen, this issue). Hence, within political science at least,

qualitative and 'immersive' accounts of party organization seem close to non-existent (for important exceptions, see Aronoff, 1993; Kertzer, 1996; Faucher-King, 2005; Anria, 2019).

The same is true for research on parties within organization studies. Here, however, the problem is not methodological or analytical but empirical: while political scientists have deployed a somewhat restricted understanding of what it means to study party organizations, organization scholars have generally overlooked political parties as interesting study objects (Husted et al., 2021). Save for a handful of recent examples (Husted and Plesner, 2017; Karthikeyan et al., 2016; Moufahim et al., 2015; Ringel, 2019; Sinha et al., 2021), parties largely escape the analytical gaze of organization scholars. Even a journal like *ephemera*, which prides itself on promoting unconventional and critical work at the intersection of 'theory and politics', has hitherto only published three papers that focus on political parties (Fredriksson Almqvist, 2016; Husted, 2018; Ince, 2011).

The purpose of this special issue is to remedy both shortcomings by allowing curious and creative scholars to push the boundaries for what party organization research might entail and, in doing so, to illustrate why parties are important study objects for organization scholars and social scientists more broadly. Relatedly, we also hope this issue will inspire activists around the world to abandon the belief that parties necessarily represent a dated organizational form that is incapable of responding to ordinary people's demands for a better life, but that it can be used actively to instigate social change and to 'prefigure' a more promising future (see Törnberg, 2021).

## Studying party organizations: A research agenda

In a recent article published in *Organization Studies* (Husted et al., 2021), we argue that there are at least five reasons why organization scholars should engage more actively with political parties. Based on these five reasons, we maintain that organization scholars can use parties as 'critical cases' (Flyvbjerg, 2006) that allow us to zoom in on dynamics that may be concealed or even suppressed in seemingly non-political organizations such as traditional business firms. This does not mean that these characteristics are

unique to parties. It merely means that they are more visible and therefore potentially more rewarding to study in party organizations. What follows is an overview of these main points.

First, political parties are interesting study objects for organization scholars because they, more than most other organizations, have to engage actively with strategies of *exclusion and inclusion*. While in-group and out-group dynamics clearly exist in all organizations (Luhmann, 2018), and perhaps particularly so in membership associations (Solebello et al., 2016), political parties rely much more explicitly on the exclusion of ideological dissidents to define and demarcate themselves from competing actors in the political landscape (Karthikeyan et al., 2016). For instance, while few business firms would admit to discriminating against certain groups in terms of recruitment or promotion, several parties on the far-right openly commit to such exclusionary practices. As such, studying political parties could exemplify how constructions of organizational identities are never ethically or politically neutral, since they always rely on the exclusion of certain interests and identities. Even parties that might be considered inclusive or progressive rely on exclusions to bolster their own organizational identity (Husted, 2018). Although this is perhaps not an entirely novel observation, the detailed examination of exclusion and inclusion processes within political parties could help organization scholars illustrate more vividly the political constitution of any given organization (see Moufahim et al., 2015).

Second, political parties tend to conduct their *infighting in the open*. While most organizations go to great lengths to hide internal conflicts (Contu, 2019), parties are often inclined – perhaps even forced – to display and act out their internal conflicts in public. Sometimes, this reflects a commitment to transparency and democracy (Ringel, 2019), in other cases competing fractions use public attention for strategic purposes (Kelly, 1990). Additionally, since parties typically represent a highly formalized mode of organization, their structural configuration is often geared to address internal conflicts, providing spaces such as annual conferences and political rallies where internal struggles can unfold and be observed in real-time (Faucher-King, 2005; Faucher, this issue). This habit of openly displaying internal conflicts makes political parties particularly suited to study how such

struggles unfold in practice, and how they produce certain organizational effects that would otherwise be hidden from public view (see Sinha et al., 2021).

Third, political parties rely heavily on active members who are *committed without being contracted* in any meaningful sense. Since the vast majority of party workers are not employed or salaried, their willingness to sacrifice time and money to work voluntarily for a political party reflects a strong normative and affective commitment to the organisation (Husted, 2020). In fact, unlike social movements and activist networks, political parties usually charge members with subscription fees, thereby rendering the entry barriers extremely high and the exit barriers equally low. Recalling the perhaps most recognized definition of organizational commitment as a 'partisan' and 'affective' attachment to the goals and values of an organization beyond its 'purely instrumental worth' (Buchanan, 1974: 533), political parties thus provide good case studies for investigating more closely how such commitment is forged and maintained in voluntary associations. They also allow scholars to theorize what technologies are conducive in terms of building strong commitment to certain progressive values such as democracy and democratic participation.

Fourth, as they are created and maintained by committed volunteers, political parties have to rely on *other modes of discipline* compared to most conventional organizations. The fact that very few active members are employed or contracted also means that parties have weaker formal means to control its members than employee-based organizations have (e.g. legal sanctions or material incentives). Political parties are thus forced to rely primarily on normative control mechanisms to ensure that members stay 'on board' and 'in line' (Rye, 2015). As such, what is sometimes described as 'party discipline' may be seen as an intensified version of traditional normative control, as observed in other kinds of organizations (Willmott, 1993), which is why it makes sense to think of parties more generally as critical cases of normative control regimes that can help us understand such mechanisms in general and the political dimension of normative control in particular.

Finally, political parties are currently involved in a transition *from bureaucracies to platforms* that is fundamentally reshaping many parts of society and its organizations. Hence, the present represents a particularly interesting time to engage more closely with parties as organizations, since contemporary parties have been forced to reconsider their modus operandi in light of recent technological developments (Ignazi, 2017). The rise of social media platforms as a dominant means of interaction reshapes not only how political parties communicate with followers and foes, but is also beginning to affect their very organizational structures (Fredriksson Almqvist, 2016). A new generation of 'digital parties' are increasingly employing platform technologies and logics to enhance internal communication and democracy (Gerbaudo 2019). Such new party models are relevant for organization scholars, not only because they draw inspiration from the world of business and entrepreneurship, but because their success represents profound institutional change.

These unique characteristics of political parties, along with the recent developments in the formation and organization of parties, makes it more relevant than ever to take a scholarly and activist interest in their organizational dimensions. In our view, such an approach needs to be alternative in two senses. It needs to be alternative in its approach and methods, involving not just quantitative methods and 'official' data, but also engagement with the inner-life of the party to understand the actual organization taking place 'on the ground' and not just 'on paper'. Relatedly, future research also needs to be open to alternative political organizations (Parker et al., 2014), not focusing exclusively on the bureaucratic machinery of the political parties of the past century, but also looking to the fringes to understand how new organizational ideas are emerging in marginal, and sometimes short lived, political parties.

In what follows, we will explain how the contributions to this special issue serves the purpose of promoting alternative party research – either by relying on unconventional methods or analytical strategies, by focusing on topics that usually escape the mainstream gaze, or by actively advancing the political interests of parties that may be deemed alternative in the normative sense.

## The contributions

We are proud to introduce the articles and research notes of this special issue, which will undoubtedly generate fruitful discussions and inspire future research about the organisation of political parties. All the papers make valuable contributions to the study of party organizations and address the topics and questions we have discussed above.

Anika Gauja and Karina Kosiara-Pedersen's article provides a useful start to this special issue, with their review of existing research on political party organization, and with their particular focus on the field of comparative politics. They discuss key areas of inquiry (namely party leadership, candidate selection, party membership, and regulation) and go on to discuss promising developments that hold important implications for party organizational research: the personalization of politics, the new forms of party affiliations, and the blurring of boundaries and/or the transition of social movements into political parties. Relatedly, and proving to be a popular area of research, the following papers study the so-called digital parties and their particular modes of organizing, their activist and entrepreneurial nature, and the specific challenges these 'new' parties grapple with.

Jasper Finkeldey discusses their personal experience as a member and candidate for the *Democracy in Europe Movement 2025* (DiEM25), running for the 2019 European elections in Germany. Beyond the value of the ethnographic insights illuminating the 'inner life' of this party, Finkeldey candidly addresses the many thorny challenges that the DiEM25 campaign faced due to its very nature as a social movement party in the competitive German political landscape. Finkeldey illustrates how the lack of resources coupled with the organizational complexity of the party, and an internal resistance by the 'movement' faction within the organization to embrace electoral politics, limited the ability of DiEM25 to perform well at the polls. As such, the text adds valuable nuance to the dominant portrait of digitalized 'movement parties' as political formations that successfully navigates the complexities that follow from the attempt to introduce movement tactics to the parliamentary arena (della Porta et al., 2017), while also supplying an

admirable example for how to engage actively and meaningfully with alternative parties.

Turning our attention to France, the issue also includes an article by Charles Barthold and Martin Fougère about the party *La Republique en Marche* (LaREM) and its strategic instrumentalization by Emmanuel Macron to secure power. The authors develop their discussion of this case of 'critical leadership' through an analysis inspired by Niccolò Machiavelli and Ernesto Laclau. They combine these vocabularies to explain how Macron, a quasi newcomer in French politics, seized opportunities in a political space saturated by contingency and achieved success for his hegemonic project. What is particularly interesting about this study is how a new (digitalized) party can be used by an individual to both renew and reinforce the political establishment. Hence, the paper goes beyond the theme of personalization, identified by Gauja and Kosiara-Pedersen among others, by illustrating how party organizations can become strategic tools in the hands of political strategists who know how to play the game of electoral politics. It also serves to introduce a sophisticated conceptualization of populism to the literature of party organization.

The next two contributions focus on the *Pirate Party*, which currently exists in no less than 36 countries around the world. Hallur Sigurdarson's article focuses on the *Icelandic Pirate Party's* organizational setup and the way the party operates and transforms by embracing complexity, as well as how it creatively engages with the ongoing construction of its so-called Core Policy. Basing their insights on a Deleuzian reading of the case and ethnographic interviews conducted with party members, Sigurdarson highlights the political entrepreneurial nature of the party in exploiting instability, ambiguity, and uncertainty by generating creative ideas and alternative solutions. As such, their study provides valuable insights for (political) entrepreneurship and management scholarships, but it also provides an inspiring example of how party organizations may be used by activists to instigate fundamental changes in otherwise stable societies.

In their study of the *German Pirate Party,* Leopold Ringel and Jenni Brichzin show how newly elected members of parliament had to promptly socialize

into 'professional politics' and accordingly adjust their identity and behaviour to fit unspoken rules and expectations. Ringel and Brichzin show how this transformation forces the Pirate Party members to reconsider some of the ideals regarding inclusive and participatory processes for decision-making, flat hierarchies, and comprehensive transparency that are central to the pirate ideology. Ringel and Brichzin's study highlights the tensions and conflicts that arise in the meeting between political bureaucracies and digital parties, and shows that while platforms might be an emerging organizational principle among new parties, the old political bureaucracies are still very much the dominant practice in professional politics. This insight is clearly worth keeping in mind for scholars and activists wanting to research and promote alternative party organization.

As a synthesis of the contributions that focus on digital parties, and based on his own extensive research on that very phenomenon (e.g. Gerbaudo, 2019), Paolo Gerbaudo offers an insightful discussion of the organizational transformation of political parties, and the shortcomings and challenges facing digital parties such as the Movimento 5 Stelle, Podemos, and the Pirate Party. Just like Ringel and Brichzin's study of the German Pirate Party, Gerbaudo's note scrutinizes the emergence of platform parties and ponders if and how organizational principles borrowed from the digital economy can be implemented in parliamentary politics. In the end, Gerbaudo concludes that while digital parties often envision more radical forms of democratic participation, their organizational structures tend to promote a more top down model of governance. In fact, rather than providing the infrastructure for proper political deliberations, the introduction of digital technology to political parties predominantly supports a bleak version of internal democracy that Gerbaudo refers to as 'plebiscitarianism 2.0' (see Husted, 2019).

Next, engaging with our thematization of *exclusion and inclusion* within political parties, Fabio Wolkenstein discusses the key integrative function traditionally performed by political parties, and explores the challenges facing contemporary parties that seek to integrate and make diverse constituencies feel part of a shared political endeavour. The text asks if and how political parties can integrate a multitude of supporters in a time when

the mass party and the dominant ideologies of the 20th century are giving way to new party formations and increasing social, cultural, and geographic fragmentation. As many of the new parties are nationalist or otherwise identity-based, and while not all contemporary parties necessarily aim to integrate all segments of citizens, this note cuts right to the heart of our first reason to study political parties, in the sense that it provides an illuminating discussion of parties as critical cases of organizational inclusion and exclusion. In conclusion, Wolkenstein calls for more sociological (and less 'asociological') research on the complexities that parties face when trying to integrate diverse and fragmented constituencies. This certainly seems like a call that could be heeded by *ephemera* readers.

Emma Crewe offers a comprehensive narrative in their research note, which engages with several topics highlighted in our research agenda section above. Arguing in favour of an immersive anthropological approach to the study of political parties, they provide a useful research agenda that aims to make sense of the relationships, the entanglements, the shapeshifting, the contradictions, and the dynamic complexities that emerge from studying parties from an anthropological perspective. Their methodological approach involves analyzing how the creation of temporalities, meanings, and symbols are used to set political agendas. In that regard, Crewe's note represents a good example of how political parties are excellent cases for analyzing the construction of alternative *modes of discipline* in ideological organizations, as well as for making sense of conflicts in organizations that conduct much of their *infighting in the open*. As such, this research note could be viewed as a substantiation of our call for more immersive accounts of the inner-life of party organizations.

Like Crewe, Florence Faucher provides a strong argument for an anthropological approach to the study of political parties. The author shows that political parties are, perhaps more so than traditional business firms, constituted by written rules and policy documents. Parties can also be seen as communities, or 'mini societies', shaped by their own political cultures, infused with norms and symbolic dimensions that are difficult to grasp. It is these norms and symbols that motivate the participants to get involved and stay involved, and they set the standards for action and interaction within the

organization. This immersive approach to political party research offers a nuanced and detailed account of motives and driving forces among the vast body of dedicated and unsalaried party functionaries. As such, it speaks to an additional reason we have highlighted to study political parties, as it uncovers the mechanisms and logics that motivate participants to be *committed without being contracted* in voluntary, ideological organizations.

Finally, we end this overview of contributions on a hopeful note (in a very literal sense). In a piece entitled 'Resources of history and hope', Owain Smolović Jones, Brigid Carroll, and Paresha Sinha reflect on their experience of loss and hope in relation to the British Labour Party's defeat in the 2019 elections. More generally, their note explores loss as a framework for the examination of political parties as repositories of care and hope in insider-studies of left-wing party formations. The authors conclude by making the case that insider research in political parties can engage with the contingencies of history through recovering and recomposing potent narratives that can act as guides for future research and practice. By focusing on the tensions, but also the interdependence, between hope and loss, this final note speaks to the resilience of participatory-based political organizations, as it helps us understand the motivation and relentless commitment of non-salaried party volunteers. Like all other texts included in this special issue, this contribution thereby addresses and extends our own reasons for studying political parties, as outlined above.

Looking back at the process of editing this issue, which began almost three years ago, we are once again confirmed in our belief that political parties represent a rich and unexplored fountain of opportunities for organization scholars and activists alike. It may be that the organizational species that we call political parties currently displays an undeniable image of terminal crisis, and that party organizations are among the most 'detested and hated' formations in representative politics (as David Hume (1742: 33) once remarked), but this should clearly not deter us from utilizing their scholarly and political value for progressive ends. Critical organization scholars have, for too long, preoccupied themselves with radical social movements and edgy activist networks, while leaving the study of parties entirely to political scientists and 'asociological' researchers. We hope that this issue will

illustrate the value of studying parties as organizations, and that organization scholars will use the present juncture to (re)discover political parties as interesting study objects. We also hope that both scholars and activists will direct their energy toward the advancement of alternative party research, and that they will employ new and creative methods to unpack the black box of party organization. Now is not the time to disengage from conventional politics. Now is the time for immersion. Welcome to the party.

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## the editors

Emil Husted is an associate professor at the Department of Organization at Copenhagen Business School and a member of the *ephemera* editorial collective. His research centers on the internal orchestration of political parties and social movements, often with a focus on the mediating role of digital technology.
Email: eh.ioa@cbs.dk

Mona Moufahim is a Senior Lecturer at the Stirling Management School at the University of Stirling. Her research focuses on identity, extreme right politics, and (political) marketing and consumption. Her research has been published in both management and marketing journals, such as Organization Studies, the Journal of Business Ethics, Tourism Management, Marketing Theory and the journal of Marketing Management. She has edited the forthcoming book titled Political Branding in Times of Political Instability and Uncertainty (Palgrave McMillan).
Email: mona.moufahim@stir.ac.uk

Martin Fredriksson is associate professor at the Department of Culture and Society (IKOS), Linköping University. He works in the intersection between law and cultural studies, studying areas spanning from the cultural history of copyright and the social implications of media piracy to questions of intellectual property rights and the protection of traditional knowledge. He has written extensively about the Pirate Party, the digital rights movement, and the political mobilisation against restrictive intellectual property rights regimes.
Email: martin.fredriksson@liu.se

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# The comparative study of political party organization: Changing perspectives and prospects

Anika Gauja and Karina Kosiara-Pedersen

## abstract

Political parties have been studied as organizations for more than a century. Over time the focus of party research has shifted, from normative concerns with organizational democracy to the comparative analysis of organizational evolution and party functions. In this article we document the trajectory of party organization research, analyzing the value of the comparative method and evaluating the predictive power of research in our field to consider how it may add value to the study of other types of organizations. We focus on four established fields: party leadership, candidate selection, party membership and party regulation, but also present some of the newest and most promising research themes in the field, including personalization, evolving forms of participation and affiliation, and the relationship between political parties as organizations and social movements.

## Introduction

Political parties are central actors in representative democracies. This centrality stems from their role as entities that nominate candidates for public elections and is a common theme of accepted definitions of what constitutes a political party – distinguishing them from other political organizations, such as interest groups. While parties have been assigned various functions

over time, which to different degrees follow from their nominating role (King, 1969; Pedersen, 1989), most definitions of political parties do not explicitly require that they have organizations. A minimalist account of democracy, for example, requires that parties compete at elections, not that each party is internally democratic (Allern and Kosiara-Pedersen, 2007).

Rather, the presence of an organizational form is a consequence of parties' character as collective actors – as entities designed to bring together groups of individuals to achieve common and coordinated political outcomes. Particularly since the 'heyday' of mass parties in the 1950s and 1960s (Scarrow, 2015), strong normative claims that political parties should be membership organizations have prevailed. This has shaped the character of party organization research, which has traditionally focused on political parties as membership organizations. In recent times this normative expectation has been challenged as member-less political parties have emerged (Mazzoleni and Voerman, 2017), but with or without members, political parties still organize.

The purpose of this article is to present how party organizations are studied within the field of comparative politics, and how this may add value to studies of other types of organizations. We assess the value of the comparative methodology, and critically analyze the predictive power of research in our field. We note, in particular, the shift from more 'big picture', normative accounts of the place of political parties in representative democracies and how they ought to be organized, to more specific accounts of the functions that parties perform in modern societies.

The first section of our article presents a broad snapshot of the tradition of party organization research, highlighting its normative origins. We follow this with a discussion of an important debate within comparative party studies around organizational change or decline. We then shift to outlining the main themes and research methodologies of a series of key projects on comparative party organizations. We focus, in particular, on four established subfields: party leadership, candidate selection, party membership and party regulation. The final section of the article presents some of the newest and most relevant research themes that are emerging in the field.

## The tradition

In the sub-field of comparative party politics, the term 'party organization' can be used to describe different phenomena. It is often used to denote that specific part of a political party that exists to support elected representatives and implies an administrative structure that may or may not be situated within a network of supporters and individual members. However, the phrase 'party organization' may also be used to describe more generally how a political party is structured – its form and governance arrangements. Organization can refer to the structure of a party and the relationships between its constituent actors in a formal sense – what appears in its constitution and is advertised on a party's website, for example – or it can refer to how a political party operates in practice. Party organization invokes the concepts of structure and agency and may be either a constraining or enabling force depending on how power is distributed within the association. It is the complex relationship between organization and control – how power is exercised and distributed – that has been of fundamental interest to comparative party scholars.

These broad questions of power share much common ground with studies of the internal dynamics of other collective political organizations, such as interest groups and social movements, which possess similar characteristics. As Allern and Bale (2012: 9-10) argue, all of these groups 'aggregate individual interests and preferences into collective demands and seek to influence and form the content of public policy'. They also face similar organizational pressures in mobilizing supporters and/or members and ensuring their organizational survival (Fraussen and Halpin, 2018). Understanding the key concerns of party scholars, and how these have changed over time, can reveal important parallels with other disciplines and subfields of political science.

It is now more than 100 years since the first (comparative) studies of party organizations saw the light of day, in particular Ostrogorski's (1903) study of parties in Britain and the United States (US) and Michels' analysis of the German Social Democrats, which formed the basis of his iron law of oligarchy (Michels, 1911). However, it was not until after World War II that political

party scholarship developed into a coherent field of research, in both Europe and the United States.

In 1950, the American Political Science Association's Committee (APSA) on Political Parties issued a report in defence of the role of political parties in modern American democracy, and argued the need for a stronger, responsible two-party system:

> Popular government in a nation of more than 150 million people requires political parties which provide the electorate with a proper range of choice between alternatives of action. The party system thus serves as the main device for bringing into continuing relationship those ideas about liberty, majority rule and leadership which Americans are largely taking for granted. (APSA, 1950: 22)

The APSA Report articulated a very clear normative role for parties, and their place in representative democracy. It was illustrative of the view that parties perform several crucial functions in modern systems of representative governance, which have informed and charted the direction for decades of party organization research. Put simply, political parties and the organizations that constitute them, create a chain of linkage between citizens and the state (see for example, Lawson and Merkl, 1988). In doing so, they reconcile and aggregate diverse and often conflicting interests in society, provide arenas for participation in politics, serve as vehicles for political communication, recruit political elites through processes of candidate selection and once elected to the legislature, perform a governance function. They represent diverse and partisan interests in society, and through the mechanism of regular general elections, act as a conduit through which the government can be held accountable.

To enable parties to effectively perform these functions, the APSA report recommended nothing less than a 'full scale transformation of American political parties' that centred on developing organizations – adopting more tightly controlled structures, party discipline in the Congress and a well-defined role for their grassroots members (Wickham-Jones, 2018: 2). The intention of the Report was to shape public debate, and though that never really occurred, the exercise represents an early example of party researchers

attempting to prescribe organizational forms, engage with political practitioners and influence public policy.

In Western Europe, party organizations attracted renewed attention after WWII. The original empirical studies of Ostrogorski (1903) and Michels (1911) were supplemented with what turned out to become 'classics' in the field, with further theoretical reflections on the differences in how parties organize. Unlike the APSA Report, which was concerned with delivering a prescriptive model of organization, these European studies sought to document the diversity of organizational forms. Duverger (1951) established two party 'types', namely the cadre party (dominated by elites) and the mass party (characterized by its membership structure). Kirchheimer (1966) contributed with the catch-all party type (sacrificing narrow ideology to appeal to as many voters as possible) and Panebianco (1988) with the electoral-professional party (prioritizing the instrumental goal of electoral success). These various party types, coherently presented together for the first time with Katz and Mair's own contribution, the cartel party (Katz and Mair, 1995) – which emphasized the collusive nature of party politics and the increasing embeddedness of these organizations within the state – provided a theoretical framework for understanding organizational structures in different social, technological and temporal contexts. Each party type was based upon the empirical world that the party researchers knew about. Theories developed on the basis of in-depth case studies and comprised a general overview of the state of parties at different points in time.

## Party decline or party change?

How political parties, as organizations, change over time has concerned party scholars working across many different subfields of political science (for example, comparative politics, political institutions, political and organizational sociology) for more than a century. However, real-world developments such as technological advances and the changing nature of social relations have been crucially important in driving the need for theoretical and explanatory advances. One of the key debates in current party

organization scholarship is the extent to which political parties as organizations are in decline, or whether they simply change over time.

In 1997, the organisers of a workshop at the European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR) Joint Sessions and a resulting special issue of the journal, *Party Politics,* cited the fact that 'after a few decades observing parties "decline" and then "renew", it was perhaps natural that more attention would be focused on how they got from there to here' (Harmel and Svåsand, 1997: 291). The questions these scholars identified in this research agenda were: What role do internal and environmental factors play in party change? How likely is change to occur? Is it reactive or proactive? Is it gradual or abrupt? And who are the relevant actors in the process of party change? In acknowledging that party change 'does not just happen', Harmel and Janda's (1994) integrated theory of party goals and party change incorporated three important explanatory and predictive elements, representing a significant advance in the field. The first was the recognition that change arises from both internal and external drivers. The second was the importance of 'party operatives', or key decision makers, in advocating for change. The third was the necessity of building a coalition of support to overcome the organizational resistance that is common to large organizations such as political parties. This scholarship represented a shift from asking *how* parties organize, to *why* organizations change over time and predicting their propensity to do so.

More than two decades on from the publication of the special issue, the context within which parties exist has altered quite significantly. Perhaps the greatest concern that overshadows studies of party organization is the collapse of formal party membership (van Biezen et al., 2012) and how this, in turn, impacts key party functions. With fewer members, political parties struggle to recruit candidates for public office, to develop policy proposals and to find campaigners to create links to voters and supporters through canvassing. The composition of parties looks less like the population. Recent research has confirmed that political party members are typically unrepresentative of the population: they are more likely to be older, male, and have a higher socio-economic status (Heidar and Wauters, 2019). Insofar as dwindling party memberships affect the performance of parties' participatory and representative functions, they also raise broader questions about the

continued capacity of parties to enhance the quality of democracy (van Biezen, 2014) – known broadly as the 'party decline' thesis. Although many are now questioning the 'golden age' of the mass party and regard it as a historical episode (see, for example, van Biezen and Poguntke, 2014), it still carries significant weight as a normative model of how parties should be organised (Gauja, 2015).

Despite public acceptance of parties as indispensable political actors, perceptions of parties are generally negative (Webb, 2009) and few believe they actually care what people think (Dalton and Weldon, 2005). In addition to declining membership, consistent empirical evidence across the board in advanced industrial democracies suggests that party activism, electoral turnout and campaign participation is dropping (Whiteley, 2011; Siaroff, 2009; Franklin, 2004) and that partisan attachments have significantly weakened (Dalton, 2000). This is, in turn, related to the argument that political parties have shifted from voluntary organizations, firmly anchored in civil society, to agents of the state – indistinguishable from one another in policy terms, and offering few genuine opportunities for political participation (Katz and Mair, 2018).

Many of the debates over decline in party scholarship parallel those in social movement and interest group studies. As early as the late 1970s McCarthy and Zald (1977) documented the transformation of classical social movement organizations to professional organizations, characterized by paid staff and supporters who preferred to donate money rather than volunteer their time to the cause. As Fraussen and Halpin (2018) note, similar arguments around the trend to professionalization in organizations have been made with respect to interest groups, not-for-profits and other civil society organizations (see, for example, Skocpol, 1999; Jordan and Maloney, 1997).

Returning to parties, there is, however, a certain scepticism of the party decline thesis (see, for example Reiter, 1989). While membership crises might seem acute at the time of research/writing, Harmel and Janda (1994) note that much of the literature on the decline of party systems in the 1980s was temporally specific: stimulated by the 'real or perceived "decline" of political parties in industrialised societies' (Lawson and Merkl, 1988). When assessing

party decline, it is important to distinguish between parties' relationships with the electorate (trust, turnout etc.) and parties as organizations (Webb, 2009). While the jury is still out in regard to the former, with the latter understanding, the conclusion seems to be change rather than decline. In light of declining membership figures, parties have replaced dues with public financing, members' policy input with focus groups and staff, and members' labour with professional campaigning techniques etc. As organizations, it could be argued, parties are thriving with more resources (financing and staff) available. This is a debate that transcends political parties and suggests that the main issue at stake is not necessarily a particular organizational form, but how organizations perform their linkage functions.

## Party organization research

Party organization research has yielded the empirical basis for the perspective that political parties are changing rather than declining. From the 1980s onwards, European party research moved forward on the basis of extensive comparative data collection to investigate patterns of organization and change over time. Kenneth Janda contributed more than two decades of work in 1980 by publishing a database on parties' organizations that drew on both primary and secondary sources (Janda, 1980), and in the last half of the 1980s, Richard Katz and Peter Mair (1992; 1994; 1995) launched the project that would become decisive for the renewed interest in comparative party organization research. The purpose of the Katz and Mair project was to show how party organizations had changed over the 1960-1990 period. Twelve country experts provided data sourced from party rules, accounts and other official material as well as information provided by party central offices, e.g. on the number of staff, membership figures and the share of women in national committees.

The Katz and Mair project laid if not *the* then at least *a central* cornerstone for modern comparative party organization research. It shifted the scope of studies from in-depth party cases to a more general analysis of specific party functions, producing a wealth of data on the formal organizations of 79 parties from 1960-1990, e.g. on parties' formal structure, number of staff,

representation of women and income profiles (Katz and Mair, 1992), twelve country studies (Katz and Mair, 1994; Bille, 1997), and some comparative analyses on candidate nomination (Bille, 2001) and party financing (Pierre et al., 2000). In addition, they, together with Janda (1980), pointed to the importance of placing party research within a comparative approach, and furthermore, established a collective of country expert party scholars, which could be replicated by scholars in other areas of organizational studies. This data enabled an examination of the differences and similarities in organizational approaches between parties and countries, as well as over time.

Theoretically, Katz and Mair also made a substantive impact on the field of party organization research. The journal 'Party Politics' was established in the wake of the renewed interest in party research, and the first article in the journal was Katz and Mair's (1995) 'cartel party thesis'. In many ways, this article is central for party organization research today. Moving on from elite, mass and catch-all party types, they present the cartel party model as characterized by the individualization of party member rights, the blurring of the distinction between members and supporters, public financing of parties, and privileged access to state media. The model was formulated on the basis of the collection of comparative data across a large number of parties and countries and highlights the importance of comparative research methods in generating theories and models of organization, that can be tested by scholars in future research.

Indeed, the cartel party thesis has sparked continuing research and robust discussion within the discipline (Katz and Mair, 2009; 2018). Not all scholars agree that it is the dominant model of party organization (see for example, Koole, 1996), and debates exist around the applicability of the model to specific parties and national contexts. While several studies have shown that parties have the attributes of the cartel party type at the organizational level (Pedersen, 2004), whether or not entire party systems operate as cartels in limiting political competition through the selective provision of public funding and privileged access to state media is not so clear. The model also potentially resonates with the evolutionary trajectory of other organizations, such as interest groups, which have traditionally had strong roots in civil

society but now comprise 'checkbook members' and are highly dependent on state resources (see, for example, Bolleyer, 2018).

Two of the country experts in the Katz and Mair project, Thomas Poguntke and Paul Webb, along with renowned party scholar Susan Scarrow, initiated a continuation and renewal of the data collection on party organizations in the 'Political Parties Database Project' project (PPDB, see www.politicalpartydb.org). As in the case of the Katz and Mair project, material and data is collected and coded by country experts. The PPDB updates data on party organization variables previously collected in the Katz and Mair project, but also includes additional variables that allow for the analysis of new aspects of party organization, for example, parties' use of the internet. The range of countries has been expanded from twelve West European countries and the US to all of Europe as well as countries and parties across the rest of the democratic world. The first round (2011-2012) included data from 140 parties in 25 countries, while the second round (2017) includes more than 250 parties in 42 countries and is continuously expanded. The PPDB dataset enables global comparative studies and a comparison across both parties and countries.

The PPDB project leaders chose not to collaborate on single country or party studies but focused upon data collection, providing public access to the data, and thematic comparative analyses (Poguntke et al., 2016; Scarrow et al., 2017). Key analytical themes include how party organizations are financed (van Biezen and Kopecký, 2017), how parties collaborate with interest organizations (Allern and Verge, 2017), and whether or not they are internally democratic (von dem Berge and Poguntke, 2017; Bolin et al., 2017). But the focus is also on the implications of party organization, e.g. party financing and responsiveness (Lobo and Razzuoli, 2017), candidate nomination and gender representativeness (Pruysers et al., 2017), and rules of enrollment and party member activism (Kosiara-Pedersen et al., 2017).

Both the Katz and Mair and the PPDB projects rely on party statutes as the primary source of empirical data on the nature of party organizations. Katz and Mair (1992) made a major argument for the relevance and importance of statutes as the 'official version' of party organization, because the rules set

out in party statutes provide the framework within which the party organizes. While not all procedures might 'follow the book', if disagreement occurs, the entitled actors will make use of the statutes. These documents enable party structures and processes to be objectively known, traced over time and therefore provide a foundation from which further studies might be conducted. While not all parties publish their statutes, this is increasingly common in established democracies, and sets political parties apart from many other civil society and business organizations, whose constituting documents remain private. Hence, the availability of party statutes enables the collection and analysis of comparative data that is simply not feasible if these documents are not in the public domain.

Of course, the statutes – and the official story of a political party – do not always prove to be the real story of how these organizations operate. While party research has not studied all the ways in which parties in their praxis deviate from the official story, it has at least to some extent studied this deviation with respect to some of the most important decisions within the party – namely party leader and candidate selection, to which we now turn.

## Subfields of party organization research

We now present the central, specialized subfields within party organization research, which go to three main questions: who constitutes the organization, how is it resourced and how are its key personnel selected? We focus on party leadership selection, candidate nomination, party membership and party regulation, since these are – and have always been – the central aspects of concern for party organization scholars, as depicted in the various party types presented above. Party leadership and candidate selection are two of the three most important indicators of intra-party democracy (Cross and Katz, 2013; Bolin et al., 2017), while party membership and legal regulation (especially the intersection between regulation and party financing) are two important indicators of party resources and legitimacy (Poguntke et al., 2016; Scarrow et al., 2017).

*Party leadership*

The comparative study of leadership selection has become a rapidly expanding field of inquiry, anchored in foundational studies undertaken, for example, by Cross and Blais (2012a; 2012b) and Pilet and Cross (2014). A growing literature considers both the factors leading to change in the processes of selecting party leaders and their implications (see, for example, Sandri et al., 2015; Schumacher and Giger, 2017; Gauja, 2017; Quinn, 2012; Kenig, 2009; Cross et al., 2016). These studies, many of which are 'large n' comparative works, examine the electoral and organizational contexts of parties adopting leadership selection reforms, the impact of a more inclusive selectorate on the leadership contests – for example, the diversity of candidates and those selected, and the implications for parties' subsequent electoral success.

Reflecting the approach taken with more general studies of party change, research has shown that reforms to the leadership selection process are more likely to occur when parties suffer electoral setbacks (Cross and Blais, 2012a) and should be linked with three pervasive trends, largely external to the organization: the personalization of politics, increasing social demands for direct democracy and declining party memberships (Wauters, 2010). Consequently, parties in many Western democracies have expanded their leadership selection processes from closed events involving party elites to enfranchise their members (Pilet and Cross, 2014). In some cases, such as open primaries, citizens who are not party members may also participate (Sandri et al., 2015). Yet, changes to party rules and processes have not necessarily led to substantive democratic outcomes. Kenig (2009), for example, shows that while more inclusive leadership selection contests produce more competitors, this does not necessarily lead to closer races. Furthermore, studies that have examined the characteristics of party leaders reveal that they are predominantly male, aged over 50 and have significant political experience (Pilet and Cross, 2016).

*Candidate selection*

Candidate selection is the process by which a political party decides who its officially endorsed election candidates will be. As the defining characteristic

and one of the principal activities of political parties, it is well regulated (Bille, 2001) and crucial to understanding where power lies within parties and how it is exercised. It is a high-stakes activity, involving personal, professional and partisan ambitions, but it also offers 'the best opportunity for rank-and-file voters to exercise influence within their party and to have an (indirect) influence on public policy' (Cross, 2008: 598). In addition to managing potentially destructive contests, the rules that political parties adopt to select their candidates should also reflect the organizational culture of the party and its ideology, balancing these considerations against electoral imperatives such as finding popular candidates in a unified and efficient way. Candidate selection is equally important outside the party as it influences the choices before voters, the composition of parliaments, cohesion and discipline within parliamentary groups, the interests most likely to be heard in policy debates, and legislative outcomes. According to Hazan and Rahat (2010: 10) 'candidate selection affects the fundamental nature of modern democratic politics and governance'. Given the importance of the process, it is somewhat surprising that it was only in 1988 that the first cross-national study of candidate selection was published: Michael Gallagher and Michael Marsh's (1988) edited book, *Candidate selection in comparative perspective: The secret garden of politics*.

Like leadership selection, studies of candidate selection have documented and analysed how the process has changed over time, focusing in particular on who participates, in addition to evaluating the outcomes for representative democracy. Some two decades after Gallagher and Marsh (1988), Hazan and Rahat's (2010) landmark cross-national study of candidate selection processes has continued to set the agenda for candidate selection research, presenting a framework for understanding and classifying parties' processes based on four key dimensions: candidacy, the selectorate, decentralisation and voting versus appointment systems. However, the implementation of particular mechanisms for candidate selection carry both intended and unintended consequences that reflect different, and often conflicting, normative visions of representative democracy (Hazan and Rahat, 2010). The political consequences of these methods are evaluated according to four

democratic criteria: participation, representation, competition and responsiveness.

Using these parameters, studies have taken interest in the movement towards more inclusive selection contests, in particular the increasingly widespread use of both open and closed primaries (see for example, Cross et al., 2016; Kenig et al., 2015; Sandri et al., 2015). The list of political parties having now used open or semi-open primaries for the selection of candidates or party leaders is quite extensive, including: the French Socialists (Faucher, 2015: 804), the Israeli parties (Hazan and Rahat, 2010), the Italian Partito Democratico (Sandri et al., 2015) and the Canadian Liberals and UK Labour and Conservatives (Gauja, 2017). Party researchers have also examined who is typically selected as a candidate. Numerous studies of political recruitment have highlighted the persistent problem of the under-selection and hence under-representation of women, younger people and ethnic minorities (see for example, Caul, 1999; Norris, 2006; Childs, 2013).

*Party membership*

Party members are essential in the mass party model, given that its primary characteristic is that it is built on a branch membership structure (Duverger, 1951). Hence, since the golden age of mass parties, party research has focused upon party members, however, mainly the number of members. This research has again and again shown that aggregate party membership figures are in decline in the established West European countries with a tradition of party membership, but that the trend in Eastern Europe after the fall of the Iron Curtain is a little different. Trends are, however, fluctuating. New parties, some traditional parties (such as UK Labour) and far right political parties have experienced increasing figures.

Membership figures have been available through the party headquarters, even if not always reliable (Katz and Mair, 1992; Scarrow, 2000; Mair and van Biezen, 2001; van Biezen et al., 2012; van Haute et al., 2018; van Haute and Gauja, 2015). Irrespective of the uncertainty concerning the precision of these figures, more importantly, these provide only an indication of the size of the membership organization. They do not reveal who the members are, how

representative they are of the party's electorate, and how they contribute to representative democracy.

These questions began to be thoroughly investigated when Patrick Seyd and Paul Whiteley completed their studies of the UK Labour (Seyd and Whiteley, 1992) and Conservative (Whiteley et al., 1994) parties. Teams in Norway (Heidar, 1994), the Netherlands (den Ridder et al., 2015) and Denmark (Bille and Elklit, 2003; Pedersen, 2003; Kosiara-Pedersen, 2015) were among the pioneers as well, and they repeated the comprehensive party member surveys across all parties represented in parliament, hence enabling longitudinal and country-specific analyses (Allern et al., 2016; den Ridder et al., 2015; Kosiara-Pedersen, 2017). Party member studies have focused on a series of themes, including who enrolls and their representativeness compared to the party's voters, how and why party members enroll, how and why party members participate, what they think of intra-party democracy, and whether they consider leaving their party. Where members are assumed to constitute parties, these themes speak to broader questions of organizational efficacy and viability.

One of the most pressing concerns of party scholars, which is presumably shared by scholars of other political organizations, is obtaining access to the groups that they study. It was a characteristic of these first membership studies that they were conducted in collaboration with parties. However, not all parties enable access to their organizations, and this has limited studies in many democracies. Furthermore, parties' willingness to grant access to researchers has changed over time, and therefore some newer studies have had to resort to recruiting members through large online panels used by market research companies (Bale et al., 2019); to exclude some parties (Kölln and Polk, 2015); limit the study to specific parties (Gallagher and Marsh, 2002; Gauja and Jackson, 2016) or specific participants, e.g. the delegates at the annual meeting (Barras et al., 2015).

Due to the infancy of this subfield (compared, for example, to election studies), international comparative party member studies have been limited. Some comparative analyses have been possible but not perfect due to the difficulties in coordinating data collection. This goes, for example, for the

Nordic comparisons between Norway and Denmark (Pedersen and Saglie, 2005; Heidar and Kosiara–Pedersen, 2006; Heidar et al., 2012), and recently with the addition of Sweden (Demker et al., 2019). However, most 'comparative' analyses have been based on national studies, including for example, the analyses of how representative party members are when compared to party voters (Heidar and Wauters, 2019). For comparative studies to be at their most powerful in identifying patterns across parties and systems, the questions asked in surveys need to be identical. This is difficult to achieve in different languages, national contexts, levels of access and indeed when the content of survey instruments needs to be negotiated with parties themselves. Collaborators also need to be clear on what they are studying, and the best way to 'measure' it.

The lack of cross-national coordination was remedied to an extent with the collaborative 'Members and Activists of Political Parties' (MAPP) project (see www.projectmapp.eu). The first volume out of this project (van Haute and Gauja, 2015) reported the state-of-the-art of the national party member studies. More importantly, however, assembling a team of country experts with good relationships with their parties, led by Emilie van Haute, has created a comparative project across countries with and without a tradition for cross-party surveys. Data collection and analysis is currently under way, and it will take party member studies to a new level within comparative politics by enabling cross-country studies. Similar comparative methodologies – utilizing country experts and nationally-fielded surveys – are also being used to study the relationship between political parties and interest groups (for example, the PAIRDEM project https://pairdem.org) and the Comparative Interest Group Survey (https://www.cigsurvey.eu ).

All three of the subfields just discussed (party leadership, candidates and membership) highlight the interplay between structure and agency within political parties as organizations, and the challenges for researchers in understanding both the role of individuals within these organizations, how they shape their parties and how, in turn, they are constrained by them. Comparative studies of political institutions have been challenged and supplemented by studies in political behavior, in particular as a result of the behavioral 'revolution' of the 1950s but also by the growth of quantitative

methods. The same goes for party organization research. While focus has been mainly on how parties organize, attention has also turned to the behavior (of MPs, party leaders, candidates, party members etc.) that various institutions promote or hinder. The development of the field of comparative party research has grown to provide methodologically sophisticated ways of assessing the balance between structure and agency within particular organizational contexts – reaching from single cases, to country studies to comparative projects. This could provide fruitful paths forward for methodologies and research designs in other organizational studies.

*Party regulation*

The last decade has seen a rapid expansion in political science scholarship concerned with charting the character and consequences of party laws, with numerous studies examining the trend towards increased legal regulation and the implications for parties' relationship with the state, particularly in the realm of campaign finance (see for example, Koss, 2010; Nassmacher, 2009; Karvonen, 2007; Janda, 2005). This literature has complemented the longer-standing concern of law, party, and elections scholars as to the partisan consequences of electoral laws, as well as the politics of electoral law reform. Comparative and single-jurisdiction studies to date have made excellent inroads into documenting the diversity and scope of party laws in existence and research agendas are now beginning to focus more on their differential impact on parties within systems and across democracies.

For the most part, laws are categorized according to their source (that is, whether they appear in constitutions, or specific legislative instruments) and what aspect of party organization and behavior they target (van Biezen, 2008; Karvonen, 2007). Some studies attempt classification based on the degree of regulation – see for example, Plasser and Plasser's (2002) 'minimal' versus 'strictly' regulated distinction – or on the anticipated outcome, for example, Janda's (2005) distinction between proscriptive, permissive, protective, and prescriptive regimes.

Global patterns of regulation can in part be explained by different institutional settings and historical developments, each of which reflects

different regulatory imperatives: for example, new versus established democracies, and presidential versus parliamentary systems. Karvonen (2007: 450–1) argues that in non-democratic states, party laws are used by regimes to restrict the activities of their opponents, in newly democratized states laws are used to counteract 'lingering anti-democratic tendencies', and in democratised states they are used to regulate political finance. Van Biezen and Kopecky (2017) also argue that we can associate different party organizational models with particular patterns of financing – much of it regulated by the state. For example, cadre parties with large private donations, mass parties with membership dues and cartel parties with public funding. Using data from the PPDB, they examine this relationship and demonstrate the 'increased importance of public subsidies and the corresponding decline of the financial relevance of the membership organization' (van Biezen and Kopecky, 2017: 88).

While party regulation and political finance are separate fields of inquiry – the former is more wide-reaching with the potential to impact on parties' behaviour, ideology and organization – they overlap significantly as money is perhaps the most important lever that states have to influence the behaviour and organization of not just parties, but all political organizations. For example, of increasing concern to scholars is also the extent to which laws treat political parties differentially to other types of civil society organizations. The cartel party thesis predicts, and indeed comparative empirical research has confirmed, that political parties occupy a privileged place among political organizations as recipients of a significant amount of public funding (van Biezen and Kopecky, 2017). Yet at the same time, they are not subject to many of the transparency requirements, governance arrangements and administrative accountability mechanisms that affect interest groups, charities and trade unions (Bolleyer, 2018; Gauja, 2016).

## The newest trends in party organization research

In this final section, we want to highlight three important new trends within party organizational studies. Each of these trends challenges the notion of political parties as organizations with common collective interests and clearly

defined boundaries between insiders and outsiders. First, the concept of personalization (and the related idea of presidentialization) have become important strands in party organization research, but also have implications for social movement organizations (Bennett, 2012) and studies of organizational leadership more generally. As a concept, personalization is multi-faceted, involving institutional, behavioral, media and campaign elements, which all point to a stronger focus on leaders, candidates or politicians instead of political parties and collective identities (see Balmas et al., 2014; Kriesi, 2011: 826; Karvonen, 2010: 4; Poguntke and Webb, 2005). This has potentially very serious implications for the nature of political parties as organizations. Balmas et al. argue that 'personalization implies a decline in the role of parties', because of the following trends:

> People identify with personalities rather than parties; individual politicians, rather than parties, become the representatives of specific policies; interest aggregation occurs more on an *ad hoc* basis rather than within parties; individuals rather than parties communicate with the public; policy emerges from an interaction between individuals in government rather than as a product of debate and deliberation within the party; and, to a certain extent, candidates and leaders select parties rather than the other way round. (Balmas et al., 2014: 47)

However, empirical studies of personalization provide only mixed evidence for these claims (Karvonen, 2010). Wauters et al. (2018), for example, reviewed 40 articles concerning perzonalisation and were unable to find clear evidence in either direction. Pruysers et al. (2018: 6) suggest that this empirical disagreement reflects conceptual ambiguity, and note that in some areas, for example, media attention to individual candidates and leaders, it is far more pronounced than in others, for example, voter behavior. In the most comprehensive study to date, including 26 democracies over 50 years and creating a comprehensive index, Rahat and Kenig (2018) found a general trend of party decline, accompanied by personalization, with the two processes feeding each other. The authors contend that for proponents of parties and the role in society, the findings are alarming, but argue that

> Those who face the challenge had better forget about the good old days when parties were parties. Political parties are way beyond their peak; personalization is here to stay. (Rahat and Kenig, 2018: 263)

The second new trend that we will point to is the transition of social movements into parties. Although much has been written on the emergence of the Greens as a movement party in the context of an increasing focus on post-materialism in the 1970s (see for example, Kitschelt, 2006; Kitschelt, 1988) in recent decades the interaction between social movements and political parties has been an area of comparative scholarly neglect. However, with changes in digital technology and the rise of mass protest mobilizations in response to the Global Financial Crisis, a number of movement parties have once again come to the attention of party scholars. Studies, for example, of the Occupy movement have highlighted important links between movement and party politics in Italy and Turkey (Draege et al., 2017).

Digital parties such as the International Pirate Party and the Five Star Movement (Italy), originating from popular mobilizations, have provided organizational templates for other formations such as Podemos in Spain and La France Insoumise. As Gerbaudo (2019: 4) notes, these movement-based parties 'display evident commonalities in the way in which they promise to deliver a new politics supported by digital technology; a kind of politics that [...] professes to be more democratic, more open to ordinary people, more immediate and direct, more authentic and transparent'. However, whether digital parties in general, as e.g. Danish Alternative, provide 'a type of oligarchization that is cloaked in a veil of participation and engagement' remains to be seen (Plesner and Husted, 2020: 250). How these groups institutionalize their organizations, achieve electoral success and ultimately transition from movements to parties are questions that animate current research. Beyond the field of political parties, this research might resonate with debates around the characteristics of social movements and their relationship with the organizational form, as well as the transition of social movements into other types of political organization, such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

The blurring of boundaries between movements and parties is not just a feature of movement politics. Party scholars have also noted the increasing importance of leader-centred populist parties, particularly those of the far right, which challenge the traditional organizational form of parties as membership-based and participatory. Recent comparative research has

argued that right-wing populist parties display distinctive organizational characteristics: although they may claim widespread partisan support, they concentrate and centralize power in the party leadership and develop formal or informal mechanisms designed to constrain intra-party democracy (Heinisch and Mazzoleni, 2016). The interaction between these organizational structures and the party's supporters is an avenue for further research. For example, can centralized and non-democratic parties retain legitimacy and command popular support (beyond the act of voting)?

The third trend that we want to point to is new forms of party affiliation. In recent years, and in light of the pervasive membership decline noted above, scholars of party organizations have begun to re-interrogate what organizational membership actually means (Gauja, 2015; Scarrow, 2015). A particular emphasis concerns the role of digital technology in reshaping membership relations, which is an area of inquiry that is more developed in studies of political communication, campaigning and organizing, particularly in the US. Writing on the experiences of advocacy organizations in the US, David Karpf notes that a key affordance of technology is that it enables existing organizational tasks to be done more quickly and cheaply (Karpf, 2012). Some even suggest that digital technology leads to the end of organization, with a shift in primary analytic focus to 'organizing' (Bennett and Segerberg, 2013; Margetts et al., 2015). In relation to party membership, views are also mixed. Some are concerned that it promotes organizations to further reduce the substance of 'membership' to mere 'clicktivism' and fosters centralizing tendencies within organizations that prompt greater elite control (see Gibson and Ward, 2009). Yet, others argue that this technology can enable organizations to engage with members more frequently, broadly, and quickly – as political communications scholars suggest (Chadwick, 2007; Karpf, 2016) – and engage more representative members (Achury et al., 2020). More specifically, we see several themes emerging, such as the blurring of membership status and the creation of new 'types' of membership (Gibson et al., 2017), as well as the increasing role of technology in promoting self-organizing, for instance by creating supportive communities beyond 'core' members. These trends align party membership more towards the kind of

support seen in other types of political mobilization such as interest organizations and social movements.

## Conclusion

From the infancy of political parties as organizations, comparative party scholars have observed that they perform a number of functions that are central to the workings of representative democracy – among them, providing policy and leadership alternatives to the electorate, providing sites for participation and selecting candidates for public office. Scholars who study party organizations today ask questions about *how* parties perform these functions and *why* they differ. These are now perhaps more important questions than *what* they do, which was the key concern of scholars until the latter decades of the twentieth century. The comparative approach has enabled researchers to understand patterns of organization between parties, countries and over time. In many ways, it has highlighted the similarities that characterize political parties as adaptive organizations and explain their longevity over time.

Theoretical advances in the field, in particular the development of a succession of 'party types', have enabled a greater understanding of the complexity of parties' organizational forms, and the relationships between internal dynamics and external environments. From Ostrogorski and Michels onwards, party organization scholars have been concerned with intra-party relationships of power. Case studies have been instrumental in showing how political parties develop their own internal logic and culture and how these play a crucial role in structuring their dynamics, how they respond to competitive demands and how they change and adapt over time. However, the comparative research agenda has also been important in highlighting the inherent link between parties' organizations and how they respond to external pressures of political competition – whether these are policy-related, ideological, legislative or electoral – or changes in their broader environment, such as technological developments. The ability of party scholarship to capture the pressures that drive organizational change across cases,

democracies and time is one of the key strengths of this field of inquiry that other organizational researchers may learn from.

Questions concerning party organization are not exclusively empirical – as we have seen they are also heavily influenced by normative democratic theory. In this sense, party scholars ask whether political parties *ought* to organize in a particular manner. While the party organization research agenda might have moved on from 'big picture' studies of parties' place in representative democracy to investigating the performance of more discrete functions, the normative foundation of much research is still evident. Relevant considerations include: What aspects of intra-party decision-making (for example, candidate selection) should be subject to democratic determination? Which democratic values (participation, representation, deliberation) are prioritised? Who should be empowered in making intra-party decisions (members, supporters, leaders) (Cross and Katz, 2013)? These normative questions continue to drive party scholars in searching for forms of party organization and practices that can better serve modern society and are questions that are equally applicable to other organizational studies and researchers.

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## the authors

Anika Gauja is a Professor in the Department of Government and International Relations, Sydney University. She is the author of *Party reform: The causes, challenges and consequences of organizational change* (2017, OUP).
Email: anika.gauja@sydney.edu.au

Karina Kosiara-Pedersen is Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science, University of Copenhagen. She is the author of *Demokratiets ildsjæle* [Democracy's fiery souls] and co-editor of *Nordic party members: Linkages in troubled times*.
Email: kp@ifs.ku.dk

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# An anthropology of contemporary political parties: Reflexions on methods and theory

Florence Faucher

## abstract

Adopting an anthropological approach to analyse contemporary political parties is fairly unusual and has tended to be limited to the margins of the political system (greens, extreme left and right), yet it provides a useful lens to explain how these organisations are changing. By focusing on the meanings that are constructed by partisans through their interactions within the party, it draws attention to the ways in which their social representations (on what society is/ought to be) and their symbolic practices (what they think is the appropriate way to act) are negotiated, taken for granted or disputed. It allows us to understand the processes through which policies, teams, rules and behaviours change or are "reformed" and how these evolutions affect members. The article builds from several such studies conducted in the UK and in France in the 1990s and 2000s. It highlights several specific contributions of anthropology to our analysis of political parties: the role of symbolic practices, the construction of group styles (in interaction with national political institutions and culture), the public performance of leadership, policy-making and democracy.

## Introduction

Political parties are essential organisations in contemporary liberal representative regimes but have been in 'crisis' for several decades, as evidenced in declining membership, electoral volatility, the growth of

alternative and competing movements. In response to these concerns, political parties have changed how they recruit and relate to members including the influence they grant them in the selection of their representatives and in the deliberation on, and choice of, policy. At the same time, the ways in which political scientists approach political parties have changed profoundly. In the early 1990s, Katz and Mair sparked a renewed interest in parties as organisations, including a focus on their resources and strategies. They coordinated teams of researchers, published comparative volumes (Katz and Mair, 1995b), and launched a new journal dedicated to the field, *Party Politics*. Around the same time, other scholars turned their attention to members and supporters: they obtained access to conduct membership surveys that also contributed to open a field of comparative analysis (Van Haute and Gauja, 2015). The construction of international databases (on members, constitutions and rules, manifestos, electoral results) and the sophistication of quantitative tools and analyses allows us to develop impressive comparative work across countries and across time, to test hypothesis about how responsive parties are to shifts in public opinion and/or electoral competition. Unfortunately, such approaches leave much in the dark and are thus complementary to analyses that come from different epistemological and disciplinary perspectives. Amongst these approaches, an anthropology of contemporary political parties has a lot to offer as it helps us focus on the processes through which partisans construct meanings and traditions, how they act and how these change, or not.

Adopting an anthropological approach to consider political parties is fairly unusual and has tended to be limited to the margins of the political system, in other words to the greens, the extremes or more generally to organisations that could be considered as movements (Kertzer, 1996; Mische, 2009). This is partly due to anthropology's historical affinity with the exotic and with studying 'down' rather than 'up' (Nader, 1969). However, it is particularly stimulating in that it invites us to interrogate what is familiar in our everyday political world and to move beyond the taken-for-granted. It encourages us to take seriously how the people involved (whether they are grassroots members or belong to parliamentary elites) think about what they are doing and how they interpret the political world in which they act. It challenges the taken-

for-granted use of theories that postulate instrumental rationality of individual actors and seeks to make sense of parties and movements through such lenses. It underlines dynamic relationships within complex and layered political organisations and sheds light directly upon actors and processes: how and by whom decisions are taken, how do ideological positions shift, why some practices, deemed acceptable in one party at a given time, are rejected in another or by the same party at a different point in time.

In this article, I argue that an anthropological approach allows us to understand better contemporary political organisations and the evolutions we are witnessing. I base such a claim not only on the ethnographic method for gathering data but also on the theoretical insights and analytic tools it offers comparativists. Indeed, I contend that it challenges us to identify and explain differences and to turn our gaze back to the familiar, whatever this familiar is. I am certainly not alone in underlying the benefits of ethnography in political science more generally (Boswell et al., 2019; Rhodes et al., 2007). My argument draws from the extensive work on political parties that I have conducted in France and in the UK (Faucher, 1999a; Faucher-King, 2005; Faucher-King and Treille, 2003; Faucher, 2015). In the first section, I highlight how an anthropological outlook makes it possible to explore three dimensions that are otherwise usually overlooked. In the second, I reflect on the challenges of data collection and analysis. Finally, I set out some of the findings from the anthropology of British party conferences and from the comparison of green parties. They highlight how symbolic practices form the fabric of group styles of interactions, construct bonds and hierarchies as well as legitimate modes of decision-making.

## Why an anthropological approach?

There are at least three types of questions that can be explored with an anthropological lens that can usefully complement more conventional political science approaches. How do parties develop as mini societies? How do they change? How do party members think about the role of their own organisation in the democratic whole?

*Parties as mini societies*

In liberal representative systems, parties are voluntary organisations made up of individuals who have chosen to contribute financially and, in many cases, through their work and participation. They attract members who identify, to various degrees, with the collective and work together for its electoral success. They usually profess to share a vision of the collective good, which they endeavour to promote through standing candidates in electoral competition in order to form a legitimate government. They follow largely self-imposed rules and produce narratives. In fact, each party within a polity functions as a mini society, with its distinctive rules, ideas and practices and that these persist through time as institutions. Observers sometimes talk derogatorily about parties as 'tribes' but why not take this quip seriously? Some parties have institutionalized factions and others contend with their *de facto* existence, whether they are structured around ideological divergences, around charismatic personalities or around the attribution of posts.

Political scientists interested in these organisations consider their formal rules, their decision-making structure, their resources and professional capabilities, internal competition for leadership and intermediary positions, the existence and interactions of factions, and the policies that are debated, adopted and promoted as campaign manifestos or the interactions between parties and their social and political environment. This is all very well but the analysis of formal rules tells us little about how these are pragmatically implemented (Bailey, 2001). Since the 1990s, accumulation of data has allowed the development of theories and models about the adaptation of these organisations to their changing environment (Katz and Mair, 1995a). We know much more about the social characteristics of their members and supporters, and their political values and policy preferences. We have theories about their strategies and behaviours. Unfortunately, rational choice models, and their refinements through the adjunction of collective and social incentives (Whiteley and Seyd, 2002) ignore the worlds members make and inhabit. Moreover, it remains difficult to answer a number of challenging questions. Why do individuals join and remain members of social groups that are increasingly considered with suspicion by the wider public? What do members do and how do they ascribe meaning to their activities and their

interactions with others? What narratives do they construct and share about themselves as a collective?

If we want to understand the meanings that members construct to justify their belonging to themselves and to others, we need to pay attention to the ways in which they talk and how they talk about what they do or ought to do. We can observe the ways in which they interact, take decisions and act upon such decisions. We can listen to the narratives about the party history and mission, which are transmitted through socialization to new members who arrive with a background that contributes to shaping their reactions to such narratives, their appropriation and their enacting of them. Each party is keenly defending a vision of the good society that distinguishes it from its political rivals. The image of itself that the party promotes to potential recruits, and to its members, includes legitimate means of winning power within the organisation as well as in society, of deliberating, of choosing policy proposals and the politicians entrusted to turn them into legislation and governmental policies. Members understand or come to understand that politics is about conflict, disagreements and competition and therefore about finding ways to negotiate and resolve such tensions whether through compromise, ruse or appeal to norms and accepted practices. What can we learn about making society?

*Continuity and change*

The idea that parties constitute subcultures is readily accepted and scholars have tended to focus on party families, which are seen as broadly sharing values, policy orientations, legitimizing stories and rules of organising (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967). Often though, the notion of culture is taken as synonymous with stability and durability, which prevents a reflection about change. Yet, as Tony Blair famously said in 1994, 'parties that do not change die and this party is a living movement, not a historical monument' (Faucher-King, 2005: 20).

Since the 1990s, many European parties have changed their rules, their organisations, their policies, their leaders. Scholars have searched for factors that trigger such changes and sometimes their effects and outcome of the

selection of candidates, leaders and policies and on electoral outcome or voter support (Cross and Katz, 2013; Rihoux, 2001; Cain et al., 2006). They also proposed genetic models (Panebianco, 1988). Yet, there are (at least) three dimensions of change, about which we know too little. How are party members affected by organisational and policy changes? How do these changes become acceptable? How are they experienced? This is important because if we consider that members identify with a set of policies and practices, they may resist and protest such change. But if so, how does it happen? The British Labour party has a long history but the recent decades have been tumultuous and the party of 2020 is very different from the organisation of 1980. The party constitution has been altered several times, aligning the procedures with conceptions of intra-party democracy that privilege the individual member in decision-making at the expense of the historical collective members (unions, socialist societies).

What are the social processes involved here? Some we might see as having brought about new ways of interacting, deciding and deliberating; others may have contributed to transforming the meanings constructed by party members for themselves. Analysts may have considered endogenous (such as change in a dominant coalition of internal factions) and exogenous catalysts (such as electoral defeat), but they tell us little about how individual party actors react and play with the rules, formal and informal. Forensic monographies can explore the embeddedness and inertia of parties within a social and territorial fabric (Hastings, 1991; Sawicki, 1997) or reveal the strategies deployed by leaders, teams and coalitions and the role of contingency (Russell, 2005; Bale, 2010). But they are sometimes criticized for not being "generalizable": they offer a complete and detailed picture of an idiosyncrasy but it is difficult to extrapolate from an example in order to propose general rules. Small n comparisons, on the other hand, make it possible to reflect on parallel changes and to analyse the processes through which organisations influence each or respond to their institutional and political environment. Indeed, they make it possible to interrogate the decision-making process and to take into account the strategies of actors as well as their circumstances (Faucher-King and Treille, 2003; Faucher, 2015).

*Parties in their context*

Identifying a degree of organisational isomorphism does not explain how practices are imported or developed *sui generis* or in reaction to competition, to institutions, to social change. Political scientists tend to focus on their own polity or may develop a high degree of specialization: they are national experts (without whom expert surveys would struggle!) or develop expertise on the SPD or on the Swedish Democrats, possibly of a party family such as the social-democrats or right-wing populists. Comparativists who have become experts of other countries than their own often do not explicitly turn their gaze back to their own society to raise questions about practices they take-for-granted. Our increased capacity to conduct large N comparisons drowns fine-grained differences but also reflexivity on our analytic categories. We know how electoral institutions tend to correlate with a certain type of electoral competition and party system but miss the beliefs and practices about the political system that are shared, yet nuanced, by citizens (Faucher and Hay, 2015) and members of different parties.

Since the 1990s, many books have brought together scholars of political parties. They offer the juxtaposition of informative case studies on party organisations, party reforms, party families, etc. (Lawson, 1994; Van Haute and Gauja, 2011; Van Haute, 2016; Waele et al., 2016) but little in the way of in depth explanations of country variations. Indeed, detailed comparisons between a small number of cases require a good understanding of several political cultures and systems in order to interpret qualitative data sensitively. They are therefore time consuming for the individual researcher or for the team of researchers who need to invest in the shifting of their analytic gaze.

If political parties can be considered as distinctive tribes, with their own norms and their rituals, how different from each other are they within a polity? Can we learn about the national political culture by looking at party subcultures, and reciprocally? Within a political system, parties submit to similar rules and constraints. For instance, they compete for votes within the same electorate and under comparable media scrutiny; they respond to victories (and defeats) but also to the ways in which these electoral outcomes are interpreted internally as well as in the public sphere. Besides, they may

anticipate some of the changes within the system (after all parties that win elections win the possibility of shaping legislation) even if to a large extent, sociodemographic and cultural changes are slow to take place. Comparison therefore sheds light on the national political culture and on the polity, including, for instance, the shift in the UK from two dominant political parties as essential Westminster cogs (McKenzie, 1964), sharing a number of beliefs and practices about the role of the party leader or the limited contribution of party members to policy-making to contested organisations that have reformed their procedures and embraced the idea of the individualization of membership (Faucher-King, 2005).

## How does one conduct such research?

It can be difficult to get access to political parties (Aït-Aoudia et al., 2010). Quite often, social scientists are viewed with suspicion, as outsiders who may reveal something about the party that will provide an advantage to its political rivals and opponents. Moreover, parties are complex and national organisations with different arenas and scales that rarely intersect and can be difficult to bridge (Sawicki, 1997; Bolleyer, 2012). It is thus practical to identify a point of entry or a milieu in which one can start the exploration, as an ethnographer would select a society and village in which to settle (Descola, 1998; Barley, 2011). Anthropologists are no longer so tightly bound to a local community (Boswell et al., 2019): fieldwork now routinely encompasses several sites, visited repeatedly for shorter periods of time; it can focus on a process and, for instance, follow decision-making through various stages. Political ethnographers interested in political parties thus follow electoral campaigns, a politician or a local party organisation (Fenno, 1978). Data collection is linked to the research questions and evolves as these very questions change inductively as the research progresses.

For instance, at the beginning of my PhD, the puzzles I wanted to solve related to the motivations of green party activists in hostile institutional environments. In the early 1990s, green parties in the UK and in France operated under electoral rules and party systems that offered very little prospects of success. Yet, dedicated activists campaigned tirelessly to

promote what were then marginal political views. I contacted a few local party secretaries, met a few members and chose two local groups that were relatively successful in their respective contexts, were fairly active on the ground and campaigned in comparable university cities. Over several months, I attended many meetings, observed electoral activities and followed a number of activists, some of whom were also involved at the national level; I also interviewed dozens of members about their involvement in the (environmental) movement and the party more specifically. Both parties (Les Verts and the Green party) were naturally open and happy to get attention, so it was relatively easy to get access, observe and ask questions as an "innocent anthropologist". Nevertheless, I got to the field with fairly typical research questions for a political scientist interested in party membership: I sought to reconcile generalisations about how social actors are expected to behave 'universally' as instrumental and rational actors with the diversity of practices.

Through this study, I learnt about politics on the ground and found out what being a party member meant to those who were dedicating much energy to it. But, my research also raised many more questions about politics, political parties and party membership and also about political culture and institutions, questions which I decided to explore further. In 1995, I set out to analyse the main British political parties. Working on the greens, I had become aware of, and intrigued by, the considerable expense of resources and energy that took place every autumn. For about one month, one after the other, British parties convened by the seaside for a week of political discussion and of partying. Most parties, in Continental Europe or beyond, contend themselves with a convention or congress every few years to select leadership, policies and strategies. I wanted to find out about why what made sense for partisans on one side of the Channel did not on the other. My British colleagues had few answers: the conference season was as obvious as the colour of swans. Yet, the questions I had were not only related to the idiosyncratic aspects of any of the four parties, nor in a way to Britain, but rather to my puzzlement with aspects of British political rules and customs and as to my interest in the meaning-making activities of individuals engaged in the promotion of distinct visions of public good. My initial plan was to

conduct a thorough comparison of UK party conferences and French party congresses and conventions but it became quite clear that the project was overly ambitious. As a consequence, I contended myself with Britain.

Conferences (but also conventions and congresses) are occasions to bring different sections of the organisation together. In the UK, conferences present other advantages to the analyst: they are organised every autumn; they follow unscripted rules about what should happen there; they combine a spectacle designed for outside audiences and the enactment of deliberative practices; they promote policies and politicians but also educate party members; they construct social bonds and create distinctive collective identities; they demonstrate that parties are playing by the rules of British parliamentary democracy. Once inside, my questions evolved inductively and I benefited from the fact that the period was transformative for British parties. Indeed, I was able to witness striking evolutions in rules, personnel, policies and practices. I could talk to party members about how they processed the fact that the organisations they had joined differed from the one they were members of today, how they felt they were contributing to these changes, how they made sense of their commitment to a collective project.

Access to each party was gained differently in each case but it helped that I first approached them as a curious, foreign and young scholar. The first thing I had to learn was to 'navigate' the idiosyncratic procedures and make sense of the committees and groups that also convened there. By the time I had decided to take them as an object of study, I had established contact with gate-keepers in central offices. I obtained my pass through them and they recommended me to other officials and members. It would have been easier to concentrate on one organisation, as others have (Minkin, 1978; Kelly, 1989) rather than hold together the threads of distinct political cultures and organisations but my interest focused on understanding political activists and my curiosity in British institutions. Having previously worked my way up from party branches to national parties (Faucher, 1999a), I considered that national conferences could be taken as melting-pots that would allow me to observe the creation of distinct alloys.

I attended the annual conference of the four national parties between 1995 and 2002. Every autumn I spent about 3 weeks in quaint sea-side resorts. I was not alone: there were thousands of other people: activists (with different names and roles each time), politicians, unionists, collaborators and officers, lobbyists, journalists, fringe-event organisers and hangers-on. During the period of my field work, party rules changed, conferences grew in size as they became fundraising opportunities, media attention waned and the staging became more professional, elections where planned and results discussed.

The weeks by the sea-side where intensive and immersive. During plenary sessions, I sat amongst party members (whether representatives, delegates, constituency members) or in the visitors' gallery. I noted carefully staging arrangements, choreographies, successions of speakers, reactions of the audience around me, interactions between people, what people were discussing, who was involved in the discussion, how the discussion proceeded and its outcome. I attended fringe events. I went to training sessions with delegates and candidates. I drank a variety of alcoholic beverages on the fringe, ate poorly on sandwiches, I mingled. I observed front stage what parties were trying to say about themselves but I also went backstage. I talked to people who chaired plenary sessions, members of party committees, party officers. I interviewed activists and politicians, and I made contact for follow-up interviews. I collected leaflets, newsletters and booklets of policy proposals and amendments. I sifted the press coverage and noted the framing adopted by different outlets. I observed press officers briefing journalists about the speeches of the day, trying to spin the news in the most favourable way. Every evening, I reviewed and complemented my field notes, I thought about what I had learnt and what new questions arose. I decided what to observe or do the following day. Between conferences, I immersed myself in party history, internal documents, followed policy debates, occasionally attended local meetings, interviewed partisans from different arenas. I developed closer relationships with a few informants who kindly opened doors or helped me decipher procedures, political games, teams and tactics. I also talked to party officials and former officials, with journalists and with lobbyists.

The method of data collection, and the analytic concepts and tools I mobilized were drawn from several social scientific disciplines. Ethnography is useful to

describe live events, to interpret what participants are doing and how they view their role in the political competition at large and within their party. I tried to disentangle the practices and the narratives that drew from a party's tradition and those that seemed to be linked to taken-for-granted conceptions of what being engaged in politics in the UK involves. I learnt to discern what was a twitch and what was a wink (Geertz, 1993: 6). Indeed, one of my objectives was to provide a thick description of each organisations, one that allowed my readers to understand whether the meanings of a wink could be understood by members of one party only or by the general British public, or by anyone with an interest in the political parties of liberal representative regimes.

Over the years, I accumulated boxes and tapes of primary qualitative data, which I analysed and interpreted along the way to articulate inductively new and more precise questions about what goes on in and for British parties when they meet annually. I followed a number of leads and themes that allowed me to compare the four parties and place them within their institutional context. I tracked which processes and practices belonged to a national repertoire, which responded to functional needs and whether these were shared across nations and parties. I also worked to distinguish what participants thought they were doing. Were they following routines, norms of appropriate behaviours, or formal rules? If they strayed from the norm, how did they do it and why? To what extent did they reflect on their innovations?

In the following section, I develop some of the key findings that are not specific to the 'very British' institutions that are annual party conferences. I show that a study that is empirically grounded in observations of a small number of organisations for short periods but over several years is an effective way of explaining how organisations change.

## What do we find?

Change in political parties is often traced to the adoption of new rules, new leaders or new policies. It is more difficult and time consuming to assess the extent to which (new) rules are implemented, how a new dominant coalition may change norms of behaviour as well as formal rules and how these affect

the role played by the grassroots in policy change. Adopting an anthropological outlook invites us to pay closer attention to what people do within political parties beyond what the organisation is prepared to say about itself. It also tends to shift focus away from the discourse of politicians and officials who are mostly concerned with image and how it affects their position in the electoral competition. It allows us to interpret the stories party members tell to justify their actions to outsiders as well as to themselves, at different levels of the organisation.

*Symbolic practices*

When the notion of ritual is used in relation to contemporary politics, it often denotes a slight condescendence towards what is perceived as exotic and quaint or ineffectual because it is associated with irrational religious practices. However, I argue that the category is useful to understand how political parties exist, persist and evolve as voluntary organisations. I define ritual as

> behaviour that is repeated, rule-bound, referring to on-going traditions or otherwise a reference point that transcends the narrow framework of a choosing acting individual. It is executed with a sense of itself as a performance. (Faucher-King, 2005: 6)

In relatively recent organisations, such as the greens in the 1990s, the elaboration of internal rules is a crucial moment. Both the British green party and Les Verts were characterized not only by their commitment to political ecology and the promotion of "sustainable society" but also by their members' strong views on the need to rejuvenate politics and to create participatory processes. The practice of democracy was essential to their commitment to the organisation and inseparable from their green convictions: in fact, they devoted a good deal of time and energy to imagine better decision-making processes and uphold the rules and principles they had chosen. Their attentiveness to procedures could appear fastidious and "ritualistic" (Douglas, 2002: 61). They reflected the centrality of symbolic practice in the construction of their group identity as well as their intuitive understanding of the paradoxes of democracy and trust (Sztompka, 1998). If I had not been striving to understand how members gave meaning to their dedication to a

cause that looked electorally futile to most observers, I would have overlooked the importance of the very performance of deliberation, of their efforts to empower each other and promote participation.

British annual party conferences may be unique in many ways but they are only examples of the symbolic practices through which organisations construct collective identities and motivate individuals to devote time and resources to a common cause. They are essential to maintain traditions yet they make change possible. As rituals, they combine cognitive content with an affective power that is bound-up with a performance (Boussaguet and Faucher, 2020): they help us understand how attitudes, values and policy proposals are also experienced first-hand by participants in the plurality of social and political events that bring together members through the year. Participation – vicariously or in person - allows party members to act 'as if' they made policy and chose leaders, 'as if' they were essential actors in the democratic life of their society. Hence, rituals contribute to naturalise ways of behaving, leading participants to believe that the world around them is not of their 'own (cultural) making, but rather an order that belongs to the external world itself' (Kertzer, 1989: 85). As they link legitimacy to tradition, they discourage critical thinking but they are rarely repeated without adaptation. Henceforth, they produce change and they contribute to its legitimation. They can – and I showed that they were – used instrumentally for such a purpose.

*Group style*

The notion of group style (Eliasoph and Lichterman, 2003) captures how groups develop and maintain styles of interactions that contribute to define the boundaries of the group, what can be said within it and what are the appropriate modes of expression. For instance, research shows how the greens strive to be consistent in their public (political) and private lives (Lichterman, 1996), transforming their lifestyles and adopting everyday habits that may create tensions with their entourage (Faucher, 1998).

Conferences are important moments in the life of organisations: they bring together people who rarely interact otherwise: delegates or representatives from local groups, elected councillors and politicians, their advisers, etc. They

help construct physical and symbolic boundaries between categories of participants, between participants and audiences, those who identify with the group. They clearly have an important function as a means to integrate the party through sociability: they provide opportunities for many social encounters and meetings on the fringe of the main event. They establish and reproduce the norms of interactions that shape the social experience of party members and weave a tradition: socialization is another process that contributes to the constitution of a collective identity. Although it is not limited to them, socialization is particular important for newcomers. They hear from experienced delegates what to expect, they learn how to interpret the complex procedures for debates, they witness how one is expected to behave in the hall or in the corridors. As they return to conference year after year, participants discover internal rules, formal and informal; they take part in gossip and in strategizing, whether they are plotting for their faction, their local association, their own career. At the same time, they progressively acquire a practical knowledge about deliberation and develop conceptions about appropriate decision-making processes.

Each party subculture is immediately recognizable to the observer as well as to the identifier thanks to an array of symbolic practices. These include procedural rules, ballots, songs, colours but also dress codes, phrases and myths. For instance, in the 1990s the British greens devoted great deal of attention to the conditions that would help maximize the participation of each participant at its national conferences: they started meetings with a minute of silence, broke up discussions in small groups around tables, sought consensus and avoided counting votes whenever possible (Faucher, 1999a ; 1999b). This contrasts with the focalization on votes as the expression of individual members' view and the epitome of intra-party democracy (Faucher-King, 2005).

The observation of conferences reveals the distinct group styles that shape how members interact as well as perform. In the late 1990s, I discovered how conservative party members were more likely to wear pin-striped suits than wooly jumpers. As I myself came back to the conference, I noticed how Labour delegates were encouraged to stop calling each other 'comrades' or 'brothers' and increasingly used phrases such as 'colleagues' and 'friends'. I found out

how the New Labour team understood very well that conferences offer important opportunities to introduce and institutionalise change. The 'modernization' of the party was thus implemented visually through the staging, the selection of speakers and the choreography of the conference schedule. They worked front stage to produce the image of 'new' Labour for the media and outside audiences. They worked backstage to coax participants into new ways of conducting political deliberation and business at conference. For instance, delegates wishing to address the conference from the rostrum were provided with help to prepare their speech and advice on how to dress to increase their chances of attracting the eye of the session chair. New (formal and informal) rules were routinized and naturalized, which helped Labour become New Labour. As history has shown, such changes are reversible or at least always amendable.

*Public performance of leadership*

Whilst conferences are important because they contribute to integrate members into the organisation and construct a shared culture based on narratives, rules and styles, they are also the most important occasion for British parties to attract free publicity in the form of news and specialized coverage. The parliamentary groups and their staff, the officials and the delegates or representatives are not the only people who converge to the sea-side: all media outlets send teams. If coverage had already been reduced by the 1990s compared to the 1970s, conference proceedings remained the best means for parties to attract attention to their policies and to promote their front bench politicians.

The four British parties I studied held very different views about the role of the party leader. In the mid 1990s, the Greens elected two joint 'Speakers' (and they only relented to elect a party leader in 2008). They were the exception. All the others paid great attention to their leader, even when they belonged to traditions suspicious of such individualization of power. At the time, the leader of the Labour party was chosen by three colleges (parliamentarians, constituency parties and trade unions). 'One member one vote' ballots had been held in the constituency parties college for the first time in 1994. Tony Blair had been elected and used the conference to

announce a 'New' Labour party. The Liberal Democrats were the only ones to ballot their membership for the election of the leadership and granted the victor a firm grip on the electoral manifesto if not on the conference agenda. The Conservative gave most autonomy to their Leader, who until 1998 was selected by the parliamentary group and had in fact no formal link with the membership.

Such attitudes were reflected in the role performed by the leaders at their respective conference. Whilst queues to attend the Leader's speech had been customary at the Conservative conference, Labour worked to draw larger crowds and opened up the conference to visitors. Labour and the Conservatives changed the scenography, the sets. Conference speeches have been a daunting task for leaders (Faucher-King, 2005: 81; Finlayson, 2021). They work for months with their teams and the performance is rehearsed to include jokes and dance moves. As television reduced its coverage, it became important to tailor oratory and to showcase the support of members as fervent fans. There is always a risk associated with the performance of a ritual (Dirks, 1992; Faucher-King, 2005: 85), particularly one designed to attract attention and be the apex of the conference and of the political year. Even when the audience in the hall is supportive, the performer may be poor (or poorly), bad luck may expose that the emperor has no clothes. In the hope of retaining control over such a fragile process, party organisers have stooges ready to stir a standing ovation: this was particularly obvious during the short leadership of Iain Duncan Smith but is not by any means an unusual technique. Other things can easily go wrong: protesters interrupt, pranksters jump on the stage, the background letters collapse or the delivery is blighted by a persistent cough. The stage performance is important (Balandier, 2006) because it must not detract from the policy content and the political objective: press officers thus sometimes offer debriefing to journalists looking for a way to frame the 'message' of the leader.

*Staging democracy*

Ethnographic observations allowed me to analyse how the "masters of ritual" avoid embarrassing situations, the strategies deployed to respond to systemic pressures and the symbolic work involved in public deliberation of policy

motions. Such descriptions help readers understand the relative importance of staging debates at conferences for each party, their structure and their agenda. These are moments when party members enact their commitment to the parliamentary democracy. Deliberations mirror the proceedings in the House of Commons but also highlight important differences relating to conceptions of intra-party democracy. The organisation of ballots on motions for instance is perfunctory in the Conservative party but can be showdowns in the three others. Whilst very distinctive traditions explain what is ultimately at stake in conference votes for each party, I was also able to demonstrate convergence to growing isomorphism and the adoption of outside norms seen as susceptible to legitimize internal procedures. Moreover, the enactment of internal democratic procedures is considered by many members as essential to their conceptions of party membership.

## Conclusion

In this article, I have argued that, although it is fairly unusual, an anthropological approach provides answers to important questions about political parties that more conventional political science methods struggle to respond to satisfactorily: such as the processes through which individuals create bonds and meanings; the practices for which individuals are prepared to devote time and resources; the narratives and visions of a collective project that they want to be part of. It does so by focusing on the meanings that are constructed by partisans through their interactions within the party, it draws attention to the ways in which their social representations (on what society is/ought to be) and their symbolic practices (what they think is the appropriate way to act) are negotiated, taken for granted or disputed. It allows us to understand the processes through which policies, teams, rules and behaviours change or are "reformed" and how these evolutions affect members. The studies I revisit here involved extended periods of fieldwork conducted over relatively long periods of time. I started observing the greens in 1991 and I attended annual British party conferences between 1995 and 2002. Both projects demonstrate the benefits of comparing between countries and within a political system. They show the diversity of views about democratic party politics and the equally diverse practices these views give

rise to. They allow us to move beyond the idiosyncrasies of each organisation, which can be captured through other qualitative research designs, and allow us not only to draw the contours of a British political culture in order to reflect on social processes that are not exclusive to Britain, nor to parties. How do parties construct a collective identity? How do they compete and strategize? How do they maintain customs whilst innovating and changing – whether proactively or reactively? It is time to consider western liberal institutions as contingent and "exotic" in the sense that they are infused with symbolic dimensions that are difficult to grasp when one contends with variables that are predominantly measurable. An anthropological imagination can help us resolve some of the aporias set up by some of the methodological and analytic approaches that are, at present, more conventional in contemporary political science.

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## the author

Florence Faucher is Professor of political science at Sciences Po (CEE) in Paris and Associate Fellow at Nuffield College, Oxford. Her research focuses on how forms of political participation and activism have changed over the last thirty years. She has analysed the blurring of boundaries between the public and the private spheres of action and how practices developed in new parties have driven a thrust for reform in well-established political parties. Currently, her main research project investigates the uses of the symbolic in public policy, particularly in response to critical situations (terrorist attacks in 2015, the Covid19 pandemic in 2020).
Email: florence.faucher@sciencespo.fr

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# Getting 'sucked into parliament': Tracing the process of professional political socialization

Leopold Ringel and Jenni Brichzin

## abstract

How do newly elected members of parliament become attuned to the role of the professional politician? Drawing from research on organizational socialization, which highlights instances of sensemaking and identity formation, the article uses a four-stage model to examine the progress of a state-level parliamentary group from the Pirate Party of Germany, a party deeply invested in renewing political institutions. The findings indicate that, even though the party's Members of Parliament set out to change established parliamentary practice, they felt it necessary to adjust their identities and behavior after taking their seats. In emphasizing organizational factors, the article sheds new light on the processes by which regular citizens are transformed into professional politicians.

## Introduction

People change when they become professional politicians; if we follow public opinion, they often change for the worse. Long before the current surge in populist resentment against 'the elite' all over the Western world, the opaque proceedings of politics were seen as having a corrupting effect, transforming idealistic newcomers into professional politicians with questionable morals and eventually alienating the public. It is a widely accepted view that people

turn into the worst versions of themselves once they take up politics. Consequently, politicians today are among the least liked and trusted professional groups. In light of this conventional wisdom, the relative lack of empirical studies on how newcomers are transformed into professional politicians – the process of *professional political socialization* – is surprising (Reiser et al., 2011). The literatures on *political professionalization* and *political socialization* have shown scant interest in the subject.

Studies on *political professionalization* provide only partial insights into how amateurs become politicians (cf. Hyman, 1969). In the polity dimension, they highlight the procedural knowledge that needs to be acquired on entering political office (cf. Sarcinelli, 2011: 131). In the politics dimension, Wodak (2009: 74), among others, discusses the (often exhausting) changes to daily routines and interpersonal relations. In the policy dimension, studies show how politicians' views are affected as they become insiders: 'compared to the general population, representative elites are more favorable toward democracy, more tolerant of minorities, more appreciative of parties and their competition and less supportive of the practices of participatory democracy' (Best and Vogel, 2017: 353). Their merits notwithstanding, what these studies have in common is a tendency to neglect the complex processes by which newcomers are transformed into seasoned professionals. Rooted in (normative) democratic theory (Mughan et al., 1997), the focus of this literature lies mainly on the relationship between officeholders and citizens (Vogel, 2018). The following quote from a Member of Parliament (MP hereafter) is indicative of the changes to which newly elected representatives are subject and that have yet to be fully understood: 'I think instead of me turning [the parliament] inside out, [it] turned me inside out a little' (Searing, 1986: 372).

Socialization has been studied extensively, with research typically focusing on the formation of the perceptional, evaluative, and behavioral dispositions that individuals develop through their interaction with the (social) environment (Hurrelmann et al., 2008). In a similar vein, studies on *political socialization* show how individuals acquire political orientations and behavior (Easton, 1968: 125). However, not only did this field of research have its heyday some 50 years ago, it also seems to have been more focused on *primary*

political socialization – the development of basic political beliefs – than secondary, or professional political socialization (cf. Niemi and Hepburn, 1995; van Deth et al., 2011). As a result, debates usually revolve around the question as to what might be the most crucial phase in primary political socialization – early childhood or adolescence? So we know a great deal about how children and/or adolescents first encounter politics, for example, how they internalize the basic norms of democracy, who the main agents of socialization throughout adolescence are, and what impediments to political engagement have to be dealt with, but our insights into how people become involved in professional politics and especially how they acquire the skills they need to be politicians are severely limited.

To address the gaps in these two literatures, we draw on research on *organizational socialization* to better understand how organizations shape the processes by which amateurs become professional politicians. There are two advantages to this approach. First, we can overcome the (implicit) biases of political research, most notably the root premise that politicians should be evaluated in terms of how well they fulfill their representative function (Brichzin, forthcoming; Ringel et al., 2019). Second, we cover the full set of tasks and activities that politicians are concerned with in their daily lives, some of which, according to political science, have little to do with politics.

Empirically, we explore an extreme case of political professionalization, that of the *Pirate Party of Germany*, a party intimately connected with digital activism and notorious for its radical views on a range of issues such as transparency, participatory democracy, and copyright legislation. After being elected to four state parliaments in 2011/2012, the party, which prides itself on its broad rejection of professional politics, was suddenly represented at the core of institutionalized politics and therefore underwent a 'reality check' in two respects: first, it suddenly had to put its organizational ideals into practice; second, it had to deal with the pressure of adapting to established parliamentary practice. In the course of this article, we will show that these two commitments were conflicting. Our dataset comprises qualitative interviews with members of the party's biggest parliamentary group – in the federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW). By focusing on the Pirates'

organizational socialization, we unveil subtle, yet powerful, mechanisms that have largely been unnoticed or unaccounted for by political research.

After outlining a four-stage model of organizational socialization in the next section, we present the case and the research process. Subsequently, we discuss our findings, which reveal that the Pirates, despite their opposition to established parliamentary practice, basically adopted the formal and informal norms of their new workplace in order to be able to participate in political processes in a meaningful way.

## Organizational socialization

Socialization into parliament is, by default, socialization into an organization. Some features of parliaments arguably make them organizations of an unusual kind: their members enter and quit the organization periodically due to legislative turnover, with the number of entrants and quitters often amounting to a large part of the organization's population; there is no way of planning the composition of the parliamentary staff as it is determined by general elections and thus by nonmembers of parliament; finally, parliaments have only limited ways to discipline their members who are protected by an often constitutionally guaranteed free mandate. In other respects, however, parliaments are quite normal organizations: membership is clearly defined by the legal framework, parliamentary proceedings are structured by formal rules, organizational charts assign tasks and responsibilities, and new members have to learn the 'rules of the game' (Brichzin, 2016; Ringel, 2017; 2019a). To analyze how the rules are learned, we borrow from research on organizational socialization.

Research on organizational socialization has produced an impressive body of literature since the 1970s. In general, organizational socialization is defined as 'the process by which an individual acquires the attitudes, behavior and knowledge needed to participate as an organizational member' (Bauer et al., 1998: 150). As Ashforth et al. (2007) highlight in a literature review, this process is complex and multifaceted, and involves activity on the part of the newcomers as well as the organization. In light of our focus on professional political socialization, we have adopted a stage model that allows us to

analyze step by step the changes individuals experience as they become fulltime politicians. By further combining it with an interpretative approach, we have also been able to trace instances of identity formation and role interpretation (Ashforth and Schinoff, 2016). Although stage models have become classic tools, Ashforth et al. (2007: 9) maintain that they 'continue to provide a useful heuristic for thinking through the challenges that newcomers (and their employers) tend to face'. The four stages of organizational socialization identified in the literature are: the anticipation phase, the encounter phase, the adjustment phase, and the stabilization phase.

The first stage, *anticipation*, 'includes activities through which individuals develop expectations regarding the organization in preparation for entry' (Ashforth et al., 2007: 9; see also Merton, 1957). Although this is likely to be a crucial phase – organizational socialization usually involves as much 'changing from' as 'changing to' (Louis, 1980) – research has yet to harvest its analytical and empirical potentials. This is also the case in legislative research, which has paid little attention to preformative phases when studying processes of socialization in political institutions. Consequently, we might ask: how do previously formed expectations shape the ways in which individuals engage with their new roles as MPs?

The second stage, the *encounter*, has, by contrast, been extensively studied. Experiencing a new organizational ecosystem often causes a 'reality shock' (Hughes, 1958) as discrepancies between expectations and reality become apparent (Louis, 1980). New members of an organization face uncertainty in such an 'anxiety producing situation' (van Maanen and Schein, 1979: 214), sometimes resulting in intense emotional reactions (Weick et al., 2005). Newcomers are, therefore, likely to engage in what is often referred to as sensemaking: when facing ambiguous circumstances, which they cannot explain by applying established frames of reference, individuals try to regain a grasp of what is happening by actively searching for meaning and effectively creating it. This helps them integrate ongoing events into a plausible narrative, form a stable identity, and develop strategies for action (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005).

> Sensemaking involves the ongoing retrospective development of plausible images that rationalize what people are doing. Viewed as a significant process of organizing, sensemaking unfolds as a sequence in which people concerned with identity in the social context of other actors engage ongoing circumstances from which they extract cues and make plausible sense retrospectively, while enacting more or less order into those ongoing circumstances. (Weick et al., 2005: 409)

This quote indicates that sensemaking is usually not a clearly distinguishable and singular event, but an ongoing activity in which action and talk are intertwined in a cyclical relationship. In other words, it is 'about continued redrafting of an emerging story so that it becomes more comprehensive, incorporates more of the observed data, and is more resilient in the face of criticism' (Weick et al., 2005: 415). Furthermore, sensemaking is fundamentally a social activity: actors craft meaning in social interactions to make their cognitive frameworks fit the respective (organizational, cultural, national, etc.) context. 'Fit,' however, does not mean that concepts correspond to an underlying 'objective' reality; sensemaking is not about finding out what *reality really is*, but involves the creation of an intelligible narrative – a working theory – of what is going on.

During the *encounter stage*, newcomers engage with other members of the organization but remain in some sort of probation period, which means that until their abilities, motives, and values have been approved, they do not enjoy full 'inclusionary rights' (Van Maanen and Schein, 1979: 222). Again, there is limited information available in the literature on how individuals cope with the need for sensemaking and establishing trust. We might speculate that this is due to the fact that normative theories of democracy tend to ignore concepts of meaning and processes of meaning-making as empirical phenomena in need of study (cf. Brichzin et al., 2018).

In the course of the *adjustment stage*, new members are integrated into the organization. As a result, they are 'given broad responsibilities and autonomy, entrusted with 'privileged' information, included in informal networks, encouraged to represent the organization, and sought out for advice and counsel by others' (Louis, 1980: 231). Studies reveal different organizational strategies to facilitate the integration of new members, distinguishing

collective from individual, formal from informal, and fixed from variable tactics, to name but a few (Ashforth et al., 2007; van Maanen and Schein, 1979). Parliaments are special in this regard because they barely, if at all, institutionalize such techniques to facilitate integration, which leaves the task of adjustment usually to the parliamentary group and the individual MP (Reiser et al., 2011).

The fourth and last stage concerns *stabilization*. For socialization processes to be successful (Porath and Bateman, 2006: 185), the sensemaking that started in the encounter stage must now lead to the formation of a (relatively) stable identity. Likewise, organizational proceedings must have become more or less self-evident to the individual and enshrined in a coherent narrative. Stabilization signifies 'that individuals are bona fide organizational insiders,' and is indicated by 'signals and actions … including promotion, sharing of organizational secrets, lower stress, termination of mentoring, and integration into a group' (Ashforth et al., 2007: 9). In parliament, newcomers seem to reach the stabilization stage when they are fully familiar with parliamentary rules and proceedings, and succeed in forming a self-concept as an MP, that distinguishes them from the electorate (Reiser, 2018).

Research has shown that, as individuals become members of an organization, they go through different stages. Since professional socialization in parliaments is also a matter of organizational socialization, we suggest making use of the stage model presented here to trace how political newcomers are transformed into political insiders.

## The Pirate Party of Germany: A newcomer to the political system

We decided to study an extreme case of professional political socialization. By 'extreme,' we mean involving individuals whose beliefs deviate considerably from established parliamentary practice and who have little prior experience in professional politics or of the challenges they will encounter when they become 'insiders.' The case that we chose was that of the *Pirate Party*, a relatively young party founded in Sweden in 2006 and in several Western and non-Western countries thereafter. The rise of the Pirates was preceded by and connected with a variety of new social movements and technological

advances, particularly the Internet. These new social movements typically emerge outside traditional political arenas, are often hard to locate on the left–right axis, and remain highly skeptical of traditional political institutions such as parliaments, which they believe to be the root cause of many of the problems that we face today (Fredriksson Almqvist, 2016b). The Pirates are passionate believers in the benefits of comprehensive forms of government transparency. They frequently engage in digital activism and are fervent users of social media platforms, which serve as important electronic infrastructures for debates, temporary organizing (planning of events, campaigning etc.), and the implementation of participatory democratic procedures. It will come as no surprise that, as activists, they are very critical of the expansion of copyright legislation targeting the digital sphere, which they see as an impediment to citizens to exercising their freedoms online (Fredriksson Almqvist, 2016a). Consequently, copyright infringement has been the most important issue for the Pirate Party from the very beginning (Fredriksson Almqvist, 2015).

Although the Pirate Parties emerged from an environment that rejects institutionalized politics, they soon sought political representation and participated in elections in a number of countries. In contrast to how the Pirates are often perceived, this strategy indicates that 'the primacy of institutionalized politics is not only a pragmatic choice by the most dedicated party activists but also consistent with the political imagination of their less organized followers' (Fredriksson Almqvist, 2016b: 104). To put it bluntly, the Pirates felt that, in order to change the political system, they first had to adopt some of its conventions by participating in organized forms of electoral competition for representation. But what happens when a party that is not only dedicated to fringe issues (e.g., largely abandoning copyright legislation), but also to organizational procedures that in several ways radically deviate from the political common sense (see below), moves to the core of the political system in the wake of elections?

For a variety of reasons, the *German* Pirate Party is an ideal case through which to address this question. First, by being elected to four state parliaments in 2011/2012, it left the largest mark on the electoral map of all the Pirate Parties. Pirates were elected in Berlin (15 seats), North Rhine-

Westphalia (20 seats), Saarland (4 seats), and Schleswig-Holstein (6 seats). Compared to other countries, the German Pirate Party has moved closest to the center of political institutions and, as a result, has been exposed to significant pressure. Second, members of the German Pirate Party are openly distrustful of parliaments (Fredriksson Almqvist, 2016b), which is why we might expect tensions between the party base and the elected representatives. Third, with its emphasis on (a) comprehensive transparency and (b) radical participatory democracy, the party promotes procedural norms that deviate from the German political post–World War II consensus, which, in spite of international developments, has proven to be very resilient. Despite occasional endorsements of transparency, German political culture is firmly entrenched in the belief that privacy and secrecy are, at some level, necessary (Eilfort, 2003; Mayntz, 1989; Schöne, 2010). The lack of effective freedom of information legislation is an indicator of the cultural importance and legitimacy of secrecy in German politics. The German political system is built around the idea of representation and offers few opportunities for participation. As earlier studies on the Green Party and their experiments with grassroots politics and participatory models of decision-making suggest, anyone who tries to implement such measures in the German political system faces severe challenges (Poguntke, 1993).

Of the four German states in which the Pirates gained parliamentary representation, NRW seemed to be the most promising. Receiving 7.8% in the snap election in May 2012 at the height of the party's national popularity (public polling had them at over 10%), the state Pirate Party was eligible to form a parliamentary group with its 20 newly elected representatives attracting a high degree of media attention. In contrast to Berlin, the Pirates in NRW moved from the margins to the center of the political system within a relatively short time and, due to its being a snap election, they had little time to prepare. The first author studied the parliamentary group between 2013 and 2016, focusing on how members tried to put their organizational ideals of transparency and participatory models of democracy into practice. The findings have already been published elsewhere (Albu and Ringel, 2018; Ringel, 2017; 2019a; see also Ringel, 2019b for a detailed account of the research process and data collection). For the purposes of this article, we

revisited the dataset to focus specifically on organizational socialization, a theme previous publications had not explored. The article draws data from a variety of sources, such as narrative interviews, video streams, blog posts, twitter feeds, and newspaper articles, analyzed according to the grounded theory methodology (Glaser and Strauss, 1971). We specifically examined narratives and mechanisms of attuning the newly elected MPs to the ways of the state parliament. We further investigated processes of identity formation and the struggles involved with them, starting from the period before the election, moving then to the moment of encountering the full force of the state parliament, and the specific type of adjustment that took place in the months following the election.

## Professional political socialization in parliament

Having analyzed the data according to the stage model of organizational socialization, we present our findings in steps. First, we show how the Pirates' core beliefs (4.1.) clashed with those held by established actors in the state parliament. As a result, the newly elected MPs had to engage in sensemaking to create a meaningful interpretation of their new situation and to acquire a stable identity (4.2.). In the months after the election, they eventually adjusted to the established ways of the state parliament even though there were no rules or authorities forcing them to do so (4.3.). In effect, they were able to become – to some extent – normal members of the state parliament, thus enjoying some of the privileges of 'insiders' (4.4.).

*Anticipation: 'Renewing the operating system'*

The informants had strong expectations before entering the state parliament, which were only loosely grounded in actual political experience, given that the party had previously resided on the margins of the political system. As already mentioned, the Pirate Party not only stands for digital activism and related issues such as rolling back copyright legislation, it also embraces a core set of procedural and organizational ideals. There is reason to believe that it was also these ideals that made the party appealing to the electorate. Calling for 'the operating system to be renewed' (*Das Betriebssystem erneuern*, Appelius and Fuhrer, 2012), the Pirates wanted to make political decision-

making processes more inclusive, thus reducing the discretion of 'political elites,' to create flat hierarchies, and to render government and public organizations transparent, as expressed in utopian visions of a 'state made out of glass' (*gläserner Staat*). All of these these themes loomed large in the interviews.

*Participation* was deemed essential by our informants. For some of them, it was the main reason why they joined the party in the first place:

> This is not a party in which you just tick the right box every couple of years in the voting booth. It's about being involved in organizing so that everybody can meet up, engage, participate at the local level. (Interview I)

Mirroring this sentiment, Informant O was intrigued by the possibility of 'becoming a member of the party and participating right away, organizationally and politically.' Clearly, what made the Pirate Party appealing was its ability to provide low-threshold opportunities for political engagement and its rejection of entrusting expert delegates with the task of discussing and determining policy positions at their own discretion. This is reportedly what some of the MPs had experienced as members of other parties.

> I was a member of [Party X] and soon began to realize that, even though I liked their policies, I wasn't comfortable with the way they were organized. … The Pirates allowed me to voice my opinion right away, without restriction. That was a lot tougher in [Party X] where you have to climb up the ladder slowly, and only after a long trial period can you participate in decision-making. (Interview I)

While it takes a long time and a high level of engagement before members of traditional parties are granted access to decision-making, the Pirate Party welcomes its members to participate immediately as it is convinced that deliberative processes benefit from unleashing the 'swarm intelligence' of the many (Piratenpartei Deutschland Wiki, 2012). Accordingly, democratic politics are to be taken out of the hands of the elites and given to the people, who should have equal opportunities in determining their own lives.

Closely related to participatory forms of organizing decision-making processes is the ideal of *flat hierarchies*. The Pirate Party is deeply skeptical of

formal authority because its members are convinced that, as one informant put it, 'we all are the party base' (Informant A). Another informant emphasized: 'This critical view of hierarchies and power, the exercise of power, is what characterizes us' (Interview L). This again is part of the reason why some MPs decided to join the party: 'What I found especially appealing was this system of very flat hierarchies, which allows everyone to come in and take part equally. That's what made me curious' (Interview K).

Even though the Green Party had already experimented with both flat hierarchies and participatory decision-making in the 1980s, the Pirate Party's quest for *transparency* was truly novel and subsequently became the cornerstone of its organizational identity, at least in Germany (see the discourse analysis by Hönigsberger and Osterberg, 2012). Once again, embracing this mode of organizational governance appealed to the informants when they decided to join the party, as the following quote illustrates: 'What I really appreciated was that they posted their protocols on the Internet right after the meetings. No other party did that. So, I decided to go to one of their meetings' (Interview O). Another informant emphasized that what united the members of the party was the firm belief that 'everything has to be transparent' (Interview A).

When running for office in 2012, the informants practiced openness in accordance with the party's ideals and did not restrict the stream of information from the inside outward: videos of party conferences were made available online, meetings and mailing lists were open to everybody, candidates used social media and interviews they gave to journalists to speak their minds freely, and the party finances and expenditures were published regularly. Facing very little opposition from the other parties, being hyped by the media, and gaining an astonishing 20 seats in the state parliament, the Pirates saw their political vision confirmed. Naturally, they expected to be able to continue in this fashion and to change the ways of parliamentary politics for good: 'There can be no conversations behind closed doors, all meetings must be public: board meetings, everything has to be streamed simultaneously' (Interview A). Another representative affirmed this sentiment publicly: 'Next stop: state parliament! Working hard to achieve the impossible: establishing our political ideals in parliament!' (Marsching, 2012).

*Encounter: 'Reality shock'*

Whether it concerns inclusive forms of decision-making, flat hierarchies, or transparency, the established practice in German parliaments (at national as well as state level) clearly deviates from the Pirates' imaginings. Elected politicians tend to develop an 'esprit de corps' across party lines (Mayntz, 1989) as they consider themselves the experts best equipped to make decisions, which implies rejecting the inclusion of citizens. Even though parliamentary groups (and parliaments for that matter) are formally prohibited from disciplining individual representatives, studies point to a rich variety of informal mechanisms to establish and enforce de-facto hierarchies (Eilfort, 2003); and, while all parties invoke the importance of transparency in public statements, they nevertheless frequently engage in backroom negotiations (Depenheuer, 2001).

How did the informants react to their new work environment? Instead of acting as bold agents of change, there are many indications that they felt rather overwhelmed and, especially during the first couple of weeks, seemed to have experienced a severe 'reality shock' (Interview L):

> None of us had a real idea of what was going to happen. I didn't, and the others, they didn't either, even if some of them said something different. No, we didn't know what was coming our way. (Interview C)

On the one hand, the informants faced challenges *within* the parliament: Above all, building a parliamentary group and navigating the formal and informal structures of the parliament proved to be a complicated and time-consuming task. On the other, they had to deal with unforeseen reactions from *outside* the parliament: public perception in particular, which seemed to have changed dramatically:

> Before the election, people had a positive view of [us being chaotic], so we had a bit of a sympathy bonus. They said we are fresh and new and everything. (Interview D)

This 'sympathy bonus' however, faded quickly and the parliamentary group faced a dissatisfied party base. One of the MPs complained in a blogpost that the party base seems to be under the impression that 'nothing more would be

heard of us, as if we had vanished into orbit like a satellite' (Brand, 2012). As for media coverage, journalists stopped reporting favorably and started to badmouth the parliamentary group. From leaving a stack of empty pizza boxes in the parliament cafeteria to poor handling of infighting, the Pirates became the subject of critical scrutiny (Ringel, 2019b). What surprised the MPs most was that they were suddenly criticized for the kinds of behavior they had generally been praised for before the election, such as the candor with which they publicized internal conflicts. As a result, the MPs were deeply confused, a state of mind typically associated with 'disjunctive socialization' (Van Maanen and Schein, 1979: 32) – situations of discontinuity between the 'old' and the 'new.' Much of the confusion seems to have been connected with the party's three maxims of organizational governance – participatory decision-making, flat hierarchies, and transparency – which we will now discuss in more detail.

*Participatory decision-making.* Creating procedures what would enable the party base to participate in decision-making proved more difficult than anticipated. On the one hand, the MPs discovered that, as one informant put it, 'when you ask the party base, you often don't get an answer' (Interview L). On the other hand, if the party base did provide 'an answer,' it often turned out to be inadequately prepared, especially when the issues were complex: 'If you work [in a non-political profession] you have only a limited amount of time that you can dedicate to political issues, which is why your knowledge will be rather shallow' (Interview K). Some informants felt that the software solutions that the party had developed to be more inclusive (for example, a digital tool called Liquid Feedback) were liable to acts of sabotage, which should be taken into consideration when seeking the input of the party base:

> I can make an online survey and within two or three hours I get thirty respondents. Considering that we have six thousand members in North Rhine-Westphalia alone, this makes barely one half per mill of all of us. No, that doesn't work. (Interview H)

Evidently, the MPs struggled to follow their initial intention of granting the party base immediate and unlimited access to policymaking.

*Flat hierarchies*. The Pirates rejected any mechanism to reprimand or discipline party members regardless of their supposed transgressions. Two early scandals that rocked the parliamentary group of NRW stand out in terms both of public reactions to them and of the internal turmoil they created (see Ringel, 2017 for a detailed account). The first scandal was caused by an MP who became the target of intense media scrutiny after sending two tweets. In the first, she mentioned that she had taken an HIV test after unprotected intercourse; in the second, two months later, she complained about long and tedious plenary sessions. The media overreported on both tweets, seeing them as clear evidence that the Pirate Party was in a veritable crisis; even her colleagues expressed frustration over her actions. An MP went so far as to ponder in public whether the parliamentary group should continue to exist; she worried that, while chaos was growing, the group seemed to be unable to act professionally (Brand 2012). The second scandal also revolved around a tweet. In it, another MP made a controversial statement about Israel, accusing its government of waging wars. In the wake of these (and related) events, the MPs struggled to maintain their favorable view of flat hierarchies.

*Transparency*. A core belief held by many Pirates is that political institutions should be less secretive, which is why they made the commitment that, once elected, they would operate with a kind of transparency that was unrestricted and comprehensive. During their first weeks in office, however, the informants realized that implementing transparency in a work environment such as the state parliament is much more complicated than they had anticipated. For instance, they struggled with requests by their political rivals to have private conversations:

> Well, there's no other way. I can't force this on others. I can tell them I want to record it. Then they can decide, do they want that or not. If they say no, then the conversation simply does not take place. (Interview M)

Disrespecting other peoples' need for privacy, the MPs learned, comes at the cost of privileged access to interparty meetings, which are sites of informal information exchange and deliberation. Another drawback, from the informants' point of view, was that the party base simply could not handle the amount of raw information thrown at them as a result of unfiltered transparency. One of the MPs explained:

> That's the downside of transparency. If you make everything transparent, then you really have a lot of raw data which you have to somehow process. That's just how it is, unfortunately. (Interview I)

*Adjustment: 'Sucked into parliament'*

Following their initial surprise and feelings of uncertainty, the informants tried to adjust to their new work environment so as to regain a sense of belonging. Van Maanen and Schein (1979) distinguish three individual responses to organizational efforts to get newcomers to adjust: custodianship, content innovation, and role innovation. New organizational members who engage in *custodianship* accept the status quo and basically try to learn the formal and informal rules of the game. Those who practice *content innovation* make 'substantive improvements or changes in the knowledge base or strategic practices of a particular role' (*ibid.*: 228). Lastly, when newcomers strive for *role innovation*, they reject 'most of the norms governing the conduct and performance of a particular role' (*ibid.*: 229) and seek to redefine it. The Pirates' initial goal clearly was to redefine what it meant to be an MP and how parliamentary business should be conducted. However, after a short period of confusion the MPs arrived at an interpretation of their role that more closely resembled a mix of custodianship and content innovation, even though there was no formal authority mandating and organizing the process of adjustment. There are many indications that this process of adjustment was mainly facilitated by daily interactions between the Pirates and a variety of other actors, who might be referred to as socialization agents. As a result, the informants were able to craft a coherent narrative and a new identity, which was a blend of the Pirate Party's organizational ideals and the traditional norms and practices of the state parliament.

It seems as if the informants abandoned the ideal of 'renewing the operating system' because the state parliament appeared as something objective to them, an external force of sorts. An informant describes a feeling of being 'sucked into parliament' (Interview H), a sentiment mirrored by the frequent use of such expressions as 'we must,' 'we had to,' 'of course we need to,' 'it was necessary,' and so forth in other interviews. See for instance the following quote:

> And, we really *had to* set up the faction from scratch. We *had to* write a statute, we *had to* develop rules of procedure, all these formalities. And then we *had* to think about the practical stuff, too. We *have to* hire staff – at first, we were no more than twenty people, only the twenty MPs, nobody else. But a parliamentary group consists not only of representatives, we *need* people who occupy the offices, who take care of the correspondence, we *need* people who work with us professionally, assistants – yes, everything *had to be* set up from scratch. (Interview I, emphasis added)

The taken-for-grantedness ascribed to the formal and informal rules of the state parliament is captured most vividly in a quote by an MP who argues that they 'had to learn the how-to's of the state parliament' (Interview A). The expression 'how-to' is illuminating as it suggests that parliamentary traditions – the current 'operating system' – are self-evident sets of rules bearing a resemblance to technical manuals.

As they, of course, lacked any real technical manuals detailing the 'how-to's of the state parliament,' the Pirates realized that they had a problem: unlike the other parties, they had neither experienced colleagues or staff to help them get adjusted and learn the 'rules of the game'.

> Don't forget: in every other company, if you are new, there's someone who takes this newcomer by the hand and shows them the ropes. That's how it usually is. Touring the office: here's the toilet, and here's the coffee machine, and here's the phone if you need to make a call. It's like that in every other company. We didn't have that. (Interview F)

Deprived of existing structures on which they could build directly, the Pirates sought external assistance: first, from other MPs, with whom they had more and more informal meetings and, second, from the administrative staff of the state parliament, who they thought were tremendously important, especially at the beginning:

> We've been in touch with the parliamentary administration on a regular basis [...]. We had different heads of department coming to caucus meetings – which took place, as I already told you, every day at that time. And they introduced us to certain procedures. (Interview K)

When hiring aides, the MPs defined many of the tasks as not being of a political nature, which is why they favored candidates with a professional

background and who, preferably, had already been working in parliament. Such candidates, the informants felt, had the advantage of being unbiased: 'I'm happy that we had people who did not try to push us in a certain direction, but who simply showed us how things are done around here' (Interview A). Thus, it did not matter whether aides were party members; several informants mention that, for all they cared, aides could 'even be members of another party' (Interview M). In spite of many disagreements within the parliamentary group, the MPs generally agreed with this hiring practice, even Informant D, who was critical of his colleagues' efforts to normalize relations with other parties in the state parliament: 'We hired a handful of people with prior experience in parliament who could show us how things are done' (Interview D).

Because they experienced the established parliamentary traditions and norms as an objective reality to which they had no other choice but to adapt, the MPs exposed themselves to socialization agents of various kinds and subsequently revised their understanding of participatory decision-making, flat hierarchies, and transparency. The following quote indicates that this process entailed intense discussions and sensemaking:

> Suddenly, we got together almost every day for hours in a room and were supposed to be a team. Of course, we were at odds at first because people have different agendas. The dynamics were fierce. And at the same time, we had to become acquainted with the ins and outs of this place and self-organize. (Interview A)

In this process the MPs came to embrace a more modest model of *participatory decision-making*, acknowledging both its merits and limitations:

> The thing you have to keep in mind is that we are 20, or now 19, MPs. We are professionals. We are highly specialized and everyone focuses only on a handful of topics with additional resources at our disposal: staff, parliamentary group staff, personal aides. At the same time, if you consider the party base's participation, uh, that is, people outside the state parliament, so to speak, hobby politicians – they do this on a voluntary basis and in their spare time, while they already have a job that keeps them busy 40 or even 50 hours per week. They want to be taken along too. (Interview L)

The quote illustrates a profound change in how the MPs defined themselves in relation to the party base: while they had become *professionals*, in possession of the in-depth knowledge required to participate in policymaking, the party base consisted mainly of 'hobby politicians' or *amateurs*. As professionals, they were able to acquire a kind of expertise for which amateurs had neither the time nor the resources, which is why, in the words of Informant L, the party base was suddenly in need of being 'taken along.' As the MPs saw it, the increasing distance between the parliamentary group and the party base was not necessarily a problem but a by-product of professionalization. The MPs had no doubt that the input of the party base could still be of high value, but ultimately they had to decide which suggestions were reasonable.

Thus, the gap between them and the party base was widening, but, by the same token, the MPs seemed to be moving closer to their political opponents in the state parliaments. Some informants even began to trust them: 'You have to trust people, right? Because you can't take care of everything yourself' (Interview C). A good example of what this meant in practice was the preparation of the so-called 'bee proposal,' which mandated the regulation of monocultures for the preservation of bees. The proposal was put forward by the Pirates and subsequently passed by the state parliament in February 2013 (more than half a year into the term). A group of Pirate MPs and their aides worked on the proposal on their own, as their colleagues trusted them and did not feel the need to intervene or to mandate their own opinions. This suggests that the MPs had grown accustomed to following each other's recommendations to some extent. Expertise and knowledge were now an important part of their shared identity.

Even though the MPs remained critical of *hierarchies*, they had become more accepting of rudimentary disciplinary measures following their negative experiences with public scandals in the encounter stage. Take the 'bee proposal' again: during informal negotiations with the Green Party whose support the Pirates were seeking, a Pirate MP send out a a press release criticizing the Green Party, which the Greens felt was highly inappropriate. According to an informant, the Pirate MPs who were involved in the negotiations successfully pressured their renegade colleague to take the

statement off the website. These types of interventions seemed to occur more frequently after the first couple of months:

> It is interesting to see that at first nobody said anything, and now there is a group that exerts pressure. Something has changed, for instance when people are constantly late. Now it's possible to say: that's enough! That wouldn't have been possible only three months ago. (Interview C)

Even though the Pirates Party opposes the exertion of pressure because its members believe that everyone should be allowed to speak their mind freely no matter what the consequences, the informant was evidently arguing that there are occasions when such measures are warranted – fellow MPs (who 'are constantly late') displaying a lack in professionalism being a case in point.

Unrestricted and comprehensive *transparency* might be the hallmark of the Pirate identity (Hönigsberger and Osterberg, 2012), but MPs' frustrations grew as they tried to make good on their promises. Once more, the 'bee proposal' is an illuminating example. The group of Pirate MPs and aides responsible for drafting the proposal not only worked on their own, but also in secret. The proposal became an item on the agenda of a caucus meeting only after it had been finalized. This way the Pirates effectively prevented other parties – who, according to the informants, were always watching the video streams of caucus meetings – from stealing the idea and making a proposal of their own. This put the other parties in the position of having to support the proposal in the plenary session since voting against animal rights is generally seen as a bad strategy in politics. The Pirates, it turned out, had succeeded by following 'the rules of the game': 'We played chess and checkmated the others because they simply couldn't be against it' (Interview F). As the MPs accepted that secrecy is sometimes necessary for success, unrestricted and comprehensive transparency regardless of the costs incurred ceased to be a goal: 'I don't have that attitude anymore,' (Interview A). Some MPs even voiced this opinion in public:

> A protocol in and of itself does not guarantee transparency. Quality is of equal importance, which is also true of legislative work. Open sessions in and of themselves do not guarantee transparency (Marsching, 2013)

Transparency, the MPs concluded, does not necessarily mean that information has to be provided in real time. An informant even mentions having heard aides telling each other the following joke: 'If you want to hide information, just put it in the public wiki [of the Pirate Party] where no one can find it' (Interview C). Thus, in contrast to the dominant vision within the party, the MPs embraced a more modest concept of transparency:

> I define 'transparency' as the traceability of decisions. The best example of this are the proceedings of the court of arbitration: in this instance, transparent procedure means documenting the proceedings and publishing them AFTER the fact. (Marsching, 2013, capital letters in original)

Transparency was no longer equated with total accessibility and the publication of raw information. That, the informants argued, may actually conceal as much as it ostensibly unveils. A more sensible kind of transparency, on the other hand, requires information to be edited.

*Stabilization: Dealing with the 'Pirate disease'*

Having become regular members of the state parliament, the MPs had gained the trust of their colleagues and were therefore granted certain privileges and access to information they did not have initially. Some MPs and aides had confidential conversations and meetings with members of other parties on a more or lesss regular basis and thus gained important insights into the backstage workings of the state parliament. For instance, at a collaborative barbecue after work, press officers learned that the Pirates were soon going to be attacked in public, which gave them ample time to prepare a response in advance.

However much the Pirates were accepted as members of the state parliament and self-identified as professional politicians, some MPs occasionally 'went off script.' Their newly acquired identity, in other words, was not as stable as it seemed. An MP who lashed out at his fellow parliamentary group members in a blog post – published well into the term, one and a half years after the election – is a good example. The blog post provided a detailed account of what had happened in the closed part of a caucus meeting and therefore, according to the norms of the state parliaments, constituted a breach of trust.

Washing dirty laundry in public was clearly considered inappropriate, and yet the MP still decided to take this step:

> my proposal was not accepted. … Even though I tried to voice my concerns, I failed. Then, 20 minutes before the deadline for submitting proposals, we had a vote on whether or not to discuss my proposal. I gave up and left the meeting. All of that happened in the closed part. (Schwerd, 2013)

We learned from the interviews that the informants are well aware of this problem, which they seem to interpret as more or less spontaneous public outbursts by individuals who cannot resist the urge. As an informant put it, MPs occasionally 'fall back into old habits' (Interview B), or, more dramatically, they succumb to what another informant refers to as the 'Pirate disease' (Interview L).

While some might be quick to rush to judgment, labelling such behavior irrational or a direct consequence of an emotional rush (or conversely, the expression of true democratic sentiment), there might be another explanation: organization members often have to navigate *membership in multiple contexts*. Such phenomena have attracted little attention in the literature on organizational socialization, which tends to conceive of organizations as having an almost 'tribal' character with individuals being a member of only one of them. Van Maanen and Schein, for instance, explicitly argue for a limited analytical framework that accounts only for the focal organization. Yet they also acknowledge that the broader context might be an important factor:

> changes in the larger environment within which organizationally defined roles are played out may force certain changes upon role occupants despite perhaps vehement resistance or whatever particular backgrounds, values, or predispositions define those who presently perform a given role. But, these factors go well beyond our interests here for they essentially lie outside an organizational analysis. (Van Maanen and Schein, 1979: 229)

Following Weick (1979) and others, we maintain that it is crucial to recognize that individuals are inevitably only partially included in most organizations. That means they usually hold multiple commitments. No-one is *only* a politician, accountant, doctor, scientist, teacher, or travel agent; they are, at the same time, a father, mother, worshipper, member of a bowling club, and

so on. Some of these commitments involve organizations (e.g., being a member of a bowling club), and some do not (e.g., being a father or mother). Taking multiple memberships into account we believe might help research on organizational socialization to gain new insights. For instance, we might arrive at a different interpretation as to why some Pirate MPs occasionally 'fall back into old habits.'

In the case at hand, the MPs of the parliamentary group had to balance their newly acquired professional identity with being members of the Pirate Party. They could not completely abandon long-held ideals of participatory decision-making, flat hierarchies, and radical transparency and sometimes felt compelled to reaffirm them, thereby violating established parliamentary practice. In the words of an informant: 'perhaps it's always like that – if the pendulum swings too far in one direction, you want to stop it. And perhaps, then it will swing a little too far to the other side.' This illustrates that, in order to understand the behavior of the MPs properly, it is necessary to consider the full set of valued commitments they hold – not only to the focal organization (the state parliament), but also to other contexts (the party). The above quote also suggests that such commitments can be mutually exclusive: individuals who act according to the Pirate Party's ideals violate established parliamentarian practices, and vice versa. To put it differently, as long as the party promotes organizational ideals that are at odds with institutionalized practices in the political system, there are limits to how comprehensive the professional political socialization of their elected representatives can be.

## Concluding discussion: Professional political socialization as organizational socialization

In this article we have examined the social process of professional political socialization by tracing the transformation of newly elected MPs in terms of their behaviour and identities. Drawing from data collected in a study on the MPs of the Pirate Party of Germany in the federal state of NRW, we have studied the process step by step, starting with anticipatory expectations and moving on to the first encounter with the ways and norms of the state parliament, the adjustment that takes place in the months thereafter, and

finally to a fragile stabilization. Making use of the stage model suggested by Ashforth et al. (2007) and Weick's concept of sensemaking (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005), we found that by recognizing individuals' expectations and previously held beliefs, studies can explain their reactions to and handling of new work environments.

Our findings suggest that the newly elected MPs experienced a severe 'reality shock' on entering the state parliament caused by the divergence between their beliefs regarding participatory decision-making, flat hierarchies, and comprehensive transparency on the one hand, and established parliamentary practices on the other. When they found that they were unable to reconcile those ideals with the ways of the state parliament, they adjusted to the latter by editing the former and creating a new identity that aimed to bridge the divide. They grew cautious of participatory decision-making and saw themselves as professionals, best equipped to form an opinion on matters of policy, making participation contingent upon expertise; they introduced rudimentary disciplinary measures in order to navigate the intricacies of parliament; and they embraced a narrower vision of transparency, grounded in the idea that true visibility cannot be achieved by merely dumping large quantities of information on the internet. We should note that there are no indications of a formal or informal authority 'putting the screws' to the MPs. Rather it seems as if they themselves were the main drivers behind those efforts as they actively looked for the help of various socializing agents such as the administrative staff of the state parliament, other parties, and aides whom they recruited based on prior experience. However, we have also shown that the process of integration into parliament was never completely finished, with MPs occasionally deviating from parliamentary norms, for instance by disclosing private conversations in blog posts. To get a better understanding of why MPs occasionally 'fall back into old habits,' as one informant put it, we have suggested broadening the analytical scope and taking into account the multiple commitments of individuals. Such a view draws attention to the fact that the MPs are not only members of parliament, but also committed to the Pirate Party. Their professionalization notwithstanding, the informants still feel compelled to act in accordance with the party's ideals, and, what is more, in doing so they can even mobilize external support for their own agenda.

What are the main takeaways from our study? First, in borrowing from research on organizational socialization, we were able to trace how newly elected MPs make sense of their work environment and flesh out new identities to establish a coherent interpretation of the situation. While such processes have been studied extensively in other work contexts, research on political socialization has largely neglected them, either focusing on the formation of political opinions in childhood/adolescence or on how well-attuned elected politicians are to the preferences of the electorate. While these studies have provided important insights into politics, we argue that by *studying parties or parliaments as organizations*, research can shed new light on a variety of issues from the alientation between politicians and voters to mechanisms of informal coordination within as well as between parties (see also Ringel et al., 2019).

Second, the study indicates that organizational socialization is not necessarily mandated by formal or informal authorities as often implied in the research literature, which tends to focus on how organizations adjust newcomers, who are thus seen as reacting to stimuli. In the case of the Pirate Party, the newly elected MPs felt 'sucked into' the state parliament even though no one directly applied pressure to them. Quite the contrary. It seems in fact as if the MPs actively went looking for socializing agents to tell them what to do. In other words, even in situations in which individuals enter an organization in order to inspire fundamental change, there is reason to believe that, regardless of their motives, the mere fact that there are established practices and beliefs indicates that these newcomers will be affected once they have crossed the boundary from the outside to the inside, even more so in the case of organizations such as parliaments with longstanding traditions and well-institutionalized structures. By taking a comparative perspective, future studies might look more closely into how taken for granted the rules and traditions of an organization appear to new members, which implies a phenomenological approach that is sensitive to perception and sensemaking.

Third, in contrast to Van Maanen and Schein (1979) cited above, who limit their analytical scope and take only intra-organizational processes into consideration, we maintain that context (other organizations, fields, sectors,

or even society) matters a great deal. Borrowing from Weick (1979), we have argued for expanding the scope of research on organizational socialization by accounting for commitments to multiple contexts – in our case to the professional environment of the state parliament and to the ideals of the Pirate Party.

In closing, we would like to emphasize that, in the course of this paper, we have made use of the analytical tools provided by research on organizational socialization (a) to offer an alternative interpretation of the alienation between politicians and the electorate and (b) to suggest new avenues of research studying political practice as organizational practice. Our point has not been to dismiss the many concerns voiced in public discourse and by political research. Both tend to discuss negative trends as being caused either by questionable ethics on the part of the political establishment or by systemic ruptures rooted in ideologies such as neoliberalism. However, we are convinced (and we hope that this paper has shown) that there are other, perhaps less obvious factors as well that might help explain phenomena such as the frequently claimed disconnect between politicians and the electorate. Tracing the organizational processes by which amateurs become politicians has allowed us to provide a more all-embracing account of the transformation that someone undergoes who crosses the boundary from the outside to the inside of a political institution. Whatever opinion we might have of these transformations, future studies on professional political socialization are well advised to take into account that any changes they find in individuals can only be understood if embedded in the larger organizational context that gives shape to and facilitates this process.

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## the authors

Leopold Ringel is a lecturer at the Faculty of Sociology of Bielefeld University, Germany. His current research focuses on the unintended consequences of organizational transparency and quantification, rankings in particular. He has published in *Organization Studies*, *Research in the Sociology of Organizations*, and *Politics & Governance*. He holds a doctoral degree from Heinrich-Heine-University Duesseldorf, Germany.
Email: leopold.ringel@uni-bielefeld.de

Jenni Brichzin is a postdoctoral fellow at the Bundeswehr University Munich, Germany. She completed her PhD at Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich, Germany, with a thesis on political work in parliaments. Currently, her work revolves

around two main areas: investigating democracy and democratic practices (both inside and outside of political institutions), and retracing anti-essentialist thinking, its limits and its influence on current society.
Email: jennifer.brichzin@unibw.de

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# A Machiavellian prince at the Elysée: *Virtù* leadership and contingency in the populist moment

Charles Barthold and Martin Fougère

## abstract

In this paper we study the strategies through which Emmanuel Macron was able to emerge as a hegemonic leader in French politics in the context of the populist moment. In particular, we analyse (1) Macron's interventions that contributed to redraw the political map and renew the establishment, as well as (2) how some of those interventions focused on building his digital movement-party LaREM through personalisation. Drawing on Laclau, we emphasise how, for political leaders, politics is about boldly adapting to contingency – and we use Machiavelli's concept of *virtù* to illuminate how Macron adopted these strategies in his rise to power. We contribute to the power and leadership literature by showing how, through *virtù,* a leadership practice can emerge and become hegemonic. Relatedly, we contribute to the political organising literature by suggesting how the digital movement-party *En Marche!* (later *La République En Marche*) and its alternating opening and closing was used strategically in Macron's conquest of power. Thus, we illuminate how a movement-party was used instrumentally for a highly personalised conquest of power. Finally, we make a theoretical contribution by suggesting how Machiavelli and Laclau can be combined in order to understand the populist moment: as a political space full of contingency in which Machiavellian insights are relevant to understand how leaders seize opportunities; and from a Laclauian perspective, as a space of opportunity for some of the *virtù* interventions to make a hegemonic project successful.

## Introduction

In critical leadership literature, the concept of power tends to be used to describe either (1) the ways in which certain hegemonic discourses shape norms about leadership (Ford, 2006; Muhr, 2011; Cook and Glass, 2016; Collinson, 2020), or (2) how leadership is entangled with struggles (e.g. Gagnon and Collinson, 2014; Smolović Jones et al., 2016) or resistance (e.g. Zoller and Fairhurst, 2007). Relating to the latter stream, Sinha et al. (2021) take an interest in the 'transition' of a leader from marginality to developing a hegemonic leadership practice, and urge for more studies to help us understand how this process might work. We aim, therefore, to explicate how in populist times a personalised leadership practice can enable a redrawing of the political map and thereby deliver a renewal of the establishment, adapting boldly to contingency through *virtù* (Machiavelli, 2017 [1532]). In doing so, we focus on Emmanuel Macron as a political leader and his interaction with his political movement-party *En Marche!*, later LaREM (*La République En Marche*, 'The Republic Onwards').

Beyond our contribution to critical leadership studies and the study of how a marginal leader manages to conquer power, we contribute to the political organising literature (Husted and Plesner, 2017; Gerbaudo, 2017, 2019a, 2019b) by analysing how the opening and the closing down of the movement-party happened in a series of strategic interventions by the leader and his team, which was highly instrumental to the conquest of power. Additionally, unlike existing studies that link digital party organising with anti-establishment politics (e.g. Gerbaudo, 2019b), we show how forms of political organising that leverage the openness of digital processes (and the possibility to modulate that openness) can be employed by actors whose objective is to renew – and perhaps even become – the establishment. Finally, we make a theoretical contribution by suggesting how Laclau's (2005) notions of political contingency and hegemonic interventions can be combined with Machiavelli's (2017 [1532]) analysis of the prince as needing to deploy *virtù* by seizing opportunities when they are offered by *fortuna*.

Macron, who was not a public figure before 2015, was able to emerge very quickly as Minister of Economy, then a presidential candidate, and then

finally the winner of the 2017 presidential elections. This entailed the creation from scratch of a successful movement, first *En Marche!* then LaREM, which quickly became the biggest political party in France. What Macron accomplished is truly extraordinary (Anderson, 2017; Roussellier, 2017; Dolez et al., 2019) because he was able to redraw the French political landscape beyond the Left-Right divide, which had characterised French politics since the beginning of the Fifth Republic and possibly since the French Revolution (for a political history of the French Right, see Rémond, 1982). The leadership practice of Macron, we argue, can only be understood in relation to the high level of contingency in contemporary French politics, similar to several Western countries. First, this is connected to the crisis of legitimacy of the French political system due to the ongoing struggle between state-led neoliberal policies, such as the 2016 and 2018 labour deregulation reforms, and the contestation of numerous large-scale social movements.

Second, this is linked to the development of populist discourse in public debate (Mouffe, 2018). To understand the link between contingency and leadership practice, we draw on the works of Machiavelli (2017 [1532]) and Ernesto Laclau (2005). Laclau conceptualises the political field as discursively articulated through equivalential chains and antagonistic frontiers – all of which are characterised by contingency in that they are rooted in 'the play of difference' (Marchart, 2004: 69). In *The prince*, Machiavelli (2017 [1532]) reflects on examples of individual leaders dealing with contingency, and he develops the concept of *virtù* to characterise successful efforts in that respect. *Virtù* is about the boldness to take the right action at the right time and therefore involves a level of personal risk. By combining both understandings of contingency heuristically, we set out to analyse how mostly during the 2017 presidential and parliamentary elections campaigns the *virtù* leadership practice of Macron helped him redraw the political map and renew the French establishment, thus taking advantage of the particular contingency of his time.

Furthermore, we discuss the instrumental role of LaREM in navigating contingency at different points in time. This will enable us to underline three elements of current political organising. First, LaREM is, we will argue, a mix of party and social movement which can be characterised as a 'movement-

party' (Della Porta et al., 2017). Several other parties, such as Podemos or the Five Star Movement, are also at the intersection of a social movement and a party. Second, we will highlight the strong digital element (Gerbaudo, 2017; 2019a) of LaREM – facilitating limited forms of political activism with no membership fees – in line with political organising elsewhere, for example with *The Alternative* in Denmark (Husted and Plesner, 2017). Finally, we will emphasise the strong personalisation of Macron's leadership of LaREM, which is in line with current digital organising in political contexts, for example with Pablo Iglesias and Podemos (Gerbaudo, 2019b; see also: Musella, 2020; Balmas et al., 2014). LaREM was created and used by Macron mainly as an instrument to help him win the presidential election and then sustain his position of power. However, it lacks meaningful internal democracy. In other words, through interventions, Macron was able to mobilise the political organising of LaREM to serve his personalised political objectives and then reduce any space for autonomy within it. This meant imposing a centralised hierarchy within LaREM with a resulting lack of meaningful participatory democracy (Gerbaudo, 2019b).

In this paper, we first review the literature on power in critical leadership studies and organisation studies. Then, we analyse the notion of contingency in the works of Laclau and Machiavelli, and *virtù* in the work of Machiavelli, which we draw upon to study Macron. Third, we analyse Macron's leadership practice mainly in terms of *virtù* interventions. We then zoom in on how LaREM's political organising was instrumental in these interventions. Finally, we discuss our contributions mostly to the literature on critical leadership studies and political organising.

## Power in critical leadership studies and organisation studies

There is an extensive literature that analyses power in organisational studies (for a review: Fleming and Spicer, 2014). For example, this includes the organisational control of the labour process by management (Beverungen et al., 2015; Gandini, 2019) as well as identity regulation of employees (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; Boussebaa and Brown, 2017). Scholars in critical leadership studies have substantially engaged with organisation studies in

order to explore the connection between leadership and power in organisational processes (Collinson, 2005; 2020).

First, certain power relations in organisational life have been analysed as producing specific types of leaders or leadership. Hegemonic organisational discourses on gender favour the emergence and reproduction of male leaders, as opposed to female leaders thereby deploying an organisational identity regulation (Ford, 2006; Muhr, 2011; Cook and Glass, 2016). For example, leadership is performed in particularly masculinist ways in mainstream financial organisations (Liu, 2017) and related metaphors are used in discourses of leadership (Linstead and Maréchal, 2015). Strikingly, the concept of the 'prince' is one such highly gendered metaphor in that, for Machiavelli, only men – such as Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar or Cesare Borgia – could exercise authority (Machiavelli, 2017 [1532]). Similarly, heteronormative discourses favour certain types of binary organisational authority and influence, either male or female (Ashcraft and Muhr, 2018), thereby marginalising those forms of leadership identities which do not conform to these, such as those of transgender and nonbinary individuals. Other scholars discuss race as a category that causes discrimination in organisational processes against minority groups since organisational norms about leadership are associated with whiteness (Liu and Baker, 2016). Accordingly, either non-white potential leaders face discrimination or they are forced to fit within a white model of leadership, which exerts a form of control on their organisational identities and practices (Liu and Baker, 2016).

Second, there is literature studying the interplay between power, resistance, and leadership in organisational processes. This involves considering leadership as entangled in a dynamic organisational process with power and resistance (Collinson, 2005), as opposed to being shaped by certain forms of organisational power. For example, Carroll and Nicholson (2014: 1414) argue that leadership development in organisations is characterised by power *and* resistance – both of which would be in a 'dialectical' relation as 'leadership development spaces are steeped in power, resistance and struggle and entangle facilitators and participants alike'. Similarly, based on the analysis of two multinational organisations, Gagnon and Collinson (2014: 645) highlight that in leadership development 'power, context and identity can be

inextricably linked'. Interestingly, Gagnon and Collinson (2014) do not see the relationship between power and leadership as a fixed and one-sided relation with power shaping leadership; they highlight that, in fact, *resistance* also occurs. For example, participants both engage and resist the organisational identity regulation that is promoted by the leadership development programmes they engage with (Gagnon and Collinson, 2014). Furthermore, the idea that leadership development can emerge through agonistic processes involving discursive conflicts also recognises the interplay between power, resistance, and leadership in organisational dynamics (Smolović Jones et al., 2016). This foregrounds 'collective approaches to organising that embraces discord and contestation' (Smolović Jones et al., 2016: 425). In that case, agonistic processes would involve a struggle among certain individuals within the perimeter of preestablished organisational rules: leadership emerges in a process in which everyone is trying to exercise organisational power over others while at the same time resisting power from others.

Third, there is a less researched area, which is the focus on the leadership 'transition' from a marginal position to a central position in an organisational context that can be described as 'anti-establishment' leadership (Sinha et al., 2021: 355). Accordingly, Sinha and colleagues analyse how Jeremy Corbyn in connection with Momentum, a grassroots organisation, was able to move from a backbencher with a marginal discourse, perceived to be outdated, to a party leader able to remobilise and increase the number of members of the Labour party – thereby embodying 'leadership practices inherent in the transition from marginality to power' (Sinha et al., 2021: 355). These dynamics lead to a democratisation process along the lines of the facilitation by an individual leader of distributed leadership processes inside the Labour political organisation. Additionally, Corbyn's anti-establishment leadership was able to operate in a context of conflict characterised by 'circumstances of heightened uncertainty' (Sinha et al., 2021: 355), namely the Brexit context. It can be noted that there are organisational similarities between Corbyn's Momentum and Macron's LaREM in terms of struggles and dynamism about leadership in a populist context. But the main difference is that Corbyn's leadership practice opposed the establishment, whereas Macron, through a rhetorical critique of the old governing elites, ensured a renewal of the

establishment. Thus, through the case study of Macron and LaREM, our aim will be to analyse how a personalised *virtù* leadership practice through a number of interventions can engage in a leadership struggle that enables the redrawing of the political map and the renewal of the establishment in a highly uncertain situation. This will enable us to contribute to the discussion around transitions in critical leadership studies and political organisation started by Sinha et al. (2021), as Macron was able to move to a hegemonic leadership position in order to renew the neoliberal establishment in the context of the populist crisis. We will also highlight the interplay of Macron's leadership practice with the digital organising of LaREM in line with the political organisation literature (Husted and Plesner, 2017; Gerbaudo, 2017; 2019a; 2019b).

## Context: Neoliberalisation struggles and the populist moment

The context of Macron's *virtù* leadership is characterized by a high level of uncertainty and fluidity in the French political space. This was brought about by two main factors: neoliberalisation struggles and the rise of populism.

Neoliberal policies have been implemented in France since at least the austerity turn of François Mitterrand's government in 1983 (Dardot and Laval, 2019), although this was often in combination with more social-democratic measures, such as reduction of the working-week to 35 hours in 1998. However, from 2002, with a higher level of consistency, the neoliberalisation project of the establishment – both left and right – has employed a combination of 'roll-back neoliberalism' and 'roll-out neoliberalism' (Peck and Tickell, 2002: 384; see also Fougère et al., 2017). The former involves pushing back the role of the state within the economy in order to move away from a Fordist model – this is typically the case with privatisations and is associated historically with Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan (Harvey, 2007). This was the case with public highways and airports among many others. The latter (roll-out) is linked to transforming social policies and a neoliberalisation of the state and institutions through, for instance, activation logic in relation to unemployment benefits or the favouring of entrepreneurship discourse, policies for continuous professional

development (Chanut, 2017), the favouring of micro-entrepreneurship Uber-like employment, or reforming the pension system. Contrary to other countries, such as the UK and Germany, where neoliberalisation was not resisted through mass social movement, neoliberal policies in France were met by a high level of contestation led by powerful trade unions, such as the communist-linked National Confederation of Labour with a culture of confrontation with the government and employers' unions (despite their decreasing membership). There were several country-wide social movements against neoliberal public policies, such as the flexibilisation of labour in 2005, the liberalisation of public universities in 2009, a pension reform in 2011, and again the flexibilisation of labour in 2016. Thus, the neoliberalisation of France creates a context of instability in that neoliberal policies are often met by a contestation that destabilises the establishment hegemony. This situation is a neoliberalisation struggle that produces tension for political leaders who, on one hand, had to move forward with their neoliberal agenda to keep their credibility and, on the other, faced decreasing popularity. The latter considerably weakened former Socialist President François Hollande, as he implemented a neoliberal labour reform in 2016 that was met by considerable contestation from the left – the reason that probably led to his lack of popularity before the 2017 presidential elections (Milner, 2017). Thus, it is the neoliberalisation agenda that favours contingency and thereby facilitated Macron's access to power through *virtù* leadership and at the same time creates risk for his hegemony. The biggest challenge to Macron's leadership was the Yellow Vests social movement, which arguably can be linked to a resistance to the project of neoliberalising France (Jonsson, 2019).

Neoliberalisation struggles have been linked to the rise of populism in France and elsewhere in the aftermath of the 2008 Financial Crisis. Mouffe (2018: 11) connects the 'populist moment' with 'a crisis of the neoliberal hegemonic formation'. This was brought about by a number of phenomena, such as the polarisation of the political field, widespread suspicion of the establishment, and development of both left-wing populism with Mélenchon's *La France Insoumise* and right-wing populism with Le Pen's National Front – both of which try to create their own versions of the people and of the establishment that they would oppose. In other words, the populist moment repoliticises the

social space and forces political discourses to deploy a 'political frontier' (Mouffe, 2018: 11). Therefore, it is no longer possible for the establishment to only present a naturalised and technocratic version of neoliberalism, and it becomes vital for a neoliberal strategy to articulate popular demands and deploy a political frontier in order to confront other political discourses. While neoliberalisation has faced a higher level of contestation in France than elsewhere since the 1980s, the 2017 presidential elections showcased an open crisis of neoliberalism with the left-wing populist Mélenchon and the right-wing populist Le Pen receiving 40 percent of the ballots in the first round.

## Framing contingency and *virtù* leadership practice

To inform our analysis of political leadership in uncertain political times, we will now discuss the question of contingency in politics, and how that relates to *virtù* leadership practice in the works of Laclau (2005) and Machiavelli (2017 [1532]).

*Contingency in the works of Laclau (and Mouffe)*

Laclau developed a post-Marxist philosophy characterised by post-foundationalism, meaning that it relies on an ontology that does not have any ultimate foundation (Marchart, 2007). Laclau's project is about redefining Gramsci's notion of hegemony beyond a Marxist essentialism, which would argue that political and ideological phenomena are determined by the economic infrastructure in the last instance (Laclau, 2005: 127; De Cleen et al., 2018). By challenging the centrality of the (essentialist) Marxist concept of 'class', Laclau and Mouffe (1985) propose that the political is open-ended and not strictly determined by the socio-economic infrastructure. The political becomes a discursive practice articulating demands emerging in the social field through empty signifiers within the framework of a 'meaning [which] is always fluid and contingent' (Smolović Jones et al., 2020: 4). Strikingly, the fact that 'the need to name an object […] is both impossible and necessary' makes discursive practices and thereby hegemonic interventions something contingent whose success is not ontologically guaranteed (Laclau, 2005: 72).

Furthermore, hegemony and hegemonic interventions are linked to two constitutive elements of politics: (1) the unification of demands through equivalential chains (Nyberg et al., 2013), and (2) antagonism through the discursive struggle against a political adversary (Laclau, 2005). The former and the latter are entangled and depend on the constitutive role of 'the *contingent* moment of naming' (Laclau, 2005: 227, emphasis added). Thus, the struggle for hegemony and thereby the political are linked to discursive interventions that are characterised by contingency in that they are not attached to any fundamental necessity – and rather correspond to a singularity that can always emerge. An example of the latter is the success of the empty signifier 'shirtless' to symbolise the struggle for social justice of the Peronist masses against the Argentinean oligarchy.

In sum, for Laclau, contingency unfolds on a variety of levels. First, it is a linguistic phenomenon in the sense that it is the outcome of an arbitrary and thereby contingent act of naming. Second, it is a political phenomenon as the political has no ultimate necessity, which could be, for instance, natural rights (for a liberal philosophy example, see Locke, 1894) or the economic infrastructure. However, contingency is not absolute in that it is restricted by the sedimentation of hegemony and the status quo it creates. Leaders are essential in terms of producing contingent acts of naming and subsequently in terms of embodying them. This means that leaders are central in articulating empty signifiers and creating equivalential chains. The objective of the interventions of the leader is to create hegemony. To illuminate this phenomenon, we now turn to a complementary analysis of leaders – through the figure of 'the Prince' – in the oeuvre of Machiavelli (2017 [1532]) whereby we develop the notion of *virtù*. We will integrate Machiavelli's *virtù* into Laclau's discursive and anti-essentialist understanding of the political space.

*Machiavelli's virtù*

In the oeuvre of Machiavelli (2017 [1532]: 52), contingency is associated with *fortuna,* which can be roughly translated as 'chance'. For Machiavelli (2017 [1532]: 52), *fortuna* determines 'half of our actions, leaving the other half – or perhaps a bit less – to our decisions'. To articulate his understanding of contingency and make it less abstract, Machiavelli (2017 [1532]: 52) associates

*fortuna* with several metaphors; for example, he 'compare[s] *fortuna* to one of those raging rivers which when in flood overflow the plains'.

*Fortuna* and contingency in the context of politics are thus linked to external factors that cannot be controlled. *Fortuna* is ontological in that *being* itself is characterised by chance, since according to Machiavelli, there is no divine causality that would be the ultimate cause of phenomena (Machiavelli, 2017 [1532]). Contingency is therefore political and ontological. *Fortuna* is linked to the 'evental time' of politics (Dillon, 2008: 1), that is, events or ruptures in particular contexts that are impossible to predict and that redraw the map of power relations. This is linked to the fact that, for Machiavelli, politics has '"no rule" [...] [as] all political authority [...] [is characterised by] continuous polemical tension' (Dillon, 2008: 4-5). We understand this to be compatible with Laclau's (2005) (and Laclau and Mouffe's (1985)) conceptualisation of contingency.

However, *fortuna* can be counterbalanced by *virtù*, a term that Machiavelli uses to describe a series of individual techniques practised by the leader. *Virtù* is indispensable for the prince's success as luck 'doesn't work well in the long run' (Machiavelli, 2017 [1532]: 11). But *virtù* without some degree of 'good fortune' is not enough. The example of Cesare Borgia – Machiavelli's major inspiration for many of the insights found in *The prince* (see, Skinner, 1981) – illustrates this point: 'his arrangements failed; but that wasn't because of any fault in him but because of the extraordinary and extreme hostility of *fortuna*' (Machiavelli, 2017 [1532]: 13), in the sense that he became sick at a strategic moment. *Virtù* is not about ethics but practical efficiency as 'a prince, especially a new one, can't always act in ways that are regarded as good; in order to reserve his state he will often have to act in ways that are flatly contrary to mercifulness, trustworthiness, friendliness, straightforwardness, and piety' (Machiavelli, 2017 [1532]: 38). This practical efficiency is nonetheless not always linked to prudence; in another striking and misogynist metaphor – linking in essentialist fashion the decisiveness and the force of the prince with masculinity – Machiavelli (2017 [1532]: 53) argues that in some cases, rapid action and aggressiveness are needed as 'it is better to be adventurous than to be cautious, because *fortuna* is a woman'. Thus, *virtù* is about 'continuously changing political artifice to figure out how to act [...] in

circumstances which are challenging in continuously novel ways, because […] the times themselves, are radically contingent' (Dillon, 2008: 5).

In summary, Laclau sees contingency as constitutive of any hegemony since the latter only accounts for the temporary sedimentation of political common sense at a particular time. Hegemony is always contingent, but it has the potential to be naturalised or considered as necessary. Leadership is then important in creating, sustaining, or contesting a hegemony, depending on contingent opportunities in the circumstances. Moreover, Machiavelli enables us to emphasise the role of *virtù* for leadership practice as he analyses specifically what the best strategies are for the prince to be prepared to face contingency. Accordingly, Machiavelli foregrounds the role of the individual in the face of contingency to deliver effective leadership practices. By combining Laclau and Machiavelli, we will connect individual leadership and the political as discursive articulation in a fundamentally contingent context linked to the populist moment. Accordingly, we analyse below the individual strategies that Macron deployed to produce several hegemonic interventions in connection with a political organisation – the EM movement, which later became the party, LaREM.

## Macron's leadership enhanced by a series of *virtù* interventions

We now turn to discussing *virtù* leadership practice in populist times through the case of Macron's rise to power. The latter is not a fixed trait that Macron would have irrespective of context, but rather a leadership practice deployed through several interventions. These interventions enabled Macron to embed his leadership practice in a power 'transition' (Sinha et al., 2021: 355) resulting in the redrawing of the French political map. We will focus mainly on *virtù* interventions during the 2017 presidential campaign, which was when Macron was able to establish his hegemony in the context marked by the populist moment.

*(a) November 24, 2016: Establishing the need for a revolution*

> We must bear in mind that nothing is more difficult to set up […] than a new system of government; because the bringer of the new system will make

> enemies of everyone who did well under the old system. (Machiavelli, 2017 [1532]: 12)

During the presidential campaign, in his book *Révolution* published in November 2016 and in other discursive interventions, Macron (2016) established the link between the leader and the dynamic people of France who wanted to be freed from their failed ruling establishment, thereby seizing contingency as a populist moment and providing an opportunity to redraw the political frontier. For example, in the very beginning of the book, this is explicitly formulated as Macron writes:

> After the left, the right, the same faces and the same persons, since so many years [...] It is their models and their methods that simply failed. The country overall has not failed [...] *Thus there is a "divorce" between the people and its ruling elite*. I am convinced that our country has the strength, the ability, and the desire to move forward. Our country has history and the *people* to do it. (Macron, 2016: 7, emphasis added)

He made a similar point on 30 August 2016 in a TV interview with the biggest French channel TF1 by saying that 'the left and the right and the way they structure French political life are obsolete' (cited in Ventura, 2017: 96). Thus, in a populist moment of suspicion towards the establishment, Macron seeks to draw a political frontier between the people and the political establishment who had ruled the country in the past decades – mainly the French Socialist Party and the Republicans, thereby aiming to create a link with a dissatisfied population mostly disappointed by mainstream French politics (see, Fougère and Barthold, 2020).

*(b) February 2017: Seizing opportunities for aggregating demands*

> a new ruler [...] has [...] to make himself loved [...] by the people. (Machiavelli, 2017 [1532]: 7)

Through several discursive interventions, Macron was able to aggregate heterogeneous demands and associate 'a people' (Laclau, 2005; Fougère and Barthold, 2020). This was done in addition to the supporters of free markets who he had already mobilised since 2015 by promoting as Minister of Economy a liberalising law which was named after him (Macron Law) and by celebrating the skills he had acquired as investment banker working for

Rothschild (Macron, 2016). However, the month of February 2017 was a *turning point* in which Macron was able to gather a decisive advantage by seizing the opportunity of the weakening of the then favourite to win the election – the centre-right candidate Fillon, who was being investigated in connection to allegations of corruption. First, he was able to aggregate environmental demands to his equivalential chain – François de Rugy and Daniel Cohn-Bendit, two prominent Green politicians who joined the Macron platform in February. Second, he was able to attract socially minded liberals such as economist Philippe Aghion, Elie Cohen, Jean-Hervé Lorenzi, and Jean Pisani-Ferry, who joined Macron's campaign staff in January 2017. Third, he was able to aggregate demands from postcolonial minorities by recognising that colonialism was a 'crime against humanity' (Roger, 2017) during a highly symbolic trip to Algiers. Furthermore, he also praised entrepreneurship and Uber in terms of job opportunities for low-skilled *banlieue* youths, often from postcolonial ethnic minorities (Van de Casteele, 2017).

*(c) March-May 2017: Preparing a new government designed to divide the main rival parties*

> A Captain ought, among all the other actions of his, endeavor with every art to divide the forces of the enemy [...] (Machiavelli, 2011 [1521]: 100)

Machiavelli (2017 [1532]) argued in *The prince* against systematising the 'divide and conquer' strategy because, as seen from the perspective of the established prince, this doctrine implies dividing the people, which is not desirable. But when understanding the situation as one of conquest of power, undermining rival groups through dividing them can be a sound strategy, akin to the strategic prescription above from *The art of war* (Machiavelli, 2011 [1521]). The Macron campaign started early on, mostly with a few experienced politicians linked to the French Socialist Party, such as the Lyon mayor Gérard Collomb (nominated Minister of the Interior in May) and mostly with young and inexperienced private and public sector professionals. However, Macron was able to perform a divide and conquer strategy during the last months of the presidential campaign by co-opting major figures of the centre-left and the centre-right. The former Socialist Party Prime Minister Manuel Valls and the former Socialist Party Foreign Affairs Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian mentioned that they would support Macron in March 2017. In parallel,

Macron was able to first attract minor figures from the Republicans, such as Marie-Anne Montchamp and Aurore Bergé in March 2017. This later facilitated the joining of senior figures such as Edouard Philippe, Bruno Lemaire, and Gérald Darmanin, who were all offered major posts in Macron's first cabinet in May.

*(d) May 8, 2017: The new party name as a hegemonic intervention*

> […] a shrewd prince ought to handle things in such a way that his citizens will always, in all circumstances, need the government and need him. (Machiavelli, 2017 [1532]: 22)

On May 8 the movement *En Marche!* officially became the political party *La République En Marche* (LaREM). By appropriating the signifier 'Republic', Macron was able to appear as a credible alternative to replace mainstream political parties in terms of upholding republicanism. The second round of the presidential elections involved for Macron opening discursively to the maximum, thereby creating a broad Republican front against the National Front of Marine Le Pen. Finally, the creation of the party LaREM just before the parliamentary elections in June 2017 acted as a bold and particularly timely hegemonic intervention, where Macron and his *virtù* tested *fortuna* while rhetorically hegemonising the French Republic away from *Les Républicains* by calling his own party *La République En Marche* (i.e. EM's – standing for Emmanuel Macron's – Republic). This vigorous intervention full of the youthful flair of a Machiavellian prince was needed to ensure a majority in parliament for Macron's followers without the need to have an alliance with the Socialists or the right-wing. This was a decisive move towards the establishment of Macron's hegemony within the French political system. Importantly, the alternating openness and closure of Macron's electoral populism was connected to the emergence of LaREM from a movement to a 'bureaucratized organization' (Fougère and Barthold, 2020: 426) in line with Husted and Plesner's (2017: 648) findings about *The Alternative* in Denmark which shifted from a movement based on 'open-source politics' to a political party with MPs.

*(e) May 17, 2017: Co-optation of key figures embodying core demands*

> […] men should be […] either well-treated so that they won't want revenge or utterly crushed so that they won't be capable of it. (Machiavelli, 2017 [1532]: 5)

Machiavelli's recommendations to the prince on how to treat potential rivals and powerful figures should be seen as a strategic question, warranting the adoption of a clear strategy: either co-opting these powerful people if possible and desirable, or crushing them, as suggested in the quote above. However, it is important to note that most often Machiavelli did not write about co-optation in a very positive manner because of the assumption that it is people from societal elites who are co-opted, which is not perceived well by the common people. In contemporary politics, however, there tend to be, in different societies, figures who have come to incarnate important symbolic demands of the people. Thus, beyond the specific issue of dividing rival political parties, being able to co-opt figures incarnating those demands that have a very broad support in society can be seen as a decisive move. This was another strategic objective of Macron's and Edouard Philippe's selection of the government in May 2017. The very popular Nicolas Hulot, who had rejected offers to become a minister on several occasions in the past, was an effective co-optation in order to aggregate environmental demands – he was offered what was presented as a high-priority Ministry of Environment post (higher in the hierarchy than the Economy post, symbolically). Similarly, the support of Bayrou, a French version of a Christian Democratic politician, for Macron's campaign from February 2017 (Willsher, 2017) was clearly linked to the foregrounding of ethics in French politics in the context of corruption scandals, a popular demand for significant sections of the electorate, including centrist voters. In May, Bayrou was offered the post of Minister of Justice, thus cementing Macron's commitment to renewal and 'cleaning up' of the political class in France.

*(f) January-June 2017: Opening to the maximum for the parliamentary elections*

> […] this way of becoming a prince is obtained with the support of the common people. (Machiavelli, 2017 [1532]: 22)

In January 2017, an internet call for parliamentary candidacies under the banner of '*En Marche!*' was launched, with the promise of deciding which

candidates were to represent the movement by 11 May, that is a few days after the results of the presidential elections. A total of 14000 people applied and on 11 May 428 were selected to represent *La République en Marche*. In this process and its outcome, emphasis was placed on recruiting potential MPs from 'civil society', such as mathematician Cédric Villani or entrepreneur Bruno Bonnell (De Guigné, 2017). This was framed as a real opening towards common people, as opposed to professional politicians – although it should be noted that, in fact, many of these 'civil society' people can be seen as belonging to the socio-economic and/or socio-cultural elites of the country. This gesture was successful in obtaining an absolute majority in the parliamentary elections: many of these inexperienced politicians were elected. In fact, this was a bold *virtù* move testing *fortuna* and adapting to a contingent situation, in that LaREM simply could not otherwise have had enough experienced candidates to stand for every seat in parliament. This seemingly unfavourable contingent situation was thus turned into an opportunity for maximising the chain of equivalence.

*(g) June 2017: Immediate strategic closure after the parliamentary elections*

> I conclude that a principality that doesn't have its own army isn't safe: it is entirely dependent on *fortuna*, having left itself with no *virtù* to defend it in times of trouble. (Machiavelli, 2017 [1532]: 31)

Although Machiavelli (2017 [1532]) does not deploy a theory of party organising beyond the idea that common people and nobles often confront each other, he mentions how effective *virtù* interventions of the prince involve organising collectives, among which the army was essential in his time. However, Macron was able to perform two hegemonic interventions through the political organisation of LaREM – first through effectively creating a digital movement-party (Husted and Plesner, 2017; Gerbaudo, 2019a) during the campaign and then through the strategic closing of LaREM immediately after parliamentary elections in order to maintain full control of it. These were both bold moves, full of *virtù*.

## Opening and closing LaREM

When looking into the instrumental role of organising LaREM strictly for the conquest and exercise of power, we observe a double movement, first opening the movement and later closing the party.

*Scaling up LaREM: From a website to digital party*

Macron's digital movement-party was progressively structured from 2015 to 2017. First, in June 2015 Macron strategically had the *Jeunes avec Macron* (Youth with Macron) created, with a website and a presence on Facebook and Twitter (France Inter, 2018). This made sense at that point as he was still Minister of Economy in Hollande's administration, but was only starting to move away from the French Socialist Party and just considering an autonomous political career. Second, when it was clear that the current president had very low popularity, in April 2016 Macron decided to become a candidate for the presidential election and on the same day created *En Marche!*. This allowed Macron to start an official campaign, thereby facilitating membership and access to funding for *En Marche!*. Membership and most of the structure remained digital with local groups mostly operating online. This enabled Macron to quickly mobilise a very significant number of followers during the presidential campaign, allowing for example a significant number of people to come to his rallies. Third, after Macron won the presidential elections, the movement *En Marche!* was transformed into a 'bureaucratized organization' (see Fougère and Barthold, 2020: 426) but retained a digital aspect (Gerbaudo, 2019a; 2019b) in that LaREM still does not require members to pay a membership fee, and one can become a member through a few clicks on the internet and accepting LaREM's 'value charter' (LaREM, 2019).

From the perspective of Macron's leadership practice, each step can be seen as a *virtù* intervention responding to a contingent moment and the changing *fortuna* surrounding President Hollande. In Autumn 2015, Hollande was still likely to become the Socialist Party's presidential candidate; therefore, the *Jeunes avec Macron* was a way for Macron to position himself as a player still cooperating with Hollande. However, as Hollande weakened and it became

clear that Macron could become a candidate in the presidential elections, it made sense to formalise the creation of a movement and start a campaign in April 2016. This flexibility was provided by the fact that *En Marche!* was to a large extent a digital platform that could be easily modulated and scaled up (or even shut down) if necessary. Thus, one of the dimensions of Macron's *virtù* consisted in manipulating the flexibility offered by digital technologies – a flexibility, which was an asset in uncertain populist times, when moving quickly becomes a priority.

A striking aspect of a digital strategy is that it is a flexible instrument for reaching out to and recruiting individuals whose levels of politicisation are potentially not as high as those members from traditional political parties or mass parties (see Duverger, 1954), as the case of the Italian Five Star Movement illustrates (Gerbaudo, 2019a). From this perspective, it is striking that *En Marche!* was able to attract individuals of the former type. This latter point is illustrated by the role of the MPs, most of whom came from civil society (Michon, 2019). Additionally, as a digital movement requires fewer structures than a formal political party, it also requires fewer financial resources, which was decisive for a leader in a marginal position, such as Macron, who could not count on the resources of an established political party. For example, it was challenging for Macron's organisation to be given a bank loan to finance his campaign, and Macron had to take out a personal loan (Goubert et al., 2017).

*Taking back control over LaREM by neutralising internal democracy*

In connection with the use of digital organising, including local groups of members, *En Marche!* was able to create an image of participatory and democratic organisational culture during the presidential election campaign. This image was instrumental in helping mobilise members during the campaign. However, Macron and his entourage kept direct oversight of LaREM. Before it was made a political party in 2017, *En Marche!* was also directly controlled by Macron and a few close aides without any internal democracy.

After the victory at the parliamentary elections, an important hegemonic intervention was to bureaucratise LaREM in order to maintain control of the party and prevent either grassroots members or MPs from deploying autonomy. Strikingly, in 2017, at the first LaREM conference Jean-Claude Castaner, who was backed by Macron, was *de facto* the *only* candidate (Galtier and Martichoux, 2017) to stand for the party head post, thereby illustrating a blatant lack of democracy (or illusion thereof). Then, in September 2018, when Macron decided that Castaner was more useful in his administration, he appointed him as Home Office Minister. In turn, Nathalie Loiseau, who was the Minister of European Affairs, was nominated by Macron to lead LaREM in the European elections, although she had not been selected by party members. Another striking example of a lack of democracy is that LaREM candidates for parliamentary elections were selected by a national committee chaired by experienced politician Jean-Paul Delevoye, who had been suggested by Macron, as opposed to elected by party members.

In summary, Macron's *virtù* leadership practice entails boldly adapting to contingency through a variety of interventions – most of which were linked to a *personalisation* of political organising centred on the strategy of a single individual seeking to win a presidential election (Balmas et al., 2014; Gerbaudo, 2019b). This form of leadership practice combined with the flexibility of a digital movement was adapted to a dynamic power relation connected to the populist moment (Mouffe, 2018). Even though Macron was able to take advantage of a contingent situation through *virtù* leadership, doing so could also bring about his downfall. For example, the rise of populism linked to neoliberalisation struggles created a high level of uncertainty, which brought about the unprecedented decision of Hollande to withdraw from the presidential race. The same phenomenon led to the Yellow Vests social movement in November 2018, whose different types of actions, including the blocking of roundabouts, roads, petroleum refineries, demonstrations, and riots (BBC, 2018), arguably were relatively close to resulting in the end of Macron's leadership. Thus, a situation that allows political leadership to quickly attain a central position of power could also take it away because of its immersion in contingency.

## Concluding discussion

We have shown how Macron was able to 'transition' (Sinha et al., 2021: 355) from a position of marginality to a position of power in the French political system through his capacity to redraw the French political map and thereby deliver a renewal of the French establishment. This leadership practice was unfolded through *virtù* interventions (Machiavelli, 2017 [1532]), allowing a particular individual to become a political leader by deploying different strategies to deal with contingency (Laclau, 2005) in the context of the populist moment (Mouffe, 2018). This enables us to make a contribution to the power literature in critical leadership studies (Ford, 2006; Muhr, 2011; Cook and Glass, 2016; Collinson, 2020).

As Sinha and colleagues (2021: 362) demonstrate with Corbyn's 'anti-establishment' leadership, moving from marginality to power involves the ability to redraw 'organisational boundaries' and the emphasis of conflict in a highly uncertain context, which they refer to as a 'crisis'. Similarly, Macron was able to redraw the organisation of the French political map by creating a new successful organisation (LaREM) and relatedly by modifying the political space. Macron also emphasised conflict in his leadership practice. Finally, the highly uncertain context that allowed Macron's leadership to emerge was the populist crisis created by the interaction between neoliberalisation and the resistance to it, which destabilises the French political system and since 2007 has prevented any leader from winning two general elections in a row. Unlike Corbyn, Macron deployed a *personalised leadership* (Gerbaudo, 2019b) by employing LaREM as an instrument with virtually no internal democracy, and which he leverages depending on the evolution of the contingent context. Our argument is that *virtù* (Machiavelli, 2017 [1532]) as leadership practice is adapted to such a highly contingent environment by finding strategies to take advantage of opportunities and adapt boldly to contingency (Laclau, 2005). A situation of permanent destabilisation weakens hegemonies, thereby creating opportunities for the emergence of individual leaders coming from the margins of the political space to renew the establishment, such as Trump or Bolsonaro (Martigny, 2019).

This study of Macron's use of his movement-party through his *virtù* leadership practice strongly resonates with all three 'newest trends in party organization research' (Gauja and Kosiara-Pedersen, 2021: np): the personalisation of politics, implying that people identify more with personalities than with parties (Balmas et al., 2014); the proliferation of movement-based parties (Gerbaudo, 2019a, 2019b); and the new (notably digital) forms that party affiliation takes (Gibson et al., 2017). The Macron campaign relied extensively on the new possibilities of internet-based free membership, which developed the *En Marche!* movement from scratch as well as on an open online call for candidacies that succeeded in mobilising thousands of people to run for parliamentary elections and possibly other elections. While this was undoubtedly the fruit of collective organisational work, the role of personalised leadership practice by Macron was crucial every step of the way, as shown in the key *virtù* interventions we described here. Thus, it is Macron's personalised leadership that diverted digital organising towards control, as opposed to any technological determinism – for example, after the presidential campaign Macron decided to bureaucratise LaREM and thereby neutralise internal democracy, when he could have instead pushed for democratisation. This is in line with Husted (2019), who underlines the indeterminacy of the political space that cannot be closed by digital technologies since political organisation always involves some form of 'human interpretation and interaction' (Husted, 2019: 656). Therefore, in another context, digital organising combined with distributed leadership could lead to more democratic outcomes, as other examples, such as *The Alternative* (Husted and Plesner, 2017) or the Occupy movement (Barthold et al., 2018) suggest. If LaREM is characterised by a lack of internal democracy similar to other digital parties, such as Podemos or the Five Star Movement (Gerbaudo, 2019b), it is not because of inherent traits of technology but because of Macron's *virtù* leadership practice and his intention to use it strategically as an instrument to win elections despite having limited resources when compared with his competitors.

Furthermore, by studying the Macron example of *virtù* leadership practice, we suggested how Laclau's (2005) understanding of contingency and hegemonic interventions can be combined with Machiavelli's idea of the prince. In

particular, both theorists conceptualise politics as a contingent space in which particular interventions – if done with *virtù* – might lead to hegemony and the establishment of the prince's power. However, for both theorists the space of politics can never be fully controlled – a prince can always be contested or lose power to a marginal player or an unpredictable event, such as the death of his father Pope Alexander VI for his son Cesare Borgia (Machiavelli, 2017 [1532]) or a mass social movement such the Yellow Vests for Macron.

Finally, we should beware of not seeing the *virtù* leadership practice of Macron as a heroic accomplishment, or as a fully controlled endeavour where contingency was fully tamed. This would be very misleading. There was a great deal of luck involved in Macron's success, the planets aligned favourably with the established parties being taken away from the centre because of their primaries, as well as with the conservative candidate Fillon being submerged in legal trouble exactly at the right time for Macron. This is precisely the point with Machiavelli's emphasis on *fortuna* and contingency, a great deal of what becomes possible is about luck… and rarely is luck always on one person's side, it tends to switch allegiances. Be that as it may, the point with *virtù* leadership practice is that luck is not enough to redraw the political map and renew the establishment when coming from a position of marginality, you need to treat luck (*fortuna*) vigorously with well-timed decisive interventions. And Macron and his team certainly did this.

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## the authors

Charles Barthold is a senior lecturer at the Open University (UK). His research draws on critical theory and employs a variety of critical approaches to organisation studies and leadership in relation to contemporary economic, environmental and social issues. Firstly, he is interested to study how organisations and leadership reproduce power relations. Secondly, his project is to analyse how resistance, politics and ethics in organisations can bring about novel forms of democratisation. His work was published in leading journals, such as *Organization*; *Journal of Business Ethics*; *Business Ethics*: *A European Review*; *Critical Perspectives in Accounting*; *Scandinavian Journal of Management*; and *Culture and Organization*.
Email: charles.barthold@open.ac.uk

Martin Fougère is an associate professor in management and politics at Hanken School of Economics, Helsinki, Finland. His main research interests relate to problematising the power effects of business and policy discourses on society. In his studies to date, he has drawn on various critical theoretical and analytical approaches, such as deconstruction, Foucault-inspired discourse analysis, neo-Gramscian perspectives on political economy, postcolonialism, and the post-foundational discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe. His work has been published in international

journals such as *Business & Society*, *International Journal of Management Reviews*, *Journal of Business Ethics*, *Journal of Management Inquiry*, *Management Learning*, and *Organization*.
Email: martin.fougere@hanken.fi

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# Reboot and repeat: Political entrepreneurship in the Icelandic Pirate Party

Hallur Thor Sigurdarson

## abstract

This paper discusses the ways in which the Icelandic Pirate Party conducts political entrepreneurship. It was developed as an inductive, mainly interview-based, study of what is arguably one of the pirate movement's most successful and sustainable parties. The paper shows how the party's repetitive engagement with its Core Policy has generated creativity and entrepreneurship. That Core Policy consists mainly of statements developed on the back of liberal democratic ideology, which has its roots in the Enlightenment. Nevertheless, intensified by a desire to change politics and in anticipation of a different future, encounters with the Core Policy have become a way of creating party political differences. The process also involves the party's radically horizontal, heterogeneous and ambiguous approach to organising itself. This enquiry was developed against the backdrop of Deleuze's ideas, which provide fertile conceptualisations concerning emergence, creativity and politics. Finally, following a Deleuzian-influenced analysis of the case, insights are developed concerning creativity in political entrepreneurship.

## Introduction

> The [Core Policy] is written as a series of statements so it is easy to quote them. (Icelandic Pirate Party website)

In his international bestseller *21 lessons for the 21st century*, Yuval Noah Harari criticises politicians for failing to facilitate discussions and create policies that can help us navigate into the future. Harari is not alone in making that point. In the face of technological progress, frequently referred to as the 'fourth industrial revolution', and diverse global challenges, the future appears radically different from the present. Despite that, today's dominant politics often looks more to the past than the future (see, for example, slogans used in the 2016 US presidential election – 'make America great again' – and the UK Brexit referendum – 'take back control of our country').

The role of political parties is central to Western liberal democratic politics and society, and, if societies are changing in radical ways, arguably, much will depend on the political ability to facilitate and lead such change within a democratic framework. It has also been argued that political parties, broadly speaking, are experiencing a terminal crisis, as expressed, for instance, in declining membership and voter turnouts (see discussion in Husted et al., 2018). It is against that backdrop and the local context, where trust in the political system has diminished significantly over the past two decades[1], that this paper considers the case of the Icelandic Pirate Party, primarily by conducting a series of interviews with party members. The paper contributes to political entrepreneurship studies by theorising ways in which the Pirate Party develops its politics and organises itself.

The study is informed by a strand of thought on entrepreneurship and process. There, entrepreneurship sits in a broad societal context and is studied across multiple social spheres and in a variety of organisations, including political ones (Down, 2013; Hjorth, 2012a; Hjorth et al., 2008; Lindgren and Packendorff, 2009; Steyaert and Katz, 2004). This strand of thought encompasses a research sensitivity for creativity, local context and processes, with cross-disciplinary approaches (e.g. Hjorth et al., 2015; Popp and Holt, 2013; Shah and Tripsas, 2007; Steyaert, 2007; Styhre, 2007).

[1] See 'Traust til stofnana' [Trust in Institutions] at https://www.gallup.is/nidurstodur/thjodarpuls/traust-til-stofnana/.

The term 'political entrepreneurship' is usually attributed to Robert Dahl's *Who governs,* published in 1961. Even before Dahl, however, entrepreneurship in politics had been recognised, for example, by Weber and by Schumpeter (Qvortrup, 2007; Sigurdarson, 2016). Research interest in entrepreneurship in politics has grown in recent years, including studies of policy processes, political actors and institutions that break the mould in one way or another (Petridou et al., 2015). Although there are some notable exceptions (e.g. Erlingsson, 2008; Helmit, 2001; Nownes and Neeley, 1996; Strom, 1990), few studies address entrepreneurship in political parties, with researchers paying even less attention to the 'inner life' of political parties (Husted et al., 2018: 2).

Entrepreneurship is commonly focused on the economy and markets (e.g. ownership, profit and customer). Thus, some of its core concepts lose significance and clarity when applied to politics (cf. Christopoulos, 2006; Sheingate, 2003; Wohlgemuth, 2000). The aforementioned processual strand of entrepreneurship helps to overcome such limitations by placing entrepreneurship in a broader social context. Furthermore, in this study, thinking process and entrepreneurship involves engagement with the work of the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze. His ideas are considered to be radically processual, steeped in an ontology of everything continuously emerging (May, 2005; Steyaert, 2007), and they have influenced studies of both organisations and entrepreneurship in various ways (e.g. Hjorth, 2012b, 2015; Linstead and Thanem, 2007; Sørensen, 2006; Styhre, 2007; Thanem, 2004). The slow but sure proliferation of his ideas into such fields has arguably been influenced by his perpetual development of new concepts and interest in expressions of dynamism, complexity and instability, as opposed to stable and neatly defined concepts and theories (Colebrook, 2002; Kristensen et al., 2014).

Beyond an ontology of emergence or process, politics permeates Deleuze's thinking, especially his work with Félix Guattari (cf. Deleuze and Guattari, 2000,2008; Patton, 2000). Deleuze and Guattari do not engage directly with normative political theory. Instead, they attend to how politics and its institutions emerge, change and transform. That produces an idiosyncratic terminology, not easily mapped in terms of common political concepts, but

which has the benefit of viewing politics as involving creativity and entrepreneurial practice. It is for that reason that such terminology imbues this enquiry.

A third attribute of Deleuzian thinking of value for this study is a comprehension of ideology as creating stability and conformity in politics, while also identifying a destabilising potentiality of idea-statements, or slogans. As we will see, that connects with how the Icelandic Pirate Party interacts with and unfolds its basic political ideas, explicitly stated in the party's, so-called, Core Policy, which is strongly influenced by the fundamental ideas of the Enlightenment and liberalism.

Drawing on what has already been mentioned concerning political entrepreneurship and process thinking, this study takes political entrepreneurship to involve creative practices which are intertwined with the ability to evoke, facilitate and actualise new ideas and actions. Developed through engagement with an empirical case, this paper presents novel and valuable insights into political entrepreneurship and its practices. Guiding the enquiry is the overarching question: *How does the Icelandic Pirate Party's approach to its so-called Core Policy serve as a catalyst for creativity in politics*?

The remainder of the paper is presented in five main sections. The first provides the empirical background concerning the Pirate Party and Icelandic politics. The second introduces the concept of 'political entrepreneurship', with an emphasis on creativity, before moving on to discuss selected ideas and concepts concerning emergence, creativity and politics in the Deleuze and Guattari philosophy. The third section outlines the method of enquiry, with the fourth providing an analytical account or theorising of the case, developed against the backdrop of Deleuze and Guattari's ideas. The theorising conveys a process of repetitive engagement with the party's Core Policy, infused by desire and facilitated by its way of organising. Such encounters are found to be central to understanding the party's way of developing creative ideas and doing political entrepreneurship. The final section of the paper discusses the implications of the insights, as developed in the analytical account, on creativity in the political entrepreneurship context.

## The Icelandic Pirate Party: Not only nerds and copyright

> [The idea of a new party] emerges in a political landscape where the root-fast political elite has sacrificed its and the voters' ideals on an altar of corruption. (Birgitta Jónsdóttir, founder of the Icelandic Pirate Party, *Morgunblaðið*, 18 July 2012)

The Icelandic Pirate Party has been influential in Icelandic politics since its establishment in November 2012. The party takes its name from the pirate movement, which first emerged as a political party in Sweden in January 2006 as a response to the tightening of government policies concerning online copyright and file-sharing. The name was a reference to The Pirate Bay, a popular file-sharing platform (Erlingsson and Persson, 2011), which prompted initial discussions about the need for a political movement focused on copyright and individual privacy. Burkart (2014) stated that such parties were operating in 56 countries and the Pirate Party International (PPI) reported members from 37 countries in 2020.[2] [3]

As the pirate movement has developed, so too has its focus. The common emphasis amongst today's pirate parties is on freedom of information, grounded in the conviction that current copyright laws harm the flow of information, digital freedom and progress. Second, pirate parties commonly strive for protection of the personal sphere, both online and offline, and in line with this is the movement's view that government surveillance has limited legitimacy (Fredriksson, 2014; Otjes, 2020). A third commonality is concern regarding the limitations of representative democracy, including lack of transparency and being too far removed from citizens' influence. That has led various pirate parties to advocate for more direct modes of democracy (Cammaerts, 2015).

[2] See https://pp-international.net/pirate-parties/. It is to be noted that not all national Pirate Parties are members of PPI. For instance, the Icelandic Pirate Party discontinued its PPI membership in 2015. As such, it can be assumed that the number is actually higher in 2020.

[3] Information on the number of party organisations varies somewhat, depending on sources and points in time.

Despite the Pirates' substantial international growth, they followed a rocky road to election success, which has been difficult to sustain (Otjes, 2020). At the time of writing, only three pirate parties have won seats in national parliaments – in the Czech Republic, Luxemburg and Iceland. The Icelandic Pirates have done that more often than any other pirate party, with seats won in three elections. By that yardstick, the Icelandic party can be considered the most successful of the pirate parties.[4] The Icelandic Pirates' establishment and subsequent success must be considered in the context of Iceland's systemic economic collapse in late 2008. A severe economic depression and social unrest resulted. It was widely considered that the political system and the state institutions had failed to react appropriately to Icelandic banks' reckless behaviour (Hreinsson et al., 2010). Trust in politicians and the Icelandic parliament, Alþingi, plummeted, with the social unrest culminating in what is known as the 'Cutlery Revolution'. New political movements soon began to appear. One of the most vocal activists at the time was the poet and web designer Birgitta Jónsdóttir. By 2009, she had been elected to Iceland's parliament, having won a seat for a new party, the Citizens' Movement. Jónsdóttir later became internationally renowned for her involvement with WikiLeaks.[5] In 2012, she left her former political colleagues to establish the Icelandic Pirate Party.

> We decided at an IMMI board meeting to create the Pirates, because we felt the understanding of technology, innovation and just human rights in this digital world we were entering was so limited. (Interview with Jónsdóttir)[6]

In the first elections in which the party ran, in 2013, it received 5.3% of the votes and three seats in the Icelandic parliament. There is a consensus, both generally and amongst the interviewees, that such a result could not have happened without Jónsdóttir's popularity. Other candidates were not well

[4] See Otjes (2020) for a detailed overview of pirate parties' election results in Europe.

[5] See https://www.theguardian.com/media/2013/feb/11/icelandic-mp-wikileaks-us-birgitta-jonsdottir.

[6] IMMI, or the International Modern Media Initiative, is an organisation established to '[bring] together the best functioning laws in relation to freedom of information, expression and speech, to reflecting the reality of borderless world and the challenges that it imposes locally and globally in the 21st century' (see https://en.immi.is/about-immi/).

known to the typical voter at the time. The party now has a dedicated following and has taken part in three national elections, with its best performance being a 14.5% share of the votes.[7] Through that success, the Icelandic Pirates have become something of a poster child for the international pirate movement.

Despite that popularity with the international movement, the Icelandic Pirates run their organisation very independently. They discontinued their PPI membership in May 2015. From the very beginning, the party has taken part in politics at various levels, with its intention always being to develop policies in all significant areas of national and local politics. The party has influenced Icelandic politics in various ways, thereby providing indications for how the pirate movement can become an influential political actor across a wide range of areas (Fredriksson, 2016). For instance, the party has significantly influenced Iceland's legal revision processes concerning freedom of speech, information and media, with the ambitions of creating international 'best practices' and making Iceland a haven for free speech (Beyer, 2014). Furthermore, the party's consistent demand for a new national constitution has garnered significant public support. The Pirates are adamant about changing the way politics operates in Iceland and fight not to fall onto the conventional 'political train tracks' (interview with Palsson). In many ways, the party appears to be succeeding in that aim, as it continues to act in ways perceived as surprising and unpredictable by other politicians and the media.

## Political entrepreneurship and Deleuze's political thinking

Max Weber (1978: 1403) observed a significant affinity between politicians and entrepreneurs, claiming that their performances possess a 'moving spirit' and a 'directing mind'. Schumpeter (1942) – a political theorist as much as an economist – also likened the characteristics of a politician to those of an

[7] In the 2016 elections, the Pirates received 14.5% of the votes and 10 seats in the national parliament. Then in 2017 the party received 9.2% of the votes and six seats. The party has also participated in two election cycles at the municipality level.

entrepreneur. Neither Weber nor Schumpeter used the term 'political entrepreneurship', but they identified parallels between entrepreneurship movements in politics, organisations and the economy (e.g. McCaffrey and Salerno, 2011; Sheingate, 2003; Sigurdarson, 2016).

Schumpeter's emphasis on entrepreneurship as a creative force for movement and progress makes him particularly interesting for this enquiry. He famously coined the term 'creative destruction' to reflect a primary movement of entrepreneurship, innovation and growth (Schumpeter, 1942). Creative destruction entails suggesting radically new products or services that can escape the existing ordering of a market moving towards equilibrium, which eliminates entrepreneurial profits. The entrepreneurial creativity brings about the destruction of the existing order and generates movement towards a new order. Such movement from one order to another reflects Schumpeter's notion of creativity at the heart of entrepreneurship. Schumpeter (1934: 93) also offered insights into what drives and qualifies creative entrepreneurial action, writing about entrepreneurs as being motivated by 'the joy of creating, of getting things done, or simply of exercising one's energy and ingenuity'. In other words, for Schumpeter, entrepreneurship involves engaging in joyful activities and a desire to add to the world.

Many of entrepreneurship's other core concepts focus on the economy and markets (e.g. ownership, profit and customer), but they tend to lose their clarity or provide an insufficiently narrow view when it comes to understanding entrepreneurial practices or how change comes about in politics (e.g. Christopoulos, 2006; Sheingate, 2003; Wohlgemuth, 2000). For instance, democratic politics tends to require complex coalitions; ownership of resources is commonly not private; and monetary profits do not have the same relevance in politics as in a market economy (McCaffrey and Salerno, 2011). That arguably increases the complexity of studying entrepreneurship in politics and indicates the urgent need for studying political entrepreneurship through multiple lenses and at multiple places (e.g. O'Brien, 2019; Petridou et al., 2015; Yu, 2001).

In a comprehensive review of political entrepreneurship studies emphasizing political institutions' policy-change processes (e.g. Kingdon, 1984; Mintrom,

2000; O'Brien, 2019; Roberts and King, 1991; Schneider et al., 1995; Sheingate, 2003), Petridou et al. (2015) identified a few shared attributes. Those included a general interest in entrepreneurship as a set of behaviours or practices, rather than focusing on personalities, and a shared concern with creativity (e.g. McCaffrey and Salerno, 2011; Sheingate, 2003; Wohlgemuth, 2000). This study shares those attributes, with its interest in political entrepreneurship as creative practice.

For Roberts (Roberts, 2000; Roberts and King, 1991), creative and intellectual activity is a point of departure for doing political entrepreneurship. Accordingly, entrepreneurial creativity involves ideas generation where, for instance, models and ideas from other policy domains are applied. Roberts also sees creativity in politics as involving criticism, or the definition of a problem, in relation to a perceived performance gap, followed by identification of alternative solutions. Sheingate (2003) discussed creativity in political entrepreneurship with reference to both Schumpeter and Kirzner (1973). He identified creative activity in politics in terms of, first, exploitation of instability. As such, instability will often make it easier to identify the cracks in the current order and expose the political sphere to new opportunities. Second, Sheingate views creativity in terms of recombining known elements (e.g. problems, assets and policies), which connects directly to Schumpeter's idea of creativity emerging endogenously from the current order. Third, creativity involves the ability to consolidate innovations – for instance, by creating new jurisdictions or boundaries that delineate the scope of further actions.

A considerable body of literature on public organising argues for organisational creativity by means of horizontal and organic structures (Crouch, 2005; Ezzamel and Reed, 2008; Rhodes, 1997; Thompson, 2003). The creative advantages of horizontality are, for instance, emphasised by the influential school of New Public Management, perhaps most famously represented in Osborne and Gaebler's (1992) book, *Reinventing government*. An overarching goal of that school is to limit the effects of large hierarchies and bureaucracy on public institutions, and instead create more independent agencies to enhance entrepreneurial abilities (Gay, 2000). In political entrepreneurship studies have also found entrepreneurial advantages in

horizontal organising. For instance, Oakerson and Parks (1999) found that non-hierarchical and polycentric arrangements provide fertile ground for political entrepreneurship. Sheingate (2003) adopted a slightly different approach by emphasising *complexity* as an important attribute of the institutional and organisational environment for political entrepreneurship. He then described three characteristics of complexity: (a) *uncertainty*; (b) *heterogeneity* of components, which can become resources for creative acts; and (c) *ambiguity*, or the inability to comprehend the character of components and their relationship to one another. Ambiguity, in his sense, also applies to organisational boundaries and areas of authority.

*Deleuze: Politics, repetition and new differences*

This enquiry into creativity in political entrepreneurship, as expressed in the case of the Icelandic Pirate Party, is infused by the process thinking of Gilles Deleuze and his collaborator, Félix Guattari. This section briefly introduces their philosophical project and selected concepts, but Deluze and Guattari hardly ever provide readers with simple definitions. Rather, they develop concepts for given contexts, then revisit and rethink those concepts. Consequently, the following discussion offers more conceptual context than would be needed for a less idiosyncratic and interconnected terrain of ideas. The reward for doing so, however, involves a way to develop an understanding of entrepreneurship, moving beyond an economic context to connect with politics as a space with immanent capacity for rupture and novelty.

A Schumpeterian understanding of entrepreneurship involves creativity and introducing something new to the world. As mentioned, Deleuze and Guattari's philosophical project draws attention to movements, ruptures and new creations – in other words, how something comes into being and its capacity to become something different (Helin et al, 2014). In that way, their thinking is guided by curiosity about how novelty can emerge from order and stability; or to use their own terminology, they find new differences emerging from repetition (repetitive movements) and the making of new connections (Deleuze, 1994). In that vein, they argue that everything emerges and functions through connections. For example, we can only speak of a body because of how cells, organs and so forth are connected. Even a bicycle has no

intrinsic purpose. It only becomes a bicycle when it connects with a body (and person-becoming-cyclist).

Employing Bergson's ideas of 'virtual' and 'actual', Deleuze identifies two aspects of reality. We experience the actual as that which exists in the world, but reality also consists of a virtuality that is equally real, even though it lacks actuality. May (2005) illustrated that with an image of Japanese origami. A piece of paper has many virtual expressions through origami. It can be folded and unfolded into different arrangements, which, at that moment, become actual. Hence, each different origami arrangement is an actualised expression of the paper, coming into being in a process of folding and unfolding. It is still only one of many potential expressions of the paper. The actualised expression is neither a copy of an original, nor is it the paper itself. Deleuze would argue that the paper's reality is equal to any potential expression of the paper, and that reality as virtuality can be actualised at any given moment. Correspondingly, immanent to every event is the world's potential to unfold and actualise in ways radically different from its current state. Although any repetition, as an event, may produce sameness or maintain the status quo (e.g. of structures, routines and habits), it also has the potential to allow virtual differences to emerge and become actual. At any time, a repetition may rupture the current order, thereby introducing new differences that become actual with different movements and speeds or some imagined newness (Hjorth, 2015). It is through repetition that the past moves itself into a different future (Deleuze, 1994).

In the context of post-war Western party politics, there have been decades of relatively stable institutional landscapes. Political entrepreneurship needs to be understood as involving activities creating new differences in such an environment. Deleuze and Guattari (2008) considered that in terms of what they call 'micropolitics', with a distinct interest in how politics changes and transforms. That is different from the liberal interest in government legitimacy, the state and political order (*ibid.*), or what Deleuze and Guattari call 'molar politics', referring to a sociopolitical territory of rigid and arborescent lines and structures, of clear segments and ideologies. Representations of molar politics involve the binary and hierarchical categorisation of class, gender, political parties and nations. Molar politics

rigidly orders the flow of life and its desires (Windsor, 2015). The modern state gives priority to molar politics, creating rigid compartments that strive to eliminate or absorb cracks and displacements. Thus, molar politics involves movement and it looks for performance gaps, which it addresses by defining them within the already established segments of power relations and institutions.

Deleuze and Guattari (2008) took issue with the representation of political change in terms of Hegelian dialectics and revolutionary outbursts. Instead, they proposed that change is a micropolitical activity emerging in and through local events and encounters. It is an activity that plays out within the ordered terrain of (molar) established institutions, but seeps through the cracks and along different paths from what has been predefined (Patton, 2000: 7). In other words, micropolitics accounts for a flow of movements, affects and passions operating alongside or below the realm of representative politics 'tout court' (Patton, 2005). Such movements are not programmatic, however, nor do they impose global solutions (Massumi, 2015). They are local experiments, with their exact outcomes and implications unknown. It is in these encounters that creativity repetitively emerges as new differences in politics.

In addition to the notion of micropolitics informing an understanding of repetition as a creative process in politics, this discussion continues with insights into how Deleuze and Guattari think of desire as an ability to actualise new differences and ideology, which ossifies, but also disrupts, politics.

*Desire*

Deleuze develops the concept of desire throughout his authorship, but it emerges most prominently in his engagement with Spinoza and Nietzsche (Deleuze, 1983; 1988). In Spinoza, Deleuze finds desire pertaining to the dual power of a body (e.g. a human body, an organisation or a thing) to be affected (receptivity) and to create affects (act with spontaneity and novelty). Desire is active in local events and encounters. It is not based on a lack of something, rather, it is productive, an enquiry into new becomings (Colebrook, 2002: 62).

It is a desire to *add to the world*, to create new connections (momentary beings) between movements, bodies and things. Desire is a longing for something more than what is already actual (Hjorth and Holt, 2014). It pertains to an openness for new encounters and different affects. A proactive desire finds *joy* in connecting with that with which it can find agreement (Deleuze, 2013). Joyful connections increase one's *power*, which is to be understood as the ability to be affected and act to create affects.

Deleuze's desire concept corresponds to Nietzsche's 'will to power', which has affirmative and negative expressions. The negative will to power allies itself with the reactive and repetitive forces of sameness, stability and rest (Massumi, 2015: 102). The affirmative will to power allies itself with active forces of creation and difference. The affirming will, or desire, moves with joy into different speeds and intensities, new combinations and organisations. The negative will to power cuts off active forces from what they can become (Deleuze, 1983). That can also be spoken of as coding or steering desire towards sanctioned interests (Hjorth, 2014) – for instance, a political party steering the desires of its members towards the sanctioned interests of the party. Many organisations support the tendency of those in power – having done well abiding by the rules of the existing order – to stop new ideas and behaviour, but an entrepreneurial political party needs to be receptive to its members' desire to affirm and actualise new ideas – to experiment with what the party can become (Husted, 2020). Such a party should retain its 'capacity for newness and avoid ossification into tightly governed patterns or relationships' (Hjorth, 2014: 105).

*Ideology and order*

Ideology is a central attribute of political parties through which they identify and position themselves (Husted, 2020). For Deleuze and Guattari (2008), ideology involves a moralisation of politics and the coding of desire into sanctioned interests (Windsor, 2015). It functions and is disseminated through local events and encounters. To understand that better, Deleuze-Guattarian ideas about language as an indirect discourse pertaining to a 'collective assemblage of enunciations' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2008: 97) are of note. The collective assemblage of enunciations accounts for language's

impersonal and social nature, and is a form of pragmatics ordering life and living. It implicates itself as a pattern of statements and actions (Porter, 2010). Such statements are 'order words'. Accordingly, '[l]anguage is not made to be believed but to be obeyed, and [to] compel obedience' (Deleuze and Guattari (1988: 76) cited in Porter, 2010). The order words of a hegemonic ideology like liberalism are transmitted as 'clichés' – a kind of hearsay that flows through and orders society and politics. Clichés pertain to reactive forces, as they stabilise and steer utterances, thought and actions. People incorporate that ordering. It speaks in and through us. It is repeated without experience or serious thought (e.g. 'yes, of course we are all individuals'; 'yes, of course we all have equal rights'). Clearly, liberal democracy is only one possible assemblage of ideas, but it is hegemonic and a ready-made set of ideas which speaks in and through Western democracies' political parties (May, 2005). Thus, there is no blank canvas for a political party, as the order of the hegemonic ideology is already there, positioning all parties on a left / right axis in accordance with its clichés.

The pragmatics of order words is not limited to circulating ideological clichés; their spell can be broken. Slogans are also statements, but their ability is to intensify a situation and affect it differently from how a cliché would. A slogan does not demand obedience. It seeks to be affirmed and catalysed into a new idea or action. A slogan is instantaneous, rich in its 'perlocutionary effect' (Porter, 2010: 239–40). It distinguishes itself against a background to which it can give new shape. A slogan does not depend on opposing something. Its quality involves a new trajectory for thought and action. A slogan is not universal in its claim or effect, but local. In *A thousand plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari (2008: 3) provide numerous slogans, including '[t]here is no ideology and never has been'. As a slogan, that is not a claim of an illusionary space outside of any ideology, as that in itself would be ideological (Husted, 2020). Instead, it is a challenge posed to a desire able to find *joy* in the slogan and think new thoughts.

In closing this overview, the discussion of ideology and order words at the level of politics brings us back to the concepts of repetition, new differences and desire. A repetition from the ordered place has no guarantee that it will return the same order, especially when it involves a desire seeking to affirm

and actualise new differences (Colebrook, 2002: 8). Without desire's intensification, however, repetition is reactive and likely to conform to the established order.[8] Slogans and sloganising statements are a way of seeking the intensification of desires to create new differences.

## Method

Process thinking and theorising has methodological implications. Drawing on discussions in organisation and entrepreneurship studies (e.g. Helin et al., 2014; Langley, 2007), and non-representational theory (e.g. Beyes and Steyaert, 2012; Steyaert, 2012), perception and theorising is guided by an attention to local situations and movements of change and rupture. A close relationship exists between the researcher and the researched, asking 'how' rather than 'why', and looking to verbs before nouns (Sigurdarson, 2016; Weick, 1979). There are no universally true representations of this (messy) world (Law, 2004). Correspondingly, analysis becomes a matter of performativity and writing, a method of enquiry (Richardson, 2000; Steyaert, 2012). That involves exploring potentialities in encounters between theory and data to catalyse thought (Steyaert, 2012).

This enquiry is based on empirical material from primary and secondary sources. Fourteen in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted between early 2018 and autumn 2019 (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2014). Each lasted around one hour on average, with the conversations recorded and

[8]Art and media provide a myriad of examples of both types of repetition, of sameness and difference. For instance, in the popular television drama series *Downton Abbey*, we find impressively detailed representations of British aristocratic life in the early 20th century. It is fiction, yet the creators stop at nothing to make the series historically convincing and provide a picture-perfect image of the past. It offers the audience nostalgic comfort in a meticulous contextualisation through storyline, clothing and environment (Baena and Byker, 2015). Another popular television series that also draws on the past is *Westworld*. Rather than just repeating the past, however, the series connects to an imagined future. The spirit and environment of the American Wild West era are brought into future virtual reality and artificial intelligence. In so doing, the series brings to the fore critical questions involving artificial intelligence, consciousness and morality (South and Engels, 2018).

transcribed. The interviews were designed to follow Spradley's (1979) guidance on ethnographic interviewing, involving explicit purpose and transparency, and combining descriptive, structural and contrasting questions. Interviewees were asked questions aimed at eliciting their own experiences and views concerning party organisation and processes, especially with regard to policy development and decision-making. They were also asked questions concerning specific events, including conflicts and successes. Interviews were coded using NVivo, first according to a few predefined categories, then more codes were developed inductively based on responses and identified overlaps.

In the analytical process, the concepts of desire and ideology became significant for the paper. Desire developed connections to comments regarding, for instance, the interviewees' passions, wants and willingness to experiment. Correspondingly, the concept of ideology developed connections to comments describing members, the party's political ideas and ideology. That included the party's Core Policy, international pirate policies, the party's national policies and approach to organising its political work. Various documents were also used to support this work.

As indicated, using a process approach already implies an interest in how a political party develops in terms of movements, changes and ruptures. Thus, this study and the interviews were aimed at gaining an in-depth longitudinal view of the young party evolving, both politically and as an organisation. Hence, it was deemed important to interview people with considerable experience and knowledge of the party, including its reasons for being, and how its political ideas and practices have emerged. Many, but not all, of the interviewees had been able to exert significant influence on the party and how it has developed in recent years. Most also had experience of being 'normal' members, with two no longer active in the party. Nevertheless, this rationale for selecting interviewees tilts the enquiry towards the views of members with stakes and influence, and towards the party's involvement in parliamentary politics.

For a brief overview, the interviewees included two individuals who were, or had been, administrative directors of the party; six were, or had been,

members or deputy members of the national parliament (MPs); and one interviewee represented the party in the capital's City Council. Furthermore, at least three interviewees had been on the party's, so-called, Executive Council and five were amongst the founding members. Additional information about individual interviewees is provided for those quoted directly in this paper, using pseudonyms.

Other sources of information were reviewed, including social media – in particular, relevant Facebook groups and the party's own online platform. Discussions on those platforms were reviewed both broadly and to gain knowledge on specific issues of interest. Video streaming and recordings of events, media news and interviews, internal party documents, the party's rules and blog posts were all significant data sources. In that respect, it was particularly helpful that the Pirate Party makes much of its activities and decision-making publicly available. In this paper, such sources are mainly used to support and validate insights developed or tested in the interviews.

## Repetition of established ideas as a sloganising process in the Pirate Party

This section discusses entrepreneurial activities in the Icelandic Pirate Party, as they involve creating new political differences in national party politics. Thinking and theorising about political entrepreneurship in terms of creativity and new differences is already implicated in Schumpeter's theory, but a Deleuze-Guattarian reading of this empirical case offers new insights into the political context. The first two parts of what follows discuss how the party repetitively, and with intensity, encounters liberal democratic ideology. The last part discusses how the approach to organising the party facilitates such encounters.

### *Repetition and liberal clichés*

> I was concerned that if we entered as a conventional Pirate Party, [like those] in Sweden, Germany and … other places, we'd drown in noise. (Interview with Loftsson)

The Icelandic Pirate Party's Core Policy is central to the party's organisational and decision-making processes. An important motivation for writing that policy was to ensure that the party's interests would not be restricted to the topics for which the pirate movement was best known.

> [The Core Policy] is basically a philosophical manifesto of our values. It evolves around, first and foremost, civil rights and some basic issues. So yes, it was this idea that we wouldn't get stuck in being a one-issue party. (Interview with Loftsson)

The Core Policy, spelled out on the party's website, has six pillars.[9] The first emphasises the importance of critical thinking and informed policy- and decision-making. Accordingly, new ideas should be approached without respect to who is promoting them, with decisions always open to revision – for instance, when new information become available. The second pillar focuses on the strengthening and protection of civil rights pertaining to equality, freedom of speech and action. The third relates to the right to privacy and defending the less powerful from abuse by the more powerful. The fourth covers transparency and responsibility, especially regarding the state and powerful social actors. The fifth pillar is the freedom to collect and share information, and to express oneself. Finally, the Core Policy advocates direct democracy and the right to self-determination; in other words, people have the right to access decision-making processes concerning their own affairs, with that right realised through direct democracy and low centralisation of power.

For all general purposes, the Core Policy spells out ideas fundamental to the Enlightenment, as well as the liberal philosophy and the human rights to which it gave rise. At its heart is the assumption that power has to come from the individual, who then becomes a core entity and a building block of any society. It is the same assumption that transcends liberal thought from Thomas Hobbes and John Lock to John Rawls and Robert Nozick (May, 2005). The Pirates' Core Policy reflects the basic question those thinkers addressed and can be stated as: Under what conditions should individuals allow themselves to be governed? The various answers created the ideological

[9] See 'Core Policy of the Icelandic Pirate Party': http://piratar.is/english/core-policy/.

framing which still speaks in and through Western politics (cf. Deleuze and Guattari, 2008). Correspondingly, the Core Policy states a belief in individual freedom and rights, human reasoning and critical thinking. It also contains a Weberian spirit emphasising traceability and responsibility (Weber, 1978). Overall, the party's Core Policy conveys a widely accepted assemblage of sociopolitical ideas, and what Deleuze and Guattari (2008) would call a 'collective assemblage of enunciations' belonging to liberal democracy. In other words, it explicitly spells out liberal order words. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Core Policy remains largely undisputed within the party.

The Core Policy is essential to the party's policy development. For instance, when developing a new policy, it must be explicitly anchored in the Core Policy to gain legitimacy. It is of no less importance in issues not already covered in current policy. Jónsdóttir talked about how vital the Core Policy was during the first years of the party, when it lacked clear policies in several areas.

> I just cannot believe when I read this political programme of ours that we made it into parliament. Wonderful! [...] We made all decisions based on the Core Policy. It was easy to use it as a template for decision-making. (Interview with Jónsdóttir)

The Core Policy is still repeatedly visited as a 'template for decision-making'. Mr Halldorsson, an MP, and Ms Sanders, a deputy MP, explained that the Core Policy is continuously brought up in political discussions and within the group of MPs. Grímsson, an MP, explained how the Core Policy has helped to prioritise what the party chooses to focus on, as well as whether and how to negotiate in the parliament. Citing Peter Drucker, Grímsson adds that the Core Policy also has a role in ensuring the party's organisational sustainability, by making it possible to demonstrate success by comparing party activities and results to the Core Policy.

When taking stock, the Pirate Party actively and frequently brings the Core Policy into various discussions at the policy and organisation levels. It is depicted as the party's 'anchor', but, as a set of ideas or statements, the Core Policy is neither inherently radical nor novel. In that sense, it is comprised of the very clichés that already order national politics and are, therefore, already

reactively embodied by other political parties in their utterances and stable practices. Nevertheless, the Core Policy is active in encounters where the Pirate Party is able to create new political differences and do entrepreneurship in Icelandic politics. We also know from Deleuze and Guattari that new differences can emerge from a repetition of order and sanctioned ideas, when statements become slogans, involving encounters with a desire to spontaneously affirm new affects that can catalyse new ideas and actions.

*The Core Policy and moments of repetition*

As mentioned, the existence of the Core Policy was motivated by the intention to take part in politics broadly and to develop policy for a variety of issues. Interviewees argued that the Core Policy distinguished the party from other local political parties and was essential for the party's goal of changing politics. They also acknowledged that the Core Policy's distinguishing effect was not obvious from a simple reading of its statements, but explained that there was more to it than that.

> If you read the Core Policy based on current politics, it doesn't necessarily tell you the same as if you understand the background, regarding the democratic conversation and agile change. (Interview with Palsson)

Here, Mr Palsson made two connections to the Core Policy to explain its capacity to support novel policy- and decision-making. The first was an active democratic conversation concerning party organisation and the distribution of decision-making power. That aspect is addressed in more detail in the following section. Palsson also connects the Core Policy to an image of an 'agile' future involving unprecedented speed of change and technological development. That relates to the ideas mentioned at the beginning of this paper, including the so-called fourth industrial revolution and the value-driven cyber-libertarian project that the pirate movement is considered to promote (e.g. Burkart, 2014; Demker, 2014; Zulianello, 2018).

At least two additional attributes exist here with implications for the Core Policy's entrepreneurial capacity, as expressed in the party's frequent and repetitive encounters with it. The first of those is the intention of the party not to be bound by its previous decisions, particularly if new information is

available. When that is the case, there is a legitimate reason to reconsider previous policy or deviate from it. Two of the MPs, Ms Káradóttir and Mr Grímsson, explained how the party attempts to take such issues seriously in its decision-making by ensuring that the process is 'compartmentalised' and isolated from other decisions taken by the party. Furthermore, several interviewees maintained that they and the party consciously tried to prevent ad hominem arguments from having any influence. To take that seriously in parliamentary politics is arguably already radical, especially considering Iceland's strongly partisan politics and coalition governments, as can also be seen in many other European countries. Such governing commonly requires compromise on policy issues in order to maintain coalition cohesion. Nevertheless, the Pirates have frequently expressed, both in speech and action, their commitment to supporting ideas from other political parties if they are in agreement with the party's Core Policy.

The other attribute to be added concerning the Core Policy's capacity to further entrepreneurial activity was expressed by Mr Loftsson: '[I]f we take the most insane units from both right and left wings of the system – [what they] emphasise – have it make sense and focus on that, then we have something new' (Interview with Loftsson). Loftsson recognises that within the space of the conventional order of liberal ideology there remains a plethora of ideas that have never been actualised. He also expressed his desire to affirm those ideas and seek to introduce them, as different and meaningful ideas, into current politics.

Drawing on the above, in addition to other insights from the study, two entrepreneurial moments in the party's repeated encounters with the Core Policy can be identified. Together, they express the party's capacity to affirm and introduce new differences into politics. One is a moment of decontextualisation, which involves forgetting previous decisions, commitments and policies, and how local politics is practised. It is a forgetting of various pre-ordered constraints on new ideas and actions. Hence, a moment of decontextualisation corresponds to an attempt to escape from the ordering effects of the Core Policy's liberal statements, as ideological clichés already ordering politics (cf. Deleuze and Guattari, 2008). In other words, the party attempts to detach itself not from the Core Policy's stated ideas, but

from how they are expressed in practice in terms of actual and current policy, involving an assemblage of habits, routines and utterances.

The second moment is one of recontextualisation, where the Core Policy statements are open to encounters with different speeds and intensities. Such recontextualising involves imagining a different future and having permission to bring up 'insane' ideas to apply to political practice. Thus, the moment is receptive to a passionate enquiry into how the collection of statements in the Core Policy can be actualised differently – what does radically different liberal democratic politics look like? That latter moment involves a sloganisation of the Core Policy statements. Here, the statements, instead of ordering thought and action according to already actualised politics, evoke spontaneous reactions and new ideas (cf. Porter, 2010). The Core Policy is open to party members' desire to experiment with new ways of doing politics. Deleuze describes that as taking statements or ideas and pushing them beyond experience, to a (virtual) point beyond what is already actual in politics, to ask, as Loftsson also does: What can an idea become? (Colebrook, 2002). In that way, the Core Policy resonates with what Massumi (2002: 72) calls a 'field of potentials', a catalysing point from which new connections, ideas and actions arise, and, eventually, a new order emerges.

Thus, the two moments are ideological movements, repetitively striving to move from the ordering and confinement of internalised clichés towards the catalysing and spontaneous effects of slogans.

*A party organising for receptivity to new differences*

> We [are] trying to make changes, and if you set yourself up exactly like everything that has become infected by the system, it happens much faster. (Interview with Jónsdóttir)

Ways of organising are important to the Pirate Party. As Jónsdóttir indicates, organising is seen as being vital to the party's desire to maintain the ability to do entrepreneurship in politics. It draws attention to the organisation's receptivity as an ability to be affected by and open to the members' desire to create new political differences. Thinking with Deleuze (2013), that openness

and ability to be affected is intertwined with the party's ability to actualise differences in politics.

Party members provided two anecdotal stories showing how they experience the party's receptivity to their desire to act and affect policy. Those stories are presented below, followed by a broader organisational overview conveying the party's openness and receptivity to new political differences.

Interviewees gave various responses to questions regarding how and why they became Icelandic Pirate Party members. What they did have in common, however, were joyful encounters and increased ability to act and influence politics. Káradóttir described herself as a 'dreamer'. She had travelled widely and lived in different countries. She also quit school at 17. Parliamentary politics did not interest her and she did not vote until she was in her thirties. She began to follow national politics in the aftermath of the 2008 crisis. In 2012, there was still a lot of anger in Icelandic society. Many had lost their jobs and properties. Káradóttir was, therefore, pleasantly surprised when she did not encounter an angry mob when she first attended meetings preparing to establish the new Pirate Party. She said: 'I felt like they were interested in bringing me along. That was important to me, and then I was just hooked'. She soon found that the new party, and what it stood for, could facilitate the development and actualisation of her own ideas, which she describes as having been rather incoherent and utopian. Káradóttir's engagement with the new party grew steadily into a determination to become a professional politician. She eventually quit her job to dedicate herself to that desire. Then, in 2016, she was voted into the national parliament.

Ms Stefánsdóttir graduated in Norway as a landscape architect in 2012. During her studies, she developed an interest in sustainable public transport. When she moved back to Iceland, she hoped people would be more receptive to her ideas than what she experienced in Norway. Soon after the move, Stefánsdóttir was contacted by a political party and asked if she was interested in being on the party's ballot. She declined, but it highlighted for her the question of whether politics could be a way for her to exercise her desire to develop more sustainable public transport. Then, in 2014, she attended a

meeting on urban policy development organised by the Pirate Party. At the meeting, she asked to speak.

> [E]veryone listened to what I had to say and it was written down, and it just became a part of the policy. That was such an amazing experience. … I had just never experienced anything like it. (Interview with Stefánsdóttir)

In 2018, Stefánsdóttir was elected to the capital's City Council as a Pirate Party representative.

Although, clearly, not every member of the Pirate Party becomes a representative, like Káradóttir and Stefánsdóttir, their experience of the party's receptivity to their desires and ideas reflects the experiences of other members, and is in line with the way the party organises itself. Phrases familiar to the pirate movement, such as 'flat', 'do-ocratic' and 'transparent', are frequently used by members when describing the organisation. Correspondingly, the first thing most people note is that the party does not have an actual party leader. Instead, the party aims to create direction and leadership through joint engagement in discussions about policy and other decisions, with the Core Policy as a guide. In many ways, the party organisation corresponds to Gerbaudo's (2019: 189) 'participationism' – a party organisational restructuring based on a belief in unrestrained participation of ordinary people. The absence of a party leader does, of course, set it apart from most, so-called, platform parties, and is a more radical move towards horizontality (cf. Gerbaudo, 2019). The positive and negative effects of that are still debated within the party. Those in favour of introducing a party leadership role point to the problem of allocating responsibility. They problematise the possibility of people taking important initiatives and risks without accepting formal responsibility. Others, arguing to continue without a party leader, emphasise the strength of open discussions guided by the Core Policy, the ability of ordinary members to take initiatives and the importance of not becoming too much like other parties.

Second, the party's main central organ is the Executive Council, which has an administrative role. To ensure transparency, the general rule has been that the Council's meetings are open for attendance by anyone, with meeting

minutes made publicly available online. To limit the impact of any one individual, members can only sit on the Council for four years.

Third, new policy development is a shared responsibility of every party member and complies with the, so-called, 'three-pirate rule'. The rule establishes an egalitarian three-step process, typically starting with an announcement of an open meeting about an issue or suggestion, which can be proposed by any party member. If a suggestion receives three votes or more at the meeting, it is allowed on the party's digital platform for online discussion and voting. As mentioned, a new policy has to be argued for and legitimised in accordance with the party's Core Policy.[10]

The final example of the party's organisational openness and receptivity is its use of digital media. Digital media is important in the party's decision-making, making it receptive to direct influence even beyond the boundaries of membership. The party's own digital platform, and the one it mainly uses, is X.piratar.is.[11] The platform handles various forms of election, including committee elections and party primaries, both national and regional. It also facilitates development of, discussions about and voting on policy changes. All records of policies and changes are stored on the platform. The platform was recently adapted to help match volunteers with various organisational tasks. The party also uses Facebook extensively, thereby exposing the party to encounters with members and non-members alike. Multiple groups associated with the Icelandic Pirate Party can be found on Facebook, with most established for the purpose of discussing a specific political subject (e.g. animal welfare, immigration, education or culture). Some of the groups are independent individual initiatives and in general, participation in the groups

[10] Formal rules about the Executive Council and the party's policy development can be found in the party's laws (see http://piratar.is/um-pirata/log-og-reglur/), but additional information about practice was also collected in interviews.

[11] When asked about the origin and existence of the platform, it is attributed to the desire and skills of the individuals involved in establishing the party, rather than a sense of obligation to the party: 'we just sort of did it' (interview with Halldorsson). X.piratar.is was created on the foundations of a software test bed, developed by one of the party co-founders, who was trying to test ideas about different election methods.

does not require party membership. In 2012, the party established the 'Pirate Chat', which is arguably the largest and most active Icelandic political Facebook group. Loftsson noted:

> The idea was to create a public forum for discussions for people with connections to the party. We knew there was risk involved [and] it would be attractive for the trolls. (Interview with Loftsson)

The discussions in that group have, on numerous occasions, been covered in the national media, due to conflicts and outrageous comments. Nevertheless, the party maintains administrative ties to the group, despite considerable concerns that it reflects badly on the party. The party's presence on and use of Facebook has also been criticised, but, as some of the interviewees pointed out, people are already on Facebook.

The organisation of the Pirate Party allows for large numbers of encounters with members and non-members. The party's emphasis on flat structures, do-ocracy and transparency makes for organisational receptivity and openness towards connecting with new ideas, and allows people to influence the party in various ways. That corresponds to organising towards entrepreneurship in politics, here understood to involve the ability of party members to affirm new differences and seek to create new connections in the organisational space (Hjorth, 2004). It is a type of organising where the ability of those in power to stifle movements that challenge the current order is not protected by formal structures and authority (cf. Hjorth, 2012b). The way in which the Icelandic Pirate Party organises itself limits the ability to arrest and redirect its members' desires towards any rigid and pre-established party interests, including previous decisions, policies and authority roles. That supports a moment of decontextualisation, of forgetting and moving away from the current order, thereby increasing the potential effect of new ideas and actions emerging.

## Discussion

This enquiry, made against the backdrop of Deleuzian thinking, explores an approach to political entrepreneurship in the Icelandic Pirate Party involving repeated encounters with the party's Core Policy statements and the party's

way of organising its activities. The party is critical of the current order of both politics and society, so it approaches the liberal clichés, as stated in its Core Policy, as if they do not already order politics proper. Instead, the Core Policy statements are visited repeatedly in local encounters, without respect for actualised political order. That involves a moment of decontextualisation and forgetting, which is intertwined with a moment of recontextualisation, or seeking to create new political differences. The clichés become slogans, open to new connections, new (insane) ideas and different futures. The slogans become invitations to a desire seeking to experiment and affirm new differences in politics. In addition, the party's horizontal organising and supple boundaries expose it to a multitude of heterogeneous encounters and affects.

Such insights contribute to an understanding of political entrepreneurship as a creative practice. According to Sheingate (2003) and Roberts (1998), creativity and intellectual activities in political entrepreneurship involve borrowing and adapting ideas and other known elements. Schumpeter (1934: 65) also spoke of creating 'new combinations' as a creative entrepreneurial activity. This Deleuzian enquiry into the Pirate Party shows entrepreneurial creativity that borrows, adapts and recombines a central attribute of politics, namely ideology. It is an ideology that is already socially accepted and largely undisputed, but, in the Icelandic Pirate Party, it is presented in a selection of statements which are repeatedly activated in various situations. This enquiry did not identify any clear agreed-upon universal or shared utopian image guiding the party overall. Rather than a ready-made utopian image, the study conveys one of a party borrowing, adapting and recombining statements and ideas.

Correspondingly, the Core Policy statements are not associated with already actualised or ultimate solutions. Instead they propose challenges and problems in need of new solutions. Indeed, they do so more urgently now than ever before, when one considers current technological and socioeconomic developments. That relates directly to the party's main criticism of Icelandic politics – the perceived performance gap Roberts (2000) cites, or the inability of other parties to reapproach and re-actualise valued ideas to prepare for, and create, a different future. Awareness of this performance gap was

heightened in Iceland by the severity of the financial crisis, which provided the instability the party needed to attract creative activity (Sheingate, 2003).

That brings us closer to the quality of engagement needed for creative activities in politics. Schumpeter (1934: 93) provided indications of the importance of 'joy', 'getting things done' and being able to 'exercise one's energy and ingenuity' for creativity and entrepreneurship. This enquiry captures party members' encounters with the party as joyful experiences, with individuals feeling that they can have an impact on the party, even as common members. The study found that members were motivated by the opportunity provided to them by the party being receptive and responsive to their political desires. That suggests that a political party wanting to do entrepreneurship should become receptive to its members' desire to have an impact, but avoid ossifying those desires into predefined party interests, including in established routines and conventions, which complements Hjorth's (2014) theorising concerning entrepreneurship in organisations.

In the context of party organisation and its implications for creativity in political entrepreneurship, Sheingate's (2003) conceptualisation of complexity, involving heterogeneity, uncertainty and ambiguity, is relevant. It also corresponds, in different ways, to the Pirate Party's expressions of horizontality, do-ocracy and transparency as its guiding organising principles. The openness to platforms, meetings and discussions in the party, even beyond the party membership, works to increase heterogeneity in encounters, including those involving policy development. Ambiguity and uncertainty are effective organisational attributes when it comes to facilitating creativity. Together, they emerge, in particular, in the party's reluctance to allocate formal authority and responsibility. That has led to members identifying opportunities to *take* the initiative to act on matters they feel passionately about (e.g. by suggesting new policies or creating platforms for new discussions). That in turn creates space for experimentation, which is an elementary attribute of creativity and entrepreneurship (Rajchman, 2001; Steyaert, 2012). It also poses challenges for the organisation, however, and some interviewees expressed concerns about the lack of authority and responsibility, as it has caused misunderstandings and sparked conflicts.

In 2012, the founders of the Icelandic Pirate Party aligned themselves with the already emerging pirate movement, which grew from a desire to share cultural content (Fredriksson, 2016). The Icelandic founders radically expanded on that initial concept and desired to change Icelandic politics, enhance democracy and transparency, and take part in every aspect of parliamentary politics. This enquiry into the Icelandic Pirate Party was prompted by an interest in political entrepreneurship and soon became attentive to the party's Core Policy and its effects. Deleuze's thinking has helped to inform a certain demystification of creativity in political entrepreneurship and the Pirate Party. Creativity and entrepreneurship did not mysteriously and suddenly transcend from nowhere. Instead, it emanated from repetitive encounters and ideology. On the surface, the party's Core Policy statements do not immediately indicate their ability to catalyse novel ideas and actions. Nevertheless, when they are encountered with a desire to make new connections – as slogans and unsolved problems – and facilitated within an organisation rich in heterogeneity and ambiguity, new differences can emerge. Such work can be difficult and complex, and in the Icelandic Pirate Party it has involved experimentation, mistakes and conflict, but there is always risk in entrepreneurship, also in politics.

Political parties are key to democratic politics and they need to be studied in depth if we want to understand entrepreneurship in politics. The inner life of political parties is rarely the subject of scholarly enquiry (Husted, 2020). In the face of various challenges (e.g. pandemic, climate change, digitalisation and transformation of job markets), understanding entrepreneurship and forces of change in politics has arguably never been so important, but the political entrepreneurship field is still in its infancy. As shown in this paper, Deleuze's processual philosophy, in its radical engagement with both politics and creativity, offers ways to produce novel insights into political entrepreneurship not limited by an economic context.

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## the author

Hallur Thor Sigurdarson is an assistant professor at Reykjavik University's Department of Business Administration. Hallur has a professional background in software and game development, and management. Following a PhD from Copenhagen Business School, his research and teaching has mainly been within the fields of entrepreneurship and organisation studies. Current research interests involve process philosophy, entrepreneurship and organising in public offices, the political domain and in software development. Hallur is currently representing RU in the EEA sponsored research project 'School of Knowledge Production and Transfer for Global Economy and Governance'.
Email: hallursig@ru.is

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# Digital parties and their organisational challenges

Paolo Gerbaudo

## abstract

Digital parties such as the 5 Star Movement, Podemos, and the Pirate Parties have introduced important organisational innovations to tap into the new affordances of digital platforms. However, their project of a digital democracy allowing for more disintermediation in the relationship between citizens and the political process has also raised important dilemmas. In this note, I summarise my research on digital parties and focus on some of the key organisational challenges they are facing.

Amidst this era of political chaos, marked by the convergence of multiple economic, political, health and ecological crisis, the question of political organisation has come back as a matter of great urgency. The sheer scale of the challenges we face makes the basic logic of all forms of organisation - namely uniting the force of individuals in pursuit of a collective cause – key to the major mobilisation efforts that are required to address contemporary social problems. In recent years we have in fact witnessed a revival of discussions on organisation, as new movements using digital media in their organising practices have arisen, raising questions about issues such as leadership and participation, horizontality and hierarchy. Vociferous debates have emerged around this and connected questions, and the discussion is as much alive among scholars as it is among activists, as seen in the debate on

horizontality and verticality (Nunes, 2021). Discussions about organisational transformation were initially focused on the transformation of protest movements, in response to the wave of protest movements experienced during the 2010s, from Occupy Wall Street to the Gilets Jaunes. Yet, in recent years the discussion has turned towards political parties, amidst a rapid transformation of electoral politics, and the emergence of new political organisations, some of which are strongly intertwined with the 2010s protest movements, to the point of being sometimes seen as their electoral projections.

One of the most significant political trends in recent years has been the emergence of new political parties sometimes described as 'digital parties', because of their enthusiastic adoption of digital technology as a means of political organisation. From the Pirate Parties in Northern Europe, to the Five Star Movement in Italy and Podemos in Spain, a new generation of political parties has emerged which adopt the logic and organisational structure of digital platforms. Meanwhile, also some mainstream political parties including the UK Labour Party, the Spanish PSOE, and the German SPD have been adopting. This return of the party is not merely a return of old organisational structures inherited from the industrial era. Rather it entails a process of profound organisational innovation, a renewal of the party-form that reflects the rapid technological change we have witnessed in recent years as a result of the so-called 'digital revolution', namely the pervasive diffusion of digital apps, platforms and devices. While political parties have a reputation as old-fashioned construction, out-of-sync with contemporary reality, historically the political party has been a very malleable organisational form. From the parties of notables of the 18$^{th}$ and 19$^{th}$ century to the mass party of the Fordist era, and the television parties of the neoliberal era, different configurations of organisation, leadership, participation and mobilisation responding to the dominant technological and social trends of the times. Something similar is currently afoot with parties re-organising after the image of the 'digital revolution'. Social media and their structure of discussion of interaction, and new participation and decision-making platforms, described as 'participatory platforms' or 'participation portals', such as Rousseau in the 5 Star Movement, and Participa in the case of

Podemos have progressively become the key organisational structure of these movements, in their striving for a more direct participation of the citizenry (Deseriis, 2017; Mikola, 2017; Deseriis and Vittori, 2019). But is this transformation actually bringing about more democracy to organisations? And what does it tell us about contemporary organisational trends and challenges?

In recent years, scholars have addressed different aspects of the organisational transformation of political parties. They have explored their forms of deliberation (Deseriis, 2020, Floridia and Vignati, 2017), their voting practices (Mosca, 2020), the functioning of online primaries (Mikola, 2017) and the relationship between digital and physical spaces (Husted and Plesner, 2017). In my own research about emerging political parties (Gerbaudo, 2019a; 2019b), I have highlighted some fundamental trends that cut across different formations and how they illuminate more general structural conditions of contemporary politics. My notion of digital party, also rendered alternatively as 'platform party' (Gerbaudo, 2019c) to indicate the centrality of the platform logic to their functioning, expresses a number of connected trends: 1) the way political organisations are absorbing innovations coming from the field of business management of digital companies; 2) the mimicking of digital platforms disintermediation dynamics and their nature as forms of re-intermediation; 3) the transformation of forms of membership this turn carries, with the shift towards more open and light notions of membership; 4) the dubiousness of claims according to which participatory platforms are ushering in a better and more involved democracy. My analysis of the digital party, and the debate (Husted, 2019; Dommett et al., 2020; Deseriis, 2020) it has sparked, carries important implications for contemporary debate on organization. In this research note I develop a series of general propositions about these different trends drawing on my own research and on relevant scholarship in the field.

First, digital parties adopt organisational features originating from the digital economy, and the 'lean management' philosophy of start-ups and large digital platform companies. This trend reflects a more general tendency: in every era political parties are adapting to the technological structure of their times, and following Lenin's famous suggestion, attempting to adopt state-of-the-art

technologies and organisational practices. While in the industrial era, the party styled itself after the Fordist factory, in these times of social media and apps it has come to adopt the quality of Facebook and other digital companies known under the collective acronym of FAANGs (Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Netflix and Google). Looking at the doings of 'digital parties' such as the Pirate Parties, the Five Star Movement and Podemos, it soon becomes apparent that what these organisations ultimately are putting forward is a political translation of the operational model of Silicon Valley firms: the platform capitalism model that brought to success figures such as Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg and Amazon's Jeff Bezos (Srnicek, 2017). This organisational change has to do with these new parties' attempt to make up for their outsider status and their lack of funds and personnel by reaping economies of scale available on social media and mobilise thousands of people in online discussions and actions that would be impossible for them to reach otherwise.

Second, digital parties are informed by their own ideology that I describe as participationism, which centers on the goal of a better democracy than the one that is on offer in the contemporary representative system. Digital parties argue that by using digital technologies they will usher in a more direct and authentic democracy that is going to make political decisions far more responsive to the wishes of ordinary citizens (Frederiksson Almqvist, 2016; Ringel, 2019). Key in this view is the idea of disintermediation. Disintermediation has become a popular keyword to express what platforms are about (Pasquale, 2015). The by-passing of previous intermediaries structures achieved by digital companies in several areas of information, culture, knowledge, commerce, entertainment, is translated by digital parties into the promise of a more direct democracy doing away barriers between voters and representatives. However, the result of this process of disintermediation are highly contradictory. It is true that by means of platformisation political parties are doing away with some forms of organisational intermediation, and in particular, the party's bureaucracy that Antonio Gramsci (1971: 133-135) in his discussion of the 'modern prince', described as the 'third element' articulating the base of the party with its apex. In the same way in which social media and apps promise to do away with middle-men in the public sphere and distribution systems, from mainstream

media, to retail malls, cab companies and restaurants so the digital party promises to use digital media to facilitate the direct participation of the citizenry in all the important decisions that concern ordinary citizens. Yet, this disintermediation is in fact a re-intermediation, the creation of new forms of higher-order intermediation in place of pre-existing one. Rather than becoming truly 'leaderless' these formations are overshadowed by charismatic leaders, or 'hyperleaders', who play a pivotal role in shaping the party's public image and its direction, and therefore end up acting as symbolic intermediaries.

Third, digital parties radically transform the nature of party membership. Traditionally political parties operated with a highly formalized definition of member, in which members were expected to abide by a series of rules, as well as contribute financially and with their own political labour to the life of the party. The case is radically different with digital parties. These formations have adopted a free registration model in which membership is disconnected from financial contribution. For example, in the case of France Insoumise, it is sufficient to write one's name and email address, and hit the button 'je soutiens' (I support) to become a member. Beppe Grillo has often celebrated the fact that becoming a member of the Five Star Movement is costless as a democratic measure. But the fact of allowing anybody to register for free also reflects digital parties' ambition of rapid growth. In so doing, digital parties are imitating the model traced since the late 1990s by digital advocacy organisations such as MoveOn, Change.org or Avaaz, which enlist internet users as 'members' simply for agreeing to be on their mailing list and for having participated in any activity at any time – for example by having signed a petition (Karpf, 2012)

Fourth, digital parties' internal democracy contradicts the promise of a participatory democracy marked by radical egalitarianism. Far from the edifying picture of a digital 'basis democracy' (*Basisdemokratie*) to adopt the term utilised by early green parties, digital parties often correspond more to a model of plebiscitarian democracy, strongly top-down in its orientation. While these formations emphasise those practices that have a strong deliberative and participatory element, such as collaborative policy-development, the practices that have the strongest impact are internal

strategic referenda. These referenda, such as those carried out frequently by the 5 Star Movement to expel members accused of not having followed party guidelines, have often been approved with overwhelming majorities for the option preferred by the leadership. Episodes of rank-and-file rebellion against the leadership's position and proposals have been very rare. This highlights that digital democracy applications can be geared towards rather different purposes from the ones officially stated by party leaders. The use of participatory platforms introduces new forms of power and control, with the party staff able to influence the results of digital ballots through their timing, the formulation of questions submitted to the base, and the creation of an atmosphere within the party conducive to the adoption of a certain line. Thus, the longstanding dream of a digital democracy appears to have foundered in its practical application. Digital democracy is often a codeword for online forms of plebiscitarian democracy in which the actual intervention of members is very limited (Gerbaudo, 2019b). Rather than delivering a participatory democracy these parties have delivered a 'reactive democracy', in which citizens' intervention merely consists in responding to the stimuli coming from the leadership, more often in the form of approval or acclamation than disapproval.

This analysis of the shortcomings of digital parties could lead to two different responses or solutions. First, the supporters of direct democracy through the use of digital media, may want to argue is that these failings have to do with an insufficiency of practice, merely digital parties have just betrayed their founding principles, and it is from this betrayal that their failures stem. According to this view, if anything digital parties have not been ambitious enough in pursuing the digital democracy agenda. However, this type of response seems to neglect that some of these parties ultimately found themselves compelled to introduce representative and plebiscitary mechanisms, as a matter of necessity rather than preference. The participation of these parties in electoral processes and mass democracies made these mechanisms essential to guarantee a semblance of internal democracy in the choice of representatives and in the adoption of certain political directions in front of dilemma issues. The 5 Star Movement and its transformation since becoming a party with parliamentary representation is

a clear case in point, given the profound contradictions that emerged between the movement's claim to leaderlessness and its creation of internal and public leadership structures, in order to cope with its incipient institutionalisation.

Second, a more sound response should start from the premise that if the project of a digital direct democracy has failed it is first and foremost because it was conceptually flawed. Leadership and hierarchy within organisations may be made more accountable, more responsive, more democratic; but they cannot ever be completely eliminated. Max Weber had already clearly highlighted that there is not such a thing as a party without the existence of a leadership, be it personal or collective, which members collectively accept (Weber, 1978: 244). Furthermore, before digital parties many other political parties, and in particular the green parties of the 1970s and early 1980s, which tried to eliminate organisational hierarchies, such as by setting term limits, and double spokespersons, only to soon be forced to do away with these measures (Poguntke, 1994). Rather than continuing with failed attempts at doing away with organisational power structures, what is necessary is establishing mechanisms in which participation and representation may be reconciled, along the lines of what in my book on digital parties I describe as 'participatory representation'. What I mean by this is a system in which representation by leaders and parties is intertwined with participation by members and the opportunity for ordinary citizens to periodically discuss and assess the status of political leadership and its policies. Only by reconciling participation and representation we may be able to overcome present organisational dilemmas, and reconcile democratic legitimacy and organisational efficacy.

In coming years, the debate on political parties in the digital era is likely to continue to occupy much of our attention. Particularly important is the question of whether what we are seeing is simply an embryonic inkling of a coming party-form or an already full-fledged organisational template. Due partly also to the failure of their organisational structures many of these parties have faced serious political and identity crises, as most glaringly seen in the case of Movimento 5 Stelle which is currently discussing internal organisational reforms to address these issues. Ultimately, unless the digital party manages to find a way to give solidity to its action, either by routinising

the charisma of the hyperleader or giving weight to its organisational structure, it risks experiencing the same mortality rate of start-ups or, worse, could end up becoming a party just like the others it so vehemently criticises. The digital party may profit much from its being cloud-like, which is what allows it to be capable of wondrous growth, similar to the one experience by successful start-up companies. However, by the same token it can also be as inconsistent as clouds. It can condense great waves of popular anger and hope, and flash thunderbolts of rage, but just like a cloud it can also rapidly disperse into blue skies and thin air in response to the ever-changing winds of public opinion. The key question going forward is how these organisational weaknesses may be addressed, and a more democratic system may be constructed by intertwining representation and participation rather than pitting them against one another. It is on this question that much of the future and ultimate legacy of digital parties is staked.

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## the author

Paolo Gerbaudo is a sociologist and political theorist at King's College London where he directs the Centre for Digital Culture. He is the author of *The digital party: Political organisation and online democracy* (Pluto, 2018) and of *The great recoil: Politics after populism and pandemic* (Verso, forthcoming).
Email: paolo.gerbaudo@kcl.ac.uk

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# Rhythms, riffs, and rituals in political parties: An anthropological view of complex coalitions

Emma Crewe

## abstract

From an anthropological perspective politics is a form of work that involves power struggles in the face of difference. The discipline of anthropology has the potential to offer rigorous and in-depth accounts of politics by relying on reflexivity, attention to plurality and multi-disciplinarity. Within political institutions in democracies, these struggles take place in different sites but a key one is political parties and yet these complex coalitions have been relatively neglected within anthropology. To understand political parties it makes sense to go beyond the aggregation of individual behaviour or investigation into coalitions as systems, structures or culture, to look at relationships, processes of relating and change in these relations. To make sense of the endless contradictions and dynamism created by these relationships, it is necessary to focus on those patterns that reveal how politicians are similar and divergent. The key ones influencing political work, including that of political parties, are rhythms of performance, riffs of meaning, and rituals and symbols.

## Introducing anthropology

From an anthropological perspective politics is a form of work that involves power struggles in the face of difference, walking and talking with friends and foes to realise aspirations, share resources and discipline people or thwart opponents' goals. Within political institutions in democratic systems, these

struggles take place in different sites but a key one is political parties. And yet parties – these complex, dynamic and partly hidden coalitions – have been neglected within anthropology with some notable exceptions.

Before I explain these exceptions, and summarise their conclusions so far, I should explain how anthropologists approach research in general. In contrast with political science literature on political parties, as summarised in the Oxford Handbook of Legislative Studies by Saalfeld and Strøm (2014) as a mix of methodological individualism and systems theory, anthropologists don't usually avoid what is difficult to measure. Anthropologists are close to those political theorists interested in performance, culture and history (such as Rai and Spray, 2019). To give another example, the spirit in which Rosenblum (2008) writes about political parties in the US, as the ordinary locus of political creativity, has much in common with anthropology because it is infused with philosophical questions, an interest in political traditions, and a reflexive approach to moral judgement. Political anthropologists tend to have a different perspective on objectivity to those, mostly political scientists rather than theorists, who assume that ethnography creates a greater problem of bias than other research approaches (e.g., Herzog and Zacka, 2017). Along the same philosophical lines as Dewey, anthropologists in contrast see reflexivity as an essential part of the task of working towards objective accounts – sometimes culturally specific but generalised where possible (Crewe, 2018).

The UK anthropologist Ingold (2014) explains that anthropology is philosophy but with the people still in, a participatory process of inquiry that gets under the skin of those we study to try and see and feel the world as it appears to them (Ingold, 2018). When researching with people in an open-minded way, relying on both imagination and analysis, the analyst has to be willing to change themselves in the process of learning. The main methodology that anthropologists tend to rely on is participant-observation – or immersion in a community, organisation or theme – pursuing questions, puzzles and disconnections in whatever way seems appropriate. This may mean interviewing, delving into archives, studying documents or social media, observing, shadowing, joining in, gossiping, watching online or undertaking a survey – usually a mixture depending on the nature of the inquiry – and then writing about what they have discovered. Eliciting responses from

informants, other practitioners or scholars on drafts of findings generates further data and insight. Anthropologists are like detectives but finding patterns and solving puzzles rather than crimes, using whatever techniques seem appropriate for specific research questions. Like detectives we hone our skills at searching for materials, tracking what has unfolded over time and talking to people with respectful scepticism. We take different informants seriously while recognising that different people will always offer different stories and, at the same time, take account of fallible memories, people's tendency to portray themselves as they wish to be seen, and the difficulty of pinpointing one's own assumptions and motivations (especially when they are contradictory, as they often are). Politicians and their parties are under even greater pressure than others to paint themselves as heroes, win supporters and protect their reputations, so researching parties requires even subtler detective skills than usual.

Anthropologists often claims rigour on the basis of three methodological processes (Crewe, 2018): (a) reflexivity: anthropologists are committed to finding out about people's 'silent traditions' (Bourdieu, 1977: 167), that is, the cultural norms and practices that people take for granted. To do this you need reflexivity. This involves a sense of detachment and a process of taking account of your own culture and history and how they impact on your research; (b) recognising plurality: you have to aspire towards learning from the diverse and contradictory perspectives in any site, inquiring into who is included and excluded in your research; (c) multi-disciplinarity: good anthropology needs to learn from experts in the same field, in the case of political parties above all political theorists and scientists. Theoretically, all anthropologists have a holistic sensibility – seeing politics as entangled with history, geography, culture and ritual – but in practice it is impossible to write comprehensively about the whole. All anthropologists are disposed towards an interest in relationships, so when prioritising that is where they focus their attention. Since the study of politicians often focuses on aggregating individual behaviour or looking at institutions as a whole (their system, structure or culture), our understanding of relationships, processes of relating and the change in these relations, offers something new to parliamentary research.

## Anthropological inquiries into political parties

Most ethnographies of parliaments reveal the workings of political parties to a lesser or greater extent (e.g., Weatherford (1985) on the US, Abélès (2000; 2006) on France, Crewe (2005; 2015) on the UK) as do anthropological monographs on politics more generally (e.g., Aronoff (1989) on Israel) or on particular nations (e.g., Lewis (2011) on Bangladesh). Lewis (2011) explains that to fathom contemporary Bangladeshi politics, including the historical struggles between Muslims and Hindus, you have to go back to the British colonial era and the policies of the East India Company but also look at how Bengali vs non-Bengali conflict was created by Partition and the establishment of East and West Pakistan. The two main political parties that emerged express these tensions. They operate in what has become a weak state but a strong society, made up of patron-client relations organised around the Awami League vs the Bangladesh National Party who took turns to form governments until 2014 (when the latter boycotted the election), using their power to build up state structures with their supporters (Lewis, 2011; Ahmed, 2020).

Politicians are embedded in wider society so their parties must be as well. Abélès's (2000; 2006) seminal work on the French National Assembly reveals how words, acts and objects are manipulated through rituals to allow the confrontation of different elements of society as represented by political parties. This is about more than the expression of belief; it expresses a belonging to one side or another. Traditionally, certain parties tended to dominate in particular localities – the Communist Party always won in certain Parisien suburbs, the right in the Western Province of the Vendée (Abélès, 2006) – but of course Macron turned French party politics upside down by establishing a new populist party and sweeping to power in 2017. The broadly left vs right camps have fractured. It remains the case that, as Abélès (2006) explains, like most countries in France you have both formal hierarchies within parties (e.g., created by who has positions of authority) and informal hierarchies jostling for influence (e.g., by creating celebrity through the media). So, any anthropologist writing about parliaments will have political parties in a central place because our approach is profoundly empirical and aims to reveal what is important to our informants in their everyday

experience. You have to keep updating as the winners, losers and coalitions keep changing.

Despite this, strangely anthropological research specifically on political parties remains rare. What we have already indicates the value of theorising about them with reflexivity, multi-disciplinarity – a sense of how politics is entangled with history, geography, social relations and culture – and a recognition of plurality and difference with and between places. In popular discourse the prevailing assumption is that political parties are all about ideology but this is not the full story. Former Shadow Leader of the House of Commons, Labour MP Angela Eagle, claims that most members of her party probably only agree with about 40% of their manifesto commitments (Crewe, 2015) and that was before Jeremy Corbyn was elected leader by the broader membership despite being extremely unpopular among Labour MPs. Nonetheless shared values constitute some kind of glue within parties so arguments between members are often about their aspirations for change but also increasingly how they convey these and who should be their spokespeople.

So, the *communication* of ideology has become just as important to understanding how political parties work. Bignell's (2018) doctoral thesis about political communication in the Green Party of Aotearoa New Zealand weaves a theory based on anthropology and history, but also on communication studies. She takes account of that tiny party's unique position (and even the different individuals within it), and tells us how connected political worlds are changing more broadly. Conveying economic competence was a key message for the Greens; for them, reputation is vitally important to their struggle for influence. But like all political parties, Bignell relates that they are under the influence of the political communications scholar and activist George Lakoff, who argues that political spin works in metaphors, appeals to emotions and needs to follow the 1+3 rule – give your headline and follow it with 3 supporting statements. Her granular account reveals how compromises are made in messaging in both ways that are specific to this group but also can be generalised to others. Faucher-King's research on political party conferences in the UK also unveils shifts (in this case as a result of the digital revolution) that are global but affect different countries in a

variety of ways. Voters can watch conference speeches on TV or online so the performances have far greater significance for winning public support. As she puts it:

> the conference season actualises the political map, frames ideological debates and clarifies the positions of the competing teams. It legitimizes political organisations and the ways in which social and political conflicts are mediated, displaced or relocated in Westminster. (Faucher-King, 2005: 11-12)

Floret also points to how social media is affecting politicians' relationship with the public:

> Mass media forbid the segmentation of the public a priori (even if new media tend increasingly to do so in practice). In creates obligation to have a catch-all message with neutral content that makes sense to the majority of the audience without alienating any minority groups. In short, technology is not only the means of communication but also a communicative constraint. (Floret, 2010: 59)

Members of political parties can never escape from public exposure and scrutiny, sometimes hostile and abusive, and the continual need to win support for themselves and their own party or faction.

Why is anthropological work on political parties so rare? One reason is that it is extremely difficult to access across them because embedding yourself in one as a member makes it impossible to join another (at least simultaneously). Schumann (2009) has written a rare ethnography as an intern for a particular party – the Liberal Democrats in the Welsh Assembly in the UK – and provides a rich seam of insight as an insider. He often observed interaction unseen by outsiders. He writes about how he watched a Special Adviser text an MP in Westminster to ask a question and then observed the MP doing so moments later on the Parliamentary TV online. Socialising with other parties was encouraged, Schumann reports, because it helps with cross-party deal-making and getting useful information. Although you might be told about such processes by insiders, when witnessing them yourself it makes it easier to discern what are claims, what are realised in practice and when these coincide. Being an insider might present problems of bias, but it also allows a researcher to produce solid evidence for their conclusions.

In my ethnographies of the UK House of Lords and Commons I relied on doing detective-like work as an outsider (Crewe, 2005; 2015). In the Lords I did get permission to attend the weekly Crossbench peer meetings (the group of independent members who belong to no party) and was given a desk in one of their shared offices, providing plenty of opportunities for informal conversation and gossip. Understanding the loyalty engendered even among non-party peers helped me fathom the emotional impact of belonging to political parties. One of the puzzles I grappled with was why political party members in the Upper House nearly always follow the instructions of their party, most importantly by voting for or against motions, even though managers have so few threats or inducements at their disposal. This defies the kind of rational choice explanations that are popular among political scientists (e.g., Kam, 2014). Peers are appointed to Parliament for life, and often towards the end of their careers, so they are mostly not ambitious for promotion to government or opposition 'frontbench' posts. What does this party 'loyalty' consist of, then? I explain elsewhere that there are three likely possibilities: (a) being a peer is socially all-encompassing and inspires a contradictory sense of social importance but political humility; (b) the collective process of disciplining between peers is surprising effective; and (c) the anticipation of shame that is felt when you betray your colleagues curbs disobedience even when peers disagree with their party (Crewe, 2005).

In contrast, in the House of Commons members' experience of political parties is in part shaped by different imperatives: being elected every few years, ambition to get a government (or opposition spokesperson) position, taking positions as scrutineers (e.g., on select committees) and being answerable to constituencies. MPs' relationships with each other, and those outside Westminster, are a response to these pressures that are all squeezed through the filter of party membership (with extremely rare exceptions when an independent MP slips through the electoral net). In my latest book – *The Anthropology of parliaments: Entanglements of democratic politics* (Crewe, 2021) – I explain how politicians undertake these various workloads in separate but also overlapping and contradictory ways. To give just one example, when MPs are elected to sit on select committees they fill seats allocated by party but once there are expected to be guided by evidence rather

than party ideology. Like all of us, politicians shapeshift between roles, expectations and audiences not only sequentially but even in the same event. The shapeshifting between sides is not only created by party. Ahmed (2019) tells a story about Bangladesh where an MP publicly humiliates a teacher in a bid to please a group of anti-Hindu constituents from his own party. So, parties and their factions, or local associations, intersect with wider conflicts socially organised by religious, ethnic, class and gendered differences.

Getting access to politicians to observe and talk to them in a range of party settings was only possible once I had a track record for discretion. I relied on politicians to introduce me to other politicians, parliamentary staff or party workers. Politicians and parliamentary officials would vouch for my scrupulous adherence to research ethics, most importantly respect for confidentiality, but also for my claim that I had enough knowledge about what might embarrass a politician or a political party at any given moment to be discreet. Politicians trust those researchers who have a reputation for being reliably discreet but also for being politically and ethically savvy enough to know what that means in any given context.

## A theory of the work of political parties

The picture of entanglement and shapeshifting that emerges out of anthropological work on political parties creates such a complex web of inter-dependencies and dynamism that it is difficult to know where to prioritise and what to focus on when doing research. I will finally suggest a way of studying these patterns with a sense of proportion. What all politicians share in common is that their various areas of work are organised by three shared and divergent processes (Crewe, 2021):

*rhythms*[1] *of performance*: to do their political work, including within parties, UK MPs navigate time and space as individuals and groups in patterned ways,

[1] White (2014) has pointed out that when the more predictable rhythms of democratic politics come under strain, with an increase of discretionary and improvised decision-making meaning that stakeholders (e.g., in the opposition) are taken by surprise and have too little time to react, then political contestation becomes more difficult.

i.e., in rhythms. All MPs attend their parliamentary political party meetings during sitting sessions and their annual party conferences. In the UK they tend to split their week between working in parliament and visiting constituencies and in both places they have regular meetings with their political parties. When parliament is sitting, Prime Minister's Question Time is usually well-attended, an opportunity to generate some party political communitas as well as public support through the televised event. But individual MPs also create varying rhythms of work depending on their party, gender, connections, location of constituency and political interests – some visiting hospitals more often, while others engage with trade unions, as examples.

*riffs of meaning*: politicians produce and communicate knowledge and views through their political parties and networks but also as individuals. They develop riffs, or core messages with improvisable variations, about matters of political and cultural important to them, their constituents and/or their party. Politicians have to use their judgement continually when weighing up when and how to align with the view of their local vs national party, their former profession and/or groups of people in their constituency, and so on. Taken together with the rhythms, these riffs create some sense of continuity in their ideas but also connection to others.

*rituals and symbols*: interaction between politicians is often ritualised in either an everyday or exceptional sense. In everyday political work this involves the rituals of debate, to hold policy debates or make laws, while the more exceptional occasions entail ceremonial rituals of status to reaffirm hierarchies (including who is important within political parties). The more rigidly events are ritualised, and the more laden with symbolism, the more politically or culturally significant they probably are. The process of agreeing new legislation – usually a moral and cosmological contest between political parties – is far more rigidly ritualised than a political party meeting having a brainstorm about an area of policy.

All humans navigate entanglements and shapeshifting by creating rhythms, riffs and rituals, but politicians in political parties do this with the intensity dial turned up. This means that those who control the rhythms, riffs and

rituals can consolidate and increase their capacity to manipulate decision-making. The work within political parties entails struggles with friends and foes – creating alliances and undermining opponents – just like any organisation, but with an intensity and pace that is hugely magnified. Elected politicians are connected through their political parties and constituents to their whole nations and the digital revolution means that they can express their demands in a multitude of ways with an immediacy that is unprecedented. As politicians will increasingly have to deal with chronic emergencies – COVID-19, climate, displacement, violence, poverty and mental illness, to name just a few – the stakes are getting bigger and the dial is turned up even higher. Political parties are key organisations in politicians' capacity to respond to these challenges. They deserve far more attention from political anthropologists.

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## the author

Emma Crewe is a Research Professor at SOAS and a Research Supervisor at the University of Hertfordshire. An anthropologist by training, she has worked as an academic, policy adviser, CEO and trustee/chair in international NGOs and grant-makers. She is currently the Director of the Global Research Network on Parliaments and People, giving grants and support to scholars and artists in Myanmar and Ethiopia. Since 2019 she has been co-ordinating an ethnographic study of parliaments in Brazil, Ethiopia, Fiji, India, the UK and the US with five other scholars (funded by an European Research Council Advanced Grant).
Email: ec15@soas.ac.uk

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# Resources of history and hope: Studying left-wing political parties through loss

Owain Smolović Jones, Brigid Carroll and Paresha Sinha

## abstract

The paper offers loss as a framework for identifying resources of hope in insider studies of left-wing political parties. It interrogates and builds on insights from our paper on the resistance leadership of Corbynism in the UK (Sinha et al., 2021), in conversation with Walter Benjamin and Raymond Williams, proposing political parties as perhaps unique resources of hope in times of loss. Three threads of hope are offered. The first is a consideration of the ambivalence of factions and the potential for intra and cross-factional learning and leadership. The second is the notion of leaders and leadership within political parties as an ongoing and live area of contention and possibility. The third is an examination of political parties as resources of care and hope. The paper concludes by making the case that insider research of political parties can engage with the contingency of history through recovering and composing potent narratives that can act as guides for future research and practice.

## Introduction: Everything goes heavy…

Our insider study of resistance leadership from the left wing of the UK Labour Party was published online on 25 November 2019, two and a half weeks before the party was soundly defeated by a surging Conservative Party in the general election. Reams of seats previously regarded as bastions of the labour movement fell. As the exit poll was announced at the close of voting, a nation

of Labour activists and supporters gasped. As one (losing) parliamentary candidate, who saw the poll announced on television in a busy pub, surrounded by her volunteers and campaign team told us in an interview recently: 'The world fell through me. Everything went heavy'.

The paper we co-authored is based on interviews with a range of Labour left insiders – MPs, senior strategists, organisers, councillors, member representatives, trade unionists and ordinary activists. In it we try to make sense of how a group previously marginal, indeed almost extinct people – Labour Party socialists – transitioned to power through a series of practices we theorise as 'dramaturgical resistance leadership'. We thought we had made a useful contribution in better understanding moments of dramatic change through resistance but confess that for some weeks after the election defeat thought it was possible our paper would be notable for a single reason, being relevant for less than three weeks. A media consensus was taking root that Labour's defeat was not the result of a new divide in British society over Brexit; rather, it was due to the party being too left wing, its leader, Jeremy Corbyn viewed by voters as too radical, its hundreds of thousands of new members being too idealistic, demanding too much change, which resulted in an overly ambitious manifesto lacking credibility amongst conservative voters. Was it possible that our study, which tried to understand how a resisting mass movement formed and transitioned to power, was in reality a study of folly and hubris?

Having somewhat processed the loss, we argue not. We write this paper in our isolated academic spaces as the Covid-19 virus circulates outside, its destruction amplified by the very structures of neoliberal social and economic relations which, only a few months ago, were assumed as political common sense – untouchable and the only show in town. In the present moment, when so much seems in flux, when social democratic solutions to contemporary problems are suddenly relevant again, developing knowledge of how the left can re-mobilise, re-assemble and re-engage through political parties seems like essential work.

Yet before we do so we need to come to terms with loss – preferably sooner rather than later, and to do so in a political and sociological way that helps us

see the potential for hope. Addressing fellow left-wing activists growing accustomed to routine defeats, the Marxist theorist Raymond Williams stated that our challenge lay in 'making hope practical, rather than despair convincing' (Williams, 2016: 209). Dwelling in something akin to melancholy for too long (where 'too long' in chrono-time now compresses to hours and days rather than years), we accept Williams' call – in general – but also as the guiding principle of the remainder of the paper. Our task here is a modest one, to interrogate our study and some of its implications in the present, but to do so in the knowledge that others are doing likewise and that together we may build resources of hope that can inform the practice and research of movements and struggles in these perilous but pregnant times.

Perhaps paradoxically, Williams was writing from a position of loss, that of the anti-nuclear movement and it is loss that also offers us a potent frame through which to take stock of the implications of our 2019 *Human Relations* paper for the organisational study of political parties. In what follows we explain and justify the conceptual basis for a focus on loss. From here, we expand on three threads we think relevant for future study of political parties. Threads dangle from the dominant body of fabric; they also come loose and float between unexpected surfaces. They can be stubborn, resisting attempts at disposal, but they can also unravel large knots and stitches if one pulls too much. In the spirit of unravelling and loosening dominant narrative, we posit our first thread as the study of political parties at the intersection with social movements; our second thread is the relationship between leaders and leadership in political parties; our third and final thread is that of the organisational ethics of political parties, which we position as resources of loss, care and hope.

Before proceeding, however, we need to make clear our respective positions with regards to our chosen object of study, the UK Labour Party. Owain has been a member of the party for over 20 years, used to work for it professionally and during the 2019 election volunteered to manage the campaign in an important target seat. Brigid and Paresha live in New Zealand and consider themselves critical friends of social democratic and left wing parties and movements in general, who became fascinated by the dynamics of the Corbyn insurgency; although they wanted it to succeed they were less close to the

action and more able to gain some critical perspective through distance. Owain, on the other hand, was in the thick of the action, both in terms of the election and the party's socialist faction. We will return to the issues generated by this research dynamic, but first we need to make sense of loss.

## Salvaging hope through loss

We have spent quite some time since the defeat of December 2019 processing and reflecting on loss. Left-wing activists and supporters become accustomed to it, of course, although some blows fall harder than others. We therefore feel a sense of responsibility to our research participants, to academic colleagues and to ourselves to offer a framework for interpreting political loss and know that, in a time of unprecedented global economic, social and personal loss, that this is one lesson that the study of political parties could indeed offer the organisational world.

Mining the resources of hope available through historical materialism has helped us situate loss and to further clarify the task for those of us engaged in insider research within progressive parties. We are mindful of Eagleton's (2015) differentiation between hope and optimism, where optimism is a naïve and blind disregard to the miserable realities of tragedy and loss but hope is a commitment to persevering despite foreknowledge that radical change is unlikely but possible. At the heart of Eagleton's formula is faith in contingency and the unsettled nature of history: 'As long as there is contingency there is hope…There is hope as long as history lacks closure. If the past was different from the present, so may the future be' (Eagleton, 2015: Loc 3084). Because things need not have developed as they did in the past, we know that the terrain of present and future struggles can buck past outcomes of loss and oppression and we therefore need to revisit the past to discover traces of possibility for how things could have been otherwise.

Like Eagleton, we have been mining the work of Walter Benjamin, who penned his great theses on history (Benjamin, 2015) under the gravest circumstances of personal loss while on the run from the Nazis. Benjamin had every reason to concede to despair and yet managed to craft a methodology for

interrogating (and rescuing) history. Consider his Thesis IX, a fabulation of a Paul Klee painting of the Angelus Novus that he had acquired:

> A Klee painting named 'Angelus Novus' shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress. (Benjamin, 2015: Loc 4092-4098)

In this narrative Benjamin offers an account of history where the agent can be identified as the 'storm' of 'progress' rather than the angel itself. Progress in this articulation is the historicist accounts of the victors, who leave a trail of accumulating catastrophes in their wake. Stripped of agency ('staring eyes', 'mouth open'), the angel, a metaphorized figure for the historical materialist, seeks to 'awaken the dead', the losers and leftovers of progress, but to no avail, as he is blown further into the future, while the 'pile of debris before him grows skyward'. The fable speaks to the tragic (im)possibilities of the historical materialist task of reconceptualising and redirecting narrative, yet one that Benjamin finds essential, as to do otherwise would be to overlook the tradition of 'progress' within which we are stuck.

Resources of hope for Benjamin therefore lie in the past as much, if not more than, in the present. At the core of his method is an understanding of history and narrative as unsettled and unsettling, open to fresh understanding and rich in potential to charge the present time with revolutionary possibility (with revolution captured for Benjamin in the metaphorical figure of the Messiah) hewn from past events and people. For Benjamin:

> A historical materialist approaches a historical subject only where he [sic] encounters it as a monad. In this structure, he recognises the sign of a Messianic cessation of happening, or, put differently, a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past. He takes cognizance of it in order to blast a specific era out of the homogeneous course of history – blasting a specific life out of the era or a specific work out of the lifework. (Benjamin, 2015: Loc 4166)

Envisaging the present task as one of 'blasting' moments and people of the past out of their allocated role in the dominant narrative of history feels like a crucial task for left researchers with practical aspirations to cultivate resources of hope - because we should of course be attentive to deconstructing and revising dominant accounts of history but also because we have so many more losses to salvage than do the usually triumphant. Academic work (acknowledging Benjamin's distaste for more traditional academic discipline(s)) by this account is far from a neutral activity of identifying causes of victory or rationalising and systematising the dimensions of victors but rather a charged political and ethical task of recovery and retelling: 'To re-member, to com-memorate, is actively to reprise, revive, retake, recuperate' (Haraway, 2015: 25). Resisting the winds of 'progress' and searching through the wreckage of loss, we now interrogate our study in the hope that they may illuminate future study of political parties.

## Thread one: Divergent organisational logics meet

Our first thread concerns factions and diverse organisational logics. Factions fractionalise, disperse and dilute energies and resources: internecine warfare debilitates. In the aftermath of loss, prominent Labour politicians warned that factionalism within the party had to end and accused Corbyn and his associates of prioritising factional advantage over electoral gain (e.g. BBC News, 2020). One legitimate resource of hope would therefore be to study attempts to transcend factionalism, to analyse the ways in which groups within political parties consciously seek commonality, to cultivate 'agonistic respect' (Connolly, 2002) and approach such leadership as residing beyond individuals and instead within stewardship of an inclusive and participative democratic practice (Raelin, 2016).

Yet factions in a political party also concentrate and intensify affects, knowledge and learning; they can act as gateways through which new entrants to a political organisation find community and education; they can interact and generate energy, possibility and joy (Munro and Thanem, 2018) from diversity, a process of 'pluralization' (Connolly, 1995). It is therefore worth circling back to factions and the 'factions as factors of loss' explanation to

critically examine it and even to grasp traces of possibilities in the interleaving and inter-agonisms of factions.

In our study, we theorised the practice of organisational redrawing as 'the questioning and testing of taken-for-granted assumptions about organisational boundaries and power, and the consequent construction of a collective leadership that stretches beyond existing actors and spaces' (Sinha et al., 2021: 355). Corbyn's campaigns reached beyond the current party membership to draw in hundreds of thousands of new members, and of those we interviewed, most said they did not think of themselves previously as people who would ever join a political party and had held indifferent or hostile attitudes towards Labour in the past. Redrawing is therefore an imaginative and dramatic means of changing and challenging the power structures of an organisation rarely achieved in practice – and it occurs through factions but in a way that radically reshapes those very gateway factions in the process.

Within these factions, we can grasp resources of hope in the distinct communities of learning and development that are notable. Hence a proliferation of literature published by faction insiders seeking to educate new entrants on the various traditions at play (e.g. Hannah, 2018) and the genesis of online readings groups and lists during the Covid-19 crisis. Factions become hubs of what Gramsci (2005) calls organic intellectuals and intellectualism, knowledge gleaned through 'active participation in practical life, as constructor, organizer, "permanent persuader"' (*ibid*: 10). Intellectualism for Gramsci is an egalitarian and potentially universal characteristic (admittedly a claim undermined by pronoun use): 'All men [sic] are intellectuals, one could… say: but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals' (*ibid*: 9). Any activist, from ordinary member to party leader, can offer a kind of intellectual leadership, therefore. Yet we need to learn more, and more systematically, about knowledge creation and adaptation within party factions, how common struggle within communities generates intellectuals and situated knowledge that is passed between members and that circulates to create new norms of 'common sense' (another Gramscian term) that guide future interactions between factions.

We also need to learn more about cross-factional learning and the possibilities at the intersection of factions, a theme of our paper that could be developed further. When interacting, the Corbynite factions and their logics could be generative, coming close to the ideal of assembly posited by Hardt and Negri (2017) when they elucidate a decentralised grassroots providing strategy and the formal leadership tactics; or the democratic yet populist energy of Laclau's (2007) 'chain of equivalence', a counter-hegemony of diverse subjects, identifications and discourses articulating an alternative in antagonistic relation to the status quo, which cannot internalise and co-opt its demands. At its strongest, there was an ethos of learning that accompanied this intra-factional engagement. In Wark's (2015: 328) terms, it was 'tektological', 'communicat[ing] between labour processes poetically and qualitatively… a training of the metaphoric wiliness of language toward particular applications which correspond to and with advances in labour technique'. Factions can cross-pollinate and this process is an aesthetic and embodied one, as well as cognitive.

Yet at the time of writing, socialist activists are grappling with the possibility that the new party leadership, under Keir Starmer, is not only against factionalism but equates ending factionalism with marginalising the left. The left, of course, is not without fault. Under Corbyn's leadership hierarchies (re)asserted themselves through the opaque decisions of leadership and their pacts with union sponsors, while centralised control and a retreat to 'parliamentarism' (Miliband, 1972) became prominent strategic approaches of the party. We refer to this possibility in our study under the practice of a 'trifold focus'. Within this practice we point to the delicate balancing act in leadership of subduing dissent from the former status quo, resisting acts of disruption and sabotage from the same group but also building for the future through generative engagement. Indeed, more generally, empirical research regarding cross-factional, multi-structural connection within parties remains threadbare, even as it seems central in a world where the multitude subsist while older established institutions and bonds of sociality wither (Hardt and Negri, 2000).

## Thread two: Blasted leaders, blooming leadership?

Our second thread of history considers more explicitly the status of, and tensions between leaders and leadership in political parties; or alternatively articulated, the problematic of where the noun of leader ends and the verb of leadership begins, in both explaining loss and for envisaging a more hopeful present and future. This does not mean adopting an uncritical account of Corbyn or his movement but comes from a standpoint of critical leadership studies, from which we adopt an attitude of scepticism to any explanation that apportions undue credit or blame to individual leaders.

Our research participants conceptualised Corbyn in 'anti-charismatic' ways, a present non-presence who helped a movement to channel its energies and disparate demands. He was also spoken of as a symbol of steadfastness and integrity, rather than as a charismatic inspiring the masses with rhetorical flourish. Almost every person we interviewed emphasised that it was not Corbyn 'as such' who inspired their commitment to the party; rather, it was more the ideas and ideals articulated through and beyond him as a symbol. In our study we refer to such work not as an investigation of leader qualities, as such an approach would be too ahistorical and depoliticised to be of much practical use. Instead, we prefer the term 'leadering', a refashioning of the noun 'leader' to a verb indicating the symbolic and affective work accomplished through the figure of a leader, which, in a contemporary left setting seems less about a cult of personality and more concerned with the ideas and values expressed through the symbol of a leader. The leader becomes one channel amongst several for a multitude of forces, desires, movements and values.

Relatedly and finally, we also need to critically interrogate the past to glean lessons concerning gender, leadership and loss. Gender was not a topic covered in our study and there are three reasons for this. First, there were uncommonly large numbers of women present in the senior echelons of Corbyn's team and indeed in leadership roles throughout the party. Second, events and meetings held by pro-Corbyn groups were strongly informed by feminism and norms of gender-equal participation. Third, the figure of Corbyn himself defied the masculine, instead embodying many characteristics

more commonly associated with 'feminine' stereotypes (inclusivity, modesty, care, etc.). Yet the party, like society, has a history of institutional sexism and hot public disputes surrounding its initiatives to implement gender equality initiatives (for an overview of these, see Smolović Jones et al., 2020a; 2020b). Labour remained a party dominated by male MPs until it introduced the first gender quota system of any UK organisation in the 1990s, under the leadership of Tony Blair. The resignation of Corbyn and the election of another male as his replacement, has reignited the question of why and how notionally left-wing, socially liberal parties continue to have a problem with electing women as their leaders.

To cultivate resources of hope from loss, there is need for inquiries that engage women in leftist parties about their experiences of candidacy, the particular pressures they feel and the attitude of party members and the public to their authority. Such research may gain further urgency in the wake of another leadership election loss.

## Thread three: Resources of care and hope

When business organisations experience a catastrophe they often go under. Political parties can also go 'bust' or wither into insignificance, a fate that has befallen Labour in Scotland and the Liberal Democrats UK-wide, but such stories are exceptions. Political parties also experience loss in hyper-visible, public and even ceremonial ways (Roberts, 2017) – e.g. losing candidates forced to hear election results on a platform alongside their opponents while the country watches on from television screens. Yet most parties bear loss, live it, walk with it and ultimately move through it. We therefore need to better understand political parties as organisms that absorb and work through loss in incredibly resilient ways. Political parties may seem unfashionable within a liquid culture (Bauman, 2013) that values loose affiliation and dynamic, multitudinous assembly (Hardt and Negri, 2017), but they persist and, when strong, provide a channel for the energies, affects and everyday ethical practices of activists (Dean, 2018). In this final thread we focus on the mundane and embodied ethical practices of parties as resources of hope that can be salvaged from loss and develop these with some concluding

methodological reflections on the challenges of researching these from the inside, through experiences of loss.

In our original paper, we described some of the bonds of sociality, generosity and solidarity that coursed through Corbyn's campaigns. Even post-election an ethos of care is discernible across spheres of the Labour Party, at a level invisible to media commentators but networked amongst the grassroots (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). Chains of digital responsibility formed through a proliferation of WhatsApp groups and social media contacts (Barad, 2007), which transited in a liquid fashion from the instrumental to the caring, from telephones to more intimate in-person care. The ability to rapidly communicate with one another meant that activists could learn more about one another's lives and struggles, which translated into the enactment of care sitting at the intersection of the political and personal. Owain's ethnographic journal of the election reveals a growing net of responsibilities and care (Barad, 2007; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017), of supporting one another through mundane family dramas, as well as more pressing issues of advising and supporting comrades in precarious conditions.

Following defeat, and outside social media and the commentariat, there was very little evidence of triumphalism from factions that opposed or were sceptical of Corbynism. Instead there were words and embraces of consolidation: 'Don't be down too long. Keep the energy and ideas going because we need them', an older and more right-leaning activist told Owain the week after the loss, demonstrating an attitude of care and respect towards seemingly opposing party factions. Activists sought one another's company and factions seemed less relevant than sharing the experience of loss. We do not wish to romanticise (Collinson et al., 2018) care, however. Care can torment and perpetuate loss (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). Owain's journal recounts spoiled special occasions and intimate family time, sleep deprivation due to late night WhatsApp conversations.

Methodologically, insider research of political parties presents opportunities but also problems we need to take seriously. How can one understand the losses of political parties without experiencing them from within, in all their bone-shaking, debilitating and world wearying horror? Dispassionate and

distanced analyses of parties versus immersive accounts seems like an unnecessary binary choice. Parties can and should be researched from within with full regard the experience of potent affect (Clarke et al., 2014); there is a power to experiencing first-hand the charge of ethical responsibility and care as it flows through bodies and across organisations (Pullen and Rhodes, 2014).

Just as parties become perhaps unique repositories of tragedy and loss, so insider research offers one means of documenting and honouring loss as much, if not more than, making sense of victory. We have yet to explore and develop this mode of insider research into the Labour Party to the extent that it deserves, as nerves and feelings remain too raw, yet when we and others do we think that it will offer a depth and visceral sense of interconnected presence within parties that is impossible to glean from the safer distance of the office or television studio. Owain felt firsthand the highs of securing radical policies, and the joy and love that comes from sharing and building a movement with comrades (Munro and Thanem, 2018). Yet he also gained a proximate view of the tiredness and anger that came in amplifying waves over time, taking their toll on the body and mind, as enthusiastic young volunteers were maligned by the media and other party members, seemingly endless voters barked racist views on their doorsteps and the fragile unity of intra-party solidarity broke down in endless cycles of recrimination.

Such proximate experiences can be captured through recourse to our pictures, memories and conversations with others as much as from more formal interviews, loosely structured or not. This research must be simultaneously political and aesthetic, drawing lines of connection between the beautiful experiences, mementos, technologies and spaces of political party activity and the charged political and ethical moments of party work. Such multimodal forms of insider research promise to unveil the everyday and mundane contours of political parties which yet provide the resources of hope from which movements are born. There is clearly an academic activist (Contu, 2019) dimension at play in the work of insider political party research, therefore. We are never neutral observers but pursue research in order to, in the tradition of critical theory, make change in the world. Our lesson from Benjamin, and indeed a rich history of critical engagement with narrative from feminism (e.g. Pullen, 2018), is that such research should not focus on

objectivity but on recounting and composing the alternative, subdued, hidden and hopeful. Insight can come simultaneously of course from proximity *and* distance, and the balance we have tried to strike has been allowing the former space to breathe while using the latter as a device to help us see emergent patterns, to conceptualise out from a basis of raw experience, as well as to check some of the taken-for-granted assumptions of right and wrong made by the researcher closest to the action.

Of course this kind of insider research does present some practical ethical issues. While those closest to the researcher in the field should be informed that everyday experiences will be written up in an ethnographic journal, duly anonymised, it is impossible and undesirable for an insider researcher with activist ambitions to inform each and every person who enters the orbit of the fieldwork that experiences may one day appear in the pages of an academic publication. To do so would sabotage the campaign, eat up precious time and resources, and, just as importantly, potentially mislead volunteers into thinking that their every utterance and movement is being recorded. Rather, reporting on events involving the peripheral appearances of volunteers requires ethical judgment. Anonymity in writing up is of course a prerequisite, with identifying features disguised as far as possible, a task made easier in the UK Labour Party of the years 2015-2020, as the pool of memberhip exceeded 500,000 people nationwide. Judgment also involves reflecting on the nature of the action observed: people need to be able to speak freely - and clumsily - within democratic spaces without fear, as it is this form of expression that generates intrinsic pleasure and collective learning. A large dose of good faith is required from the insider to respect the protected spaces of free expression and when such instances are conveyed in research to take extra steps to maintain anonymity – through merging events, disguising geography and identity, if necessary.

This does not mean that unpleasant events or acts should be redacted. Indeed, the research of Owain and colleagues on Labour's ongoing gender problems (Smolović Jones et al., 2020a; 2020b) did report on instances of sexism and misogyny in the wider party, but the value of writing up such events for research lies in seeing and making sense of their presence rather than identifying the perpetrators. Of course being an insider researcher also means

accepting the normal responsibilities of being a good organisational citizen, utilising internal systems for reporting hateful or harmful conduct when necessary, and where such systems fail, blowing the whistle. While such measures will be disruptive of the research process, they are ethically vital.

## Conclusion: Hope through loss

This paper has sought to recognise and work through the experience of loss to illuminate some resources of hope for future insider study of political parties. These organisations are to a great extent unique in their ability to process loss, adapt and continue. We have argued in this paper that such a capacity stems from their potential to glean energy from factional difference, to reconceptualise the meaning of leadership and to forge sustainable and ethical ties. We have also started the work of critically interrogating the ways in which parties can seemingly perpetuate losses, particularly when our notions of loss are extended beyond the instrumental realms of losing elections. Our primary focus, however, has been on seeking resources of hope in dark times, of dwelling in these moments to offer insider learning. Now more than ever it seems vital to recover and honour resources of hope that circulated in the multitude (not the few), in the old times, the distant and receding memories of a 'Brexit' election already backgrounded by the grim realities of a pandemic.

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## the authors

Owain Smolović Jones is director of the Research into Employment, Empowerment and Futures academic centre of excellence at the Open University, where he is also a senior lecturer. He is a critical leadership studies academic whose research focuses on the dynamics of power and resistance in leadership. Owain is particularly interested in better understanding alternative modes and practices of leadership from grassroots organisations, groups and factions. He is currently working with precarious workers who have taken industrial action to explore the gendered and insurgent practices of their leadership and with housing activists to explore leadership in relation to urban space and agency.
Email: owain.smolovic-jones@open.ac.uk

Brigid Carroll holds the Fletcher Building Employee Educational Fund Chair in Leadership at the University of Auckland. Her research is in the areas of leadership as practice, collective and distributed leadership, theory and practice of leadership development and the relationship between leadership, development, identity, power and resistance.
Email: b.carroll@auckland.ac.nz

Paresha Sinha is a senior lecturer in the School of Management and Marketing at the Waikato Management School, University of Waikato. Her research interests cover the broad topic of organizational leadership with a focus on CEO image and rhetoric, follower resistance and identification, as well as the study of strategic decision making, management of legitimacy and stakeholder relations in pluralistic settings.
Email: psinha@waikato.ac.nz

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# How can political parties integrate today?

Fabio Wolkenstein

## abstract

One of the most important functions that political parties were traditionally said to perform is the integration of hitherto disenfranchised citizens into the political process. The 'people's parties' of the post-war era even succeeded in making quite heterogenous groups feel like they were part of a common endeavour. This research note explores how and why the integrative capacity of parties has changed from the age of mass parties until today, and discusses the distinctive challenges facing contemporary parties that wish to appeal to wide and diverse constituencies. The note closes by reflecting on how partisan integration could be studied empirically.

## Introduction

The integration of multiple, sometimes quite heterogenous, groups of citizens into the political process used to be one of the primary functions ascribed to political parties. In Europe, the parties that have historically achieved this feat were the 'mass parties of integration' that emerged in the early and mid-20th century, in tandem with the advance of mass democracy, as well as the 'people's parties' of the post-war era. Today, it is widely doubted that parties can still perform such a broadly integrative role. The decline of traditional class- and religious milieus, growing political polarisation and economic inequality, and an increasing tendency among citizens to prefer more individualised forms of participation – these are just some of the reasons why

contemporary parties struggle to make citizens of different backgrounds feel like they are part of a common endeavour.

The purpose of this research note is to examine parties' changing capacity to integrate citizens into the political process. Deliberately painting with a broad brush, I trace the main transformations from the age of mass parties until today, and discuss the new challenges facing parties that seek to appeal to wide and diverse constituencies – perhaps most of all social democratic parties. In closing, I make some suggestions as to how the contemporary integrative potential of parties could be studied as part of an alternative, more sociological research agenda on political parties.

## Integration in the age of mass parties

Marxist thinkers were among the first to systematically theorise the integrative function of political parties. Antonio Gramsci (1971: 5-23, 30-31, 123, 168, 340) in particular argued that politically significant social blocs are constituted by parties, and not vice versa. Accordingly, parties can 'dis- and rearticulate social groups partly by producing organic intellectuals who foster class alliances and cultivate the "good sense" of the masses' (Mudge and Chen, 2014: 309). A few decades later, this theme resurfaced (in a less normatively-loaded language) in mainstream political science. Reflecting on the rise of the large labour and religious parties in the first half of the twentieth century, influential figures such as Maurice Duverger (1954), Otto Kirchheimer (1967) or Sigmund Neumann (1990) spoke of the emergence a new party type, the 'mass party of integration' or just 'party of integration'. What makes this party form distinctive, wrote Neumann (1990: 47), is that it 'demands not only permanent dues-paying membership … but, above all, an increasing influence over all spheres of the individual's daily life'.

What Neumann meant was that the parties' organisation reached, as it were, from the cradle to the grave. In the case of the continental European socialist parties, for example, it extended 'from the workers' infant-care association to the atheists' cremation society' (Neumann, 1990). Thus, the primary way in which the parties of integration made their constituents regard themselves as implicated in a common endeavour was by establishing and maintaining a

wide-ranging network of party-related associations that foster and reinforce a sense of identity and community. These so-called *milieu organisations* were typically ‘more prominent than the local party branches’ (Scarrow, 2014: 162) and allowed the party’s followership to pursue many or indeed most of their everyday activities under the aegis of the party. In a sense, the party of integration really offered something for everyone: one could join one of the party’s football or gymnastics clubs, it’s women’s or youth organisation, and so on.

Of course, not all parties of integration needed to build a large network of milieu organisations from scratch. The early Catholic parties of integration, such as the German *Zentrumspartei* and later the CDU, could rely on the identity-building and mobilising capacities of pre-existing Church communities and religious associations like Catholic journeymen’s unions, fraternities, etc. (Bösch, 2002: 192) As one authoritative account of the Italian *Democrazia Cristiana* in the early post-war years stresses, ‘the party organisation remained weak, and the [*Democrazia Cristiana*] continued its heavy dependence on the “indirect party”, i.e. the Catholic organisations, to mobilise the vote during election campaigns’ (Leonardi and Wertmann, 1989: 126). In fact, when it came to shaping and sustaining a common sense of belonging among their constituents, and getting the latter to cast a vote for the party, these organisations proved just as effective as – if not more effective than – those specially established by the socialist parties.

The large Socialist and Catholic parties are the most prominent examples of parties of integration, but they were of course not the only parties that integrated different groups of citizens into the political process. For instance, agrarian parties – the most notorious being perhaps the American People’s Party of the 1890s (Kazin, 1995) – provided a way for the lower classes in rural areas to act together and make their voices felt. At any rate, what is important to note is that most parties, however great their integrative capacity, did not include those whom they integrated in intra-party decision making. As Neumann (1990: 47) observed about the parties of integration, while they take on ‘an ever increasing area of commitments and responsibilities assuring the individual’s share in society and incorporating him into the community,’ it is

'only a small active core' that decides on the party's policies and more general direction (the classic study is Michels, 1989).

In addition to drawing on the support of milieu organisations, the parties of integration successfully availed themselves of at least three other integration strategies. The first and perhaps most common one was *conjuring up shared enemies*, that is, producing a collective 'we' by eliciting hostile reactions vis-à-vis an external other. This strategy was highly effective as a way of integrating diverse constituencies, especially because appealing to shared enemies rang plausible to many in an age where both the traditional class cleavage and the ideological struggle between East and West still were politically salient. For example, many commentators agree that the early CDU managed to unify the traditionally divided German Catholics and Protestants primarily because it continuously conjured up the common enemy of communism, stressing 'the difference between Marxist "materialism" and Christian principles, and the need for all Christians to recognize their common interest in opposing communism' (Granieri, 2004: 55).

Secondly, the parties of integration could make people feel like they are part of a greater collective endeavour by organising and orchestrating *ritualistic practices*, or profiting from the identity-building force of ritualistic practices performed in the wider milieu of the party. Think, paradigmatically, of the annual Labour Day celebrations; many socialist and social democratic parties saw (and still see) it as their responsibility to arrange these festivities, bringing together all their members and supporters in a joint affirmation of a shared political identity. Many of the Catholic parties of integration profited from identity-reinforcing practices enacted in local communities, ranging from the celebration of official Catholic holidays to particular rural festivities (Walter, 2009: 30). There was accordingly little need for those parties to 'invent' their own holidays or directly mobilise their own resources.

A third integration strategy to unify disparate segments of voters may be called *being everything to everyone*. This strategy tends to be associated with the 1960s and 70s 'catch-all party,' which is said to lack a distinct ideology and clearly identifiable constituency (Kirchheimer, 1967); but it is difficult to deny that many prominent parties of integration also integrated people in this

way. The strategy mainly involves pandering to a range of different demands in order to attract different groups of voters; it is about gratifying as many people as possible. A French newspaper critically noted in 1946 that the German CDU is 'socialist and radical in Berlin, clerical and conservative in Cologne, capitalist and reactionary in Hamburg, and counterrevolutionary and particularistic in Munich' (cited in Granieri, 2004: 14). But this proved to satisfy very diverse constituencies, instilling in them a sense that the party really took their concerns seriously.

## Integration in the age of 'cognitive mobilisation'

Obviously, a lot has changed since the mid-twentieth century, when the parties of integration and 'people's parties' had their heyday. The story of the fragmentation of parties' social bases and the individualisation of mass publics has been told almost too often to bear further repetition. But it is still worth underlining that these twin tendencies are widely seen as amounting to a loss for democracy, precisely because they undermine parties' capacity to integrate (e.g. Mair, 2013; Streeck, 2014). The thought is that milieu organisations, ritualistic practices and all sorts of group-based appeals lose their integrative force when citizens do not perceive themselves as belonging to a particular social group and sharing a particular way of life or core values with others.

Yet, any uniformly pessimistic interpretation of the decay of social segmentation and the increasing tendency of individualisation overlooks two things. First, it might well be that those who relate to politics in a more individualistic fashion and view their political allegiance in terms of a choice among alternative options could still be integrated using integration strategies that appeal to their individualised self-understanding and new participatory demands. Second, even if traditional milieus and political loyalties have largely disappeared, there are still large cohorts of voters who strongly identify with particular collectives, and who are also responsive to some of the aforementioned 'classic' integration strategies. While it is true that the social base of many parties 'may no longer be amenable to the kind

of collective action that parties traditionally inspired' (Streeck, 2014: 127), new forms of social identity-based collective action can be traced.

The first thing to note in relation to possible new strategies of integration is that the gradual decline of parties' social bases and the individualisation of mass publics have often been shown to correlate with a development that many sociologists and political scientists have described in terms of 'cognitive mobilisation'. One influential scholar describes 'cognitive mobilisation' as involving the following developments:

> First, the public's ability to process political information has increased, as a function of higher levels of education and political sophistication among the electorate. Second, the cost of acquiring political information has decreased, such as through the expansion of the mass media and other information sources. Cognitive mobilization thus means that more citizens now possess the political resources and skills that better prepare them to deal with the complexities of politics and reach their own political decisions without reliance of affective, habitual party cues or other external cues. (Dalton, 2007: 276)

Typically, this is described as a general trend that unfolded over the second half of the twentieth century – and one that maps unequally onto citizenries. In particular, younger and more educated people tend to be more 'cognitively mobilised' in the just-described sense than older and less educated ones (Henn et al., 2018; Inglehart and Welzel, 2005; Li and Marsh, 2008; Milburn, 2019). Amongst those cognitively mobilised citizens who have an interest in political participation, moreover, many tend to demand 'more individualised and direct forms of political participation' that allow for greater self-actualisation (Gauja, 2015: 89). As Henn et al. (2018: 713) note, they exhibit a 'tendency towards support for, and participation in, new styles of non-institutionalized political action that better fit their individualized life-styles and permit the actualization of their political aspirations'.

Some parties respond to these new participatory demands and capabilities by supplementing integration strategies that are aimed at the affective construction or affirmation of collective identities with strategies that give citizens room for voicing and shaping their views and connecting these views to collective decisions (Gauja, 2015; Invernizzi-Accetti and Wolkenstein, 2017; Wolkenstein, 2019). This typically involves diffusing power beyond the

'small active core' (Neumann, 1990: 47) of decision makers that tended to rule parties since the age of the party of integration, and doing so in ways that 'cognitively mobilised' citizens consider meaningful (Invernizzi-Accetti and Wolkenstein, 2017: 106).

For example, some parties make space for, and empower, 'movements' within parties that are driven by citizens who are committed to the party's broader values and aims but want to transform the party in a bottom-up fashion. An instructive example is the *Momentum* movement within the British Labour party. This has contributed significantly to the re-politicisation and mobilisation of (especially young) people by establishing new, local fora of political discussion and debate that proved more dynamic and inclusive than traditional party branches. Animated by the notion that 'politics as a spectator sport has lost traction with voters' (Oltermann, 2018), *Momentum* also coordinated activities like phone canvassing, local campaigning, and even educational events where expert speakers could discuss current political affairs with lay audiences. All of this proved attractive for those favouring more or less non-institutionalised and highly self-actualising forms of political participation (Muldoon and Rye, 2020). It allowed them to take ownership of the party as a shared political project through directly engaging in discussion and debate.

As political theorists have recently suggested, parties seeking to integrate 'cognitively mobilised' citizens could also more systematically institutionalise non-conventional participatory channels that allow their members (and maybe also unaffiliated supporters) to voice their views and discuss them with others, either with the 'positive' aim of developing shared political agendas or the 'negative' aim of criticising those in power and holding them to account (for more discussion and examples, see Wolkenstein, 2016; Invernizzi-Accetti and Wolkenstein, 2017; Wolkenstein, 2019). Similar to the empowerment of intra-party movements, this might go some way in reconnecting certain citizen cohorts – notably young people without traditional party identities – to democratic political processes. A happy side-effect of this might be that even some of those who do not wish to participate themselves will evaluate parties more favourably. After all, evidence suggests that many citizens, especially politically disaffected ones, tend to think that

open and democratic procedures of internal-decision making within parties are normatively desirable and evaluate internally democratic parties more positively than ones that are organised in a top-down fashion (Close et al., 2017).

Turning now to the second issue that I noted earlier, those who argue that social bonds and related political commitments are today exclusively 'a matter of taste and choice rather than of obligation' (Streeck, 2014: 126) also often overlook that there are still large numbers of citizens whose political self-understanding is tied to strong feelings of group loyalty. Indeed, despite the disappearance of traditional partisan milieus and identities, and despite the just-discussed trends of cognitive mobilisation, these group-based modes of political engagement remain pervasive in established democracies (compare the influential accounts by Achen and Bartels, 2016; Cramer, 2016; Gest, 2016; for an in-depth study of group loyalty among party members, see Wolkenstein, 2019). Cognitive mobilisation is very real, but it has far from crowded out identity-based and affective mobilisation.

Besides accounting for the voting behaviour of some of the older, still-loyal voters of long-standing class or religious parties, identity-based and affective mobilisation explains in large part the much-discussed rise of so-called 'populist' parties and leaders. Those parties and leaders tend to 'emphasize a cultural cleavage, the national, ethnic, religious, or cultural identity of the "people" against outside groups who allegedly pose a threat to the popular will' (Rodrik, 2017: 22). And here, they typically use the traditional integration strategy of *conjuring up shared enemies* that we have encountered earlier. As Rodrik observes,

> [i]n the US, Donald Trump has demonized at various times the Mexicans, Chinese, and Muslims. In Europe, right-wing populists portray Muslim immigrants, minority groups (gypsies or Jews), and the faceless bureaucrats of Brussels as the "other". (Rodrik, 2017: 22)

Just as with the shared enemies that politicians of the post-war era sought to construct, these 'threats' or 'enemies of the people' are evoked to produce divisive emotions that unify and mobilise specific constituencies (Richardson, 2019).

## Can today's parties integrate everyone?

All of this raises a difficult question: Could contemporary parties *combine* different strategies of integration, such that they make both those who are responsive to identity-based and affective appeals and the 'cognitively mobilised' feel like they are part of a shared endeavour? To be sure, not all parties might want to achieve such broad integration in the first place. For example, some minor parties in proportional representation electoral systems may limit their integration efforts to a small and homogenous constituency. But most parties will aim for more and try to reach out to a wider group of citizens. This is true not only for large 'mainstream' parties that have a history of representing diverse voter groups; research suggests that even niche parties that limit their platforms to very few or just a single issue often seek to appeal to heterogenous groups of voters that 'cross-cut traditional partisan alignments' (Meguid, 2005: 348).

Now, one obstacle for integrating very diverse voter groups arises from the fact that the different groups may not only relate in different ways to party politics, but also hold more or less irreconcilable views on salient political issues. This has been a major challenge for social democratic parties in particular, who often are incapable of reconciling the starkly diverging demands of younger, well-educated, highly skilled and mostly urban voters, on the one hand, and older voters with lower educational attainment and more specific skills, on the other hand (the standard account is Kriesi et al., 2008). What tends to divide the two groups are usually conflicting value-based commitments on such prominent issues as immigration, though one should be cautious with treating these as unconnected to economic grievances (Manow, 2018; Rodrik, 2017).

The example of the United Kingdom is instructive. Research suggests that value shifts that 'shape the outlook of voters on a range of social and cultural issues, particularly on issues such as race and immigration, national identity, gender, rights for same-sex couples, Europe and ethnic diversity' have created a divide between younger, more educated, urban voters – the group that is more likely to be 'cognitively mobilised' – and older, less educated and rural voters – the group that is more likely to be mobilised via appeals to collective

identity (Ford and Goodwin, 2014: 278-279). Put baldly, what divides the two groups is that the former group regards the views of the latter group as 'parochial and intolerant,' while the latter group resents the former for its socially liberal views and supposed self-righteousness (Ford and Goodwin, 2014: 278-279).

Under such circumstances, implementing an integration strategy that empowers politically engaged members of the first group of citizens, and gives them power over the party's political direction, is bound to further alienate the second group. For this would mean that the concerns of the second group remain unheard, while reinforcing that group's sense of having no influence on the party anymore. This is exactly what happened in the British Labour Party when the political influence of the already-mentioned intra-party movement *Momentum* increased after the election of Jeremy Corbyn as party leader. As noted, *Momentum* mainly attracted younger and more educated citizens with socially liberal views; and the fact that the movement shaped the party line and Corbyn's own views led older, more socially conservative Labour voters in rural areas to abandon the party. Reporting on Labour's collapse in its former north-east heartlands in the 2019 UK general election, one journalist noted:

> Talking to regulars the same allegations surface again and again. That Corbyn consorted with the IRA, that he is soft on terrorists. That he has remained silent on prosecuting veterans over the Bloody Sunday killings. The leader's shifting agnosticism on Brexit [which was importantly influenced by the younger and more active party members], in this context, is portrayed as yet another failure of patriotism, just as symbolic as his unforgivable reluctance to sing God save the Queen at a Battle of Britain remembrance service. (Adams, 2019: np)

Given how much the two groups' value commitments differ, it is difficult to see how Labour (or any other party that seeks to attract constituencies that are divided in this way) could successfully combine different integration strategies. There are for one thing no plausible candidates for *shared enemies* that could successfully be conjured up: while the younger, educated and urban voters might be inclined to assign to 'big money' and the (Conservative) politicians who act as its agents the role of a shared enemy, they would recoil at the thought of portraying immigrants or perhaps the EU in these terms –

even if the less educated, older and rural voters that they tend to recognise as relevant constituents regard immigrants or 'the faceless Brussels bureaucrats' as major threat. For this reason, the party could also not try to *be everything to everyone*. It could only pander to the fears of the latter group of voters at the cost of limiting the influence of the former group.

That different, and divided, constituencies could be integrated by way of common *ritualistic practices* seems equally unlikely. First, even if older, formerly loyal constituents might still see the value of such practices and the collective identities they are meant to uphold, the younger constituents who have not been socialised to view themselves as part of a larger social group might see little value in traditions that seem like a relic from a time long past. The latter might develop new ritualistic practices that serve a similar purpose, or 're-purpose' other collective practices in their milieu, such that they serve identity-formation (think of how in 2017 thousands of young festival-goers were chanting 'Oh, Jeremy Corbyn!' at Glastonbury festival) – but this might in turn exclude those who are not part of the same cultural milieu.

Second, research suggests that the different constituencies we are talking about are typically geographically divided, since younger, more educated and socially liberal people are more likely to live in cities while older, less educated and socially conservative people are more likely to live in the countryside (e.g. Maxwell, 2019). It seems plausible to assume that this geographical divide makes it harder to develop common ritualistic practices and traditions that parties could exploit in order to make very different kinds of people feel like they are part of a larger collective endeavour. There is not just little that connects the groups in question in terms of political commitments, they also tend to be spatially disconnected from one another.

## Towards a renewed study of integration

As I have already noted, social democratic parties are probably most heavily affected by the trends I have discussed. The deep ideological gulf that often runs between their erstwhile constituencies and their new supporters makes it especially difficult for them to successfully employ multiple strategies of integration and integrate very diverse constituencies. But there is no reason

to think that other parties remain unaffected. Conservative parties might on average find it easier to integrate diverse constituencies, not least because they have always drawn on the support of multiple groups of citizens and refrained from presenting themselves as the political arm of a particular class or other social group; however, to the degree that they are also losing voters to the various 'anti-establishment' parties that so effectively attract former social democratic loyalists, they will no doubt be confronted with the same challenges as their social democratic rivals.

It might be tempting to view these quite fundamental challenges purely as a matter of parties' policy priorities, assuming that broad integration can be achieved by promoting those policies that appeal to the broadest group of voters (a recent book-length statement of this quite common view is Rosenbluth and Shapiro, 2018). But to reduce integration to a matter of individual policy preferences is to discount the affective and sociological bases of some forms of partisan mobilisation (Achen and Bartels, 2016; Richardson, 2019; Streeck, 2014: 127), as well as the fact that growing numbers of 'cognitively mobilised' citizens demand an altogether different way of organising politics (Henn et al., 2018; Milburn, 2019). Thinking of integration in such a reductive way might well be in conformity with the 'relatively asociological paradigm' (Mudge and Chen, 2014: 311) that dominates political science, but it overlooks important complexities that parties must navigate to achieve integration.

Most likely because of the 'asociological' way in which most research on parties is conducted, we currently know relatively little about these complexities. True, we know something about rural and working-class milieus who have increasingly come to resent 'liberal elites' and vote for anti-establishment parties and candidates. Pioneering this line of research were scholars like Eribon (2010), Cramer (2016), Gest (2016) and Hochschild (2016), all of whom have shown that place-based (e.g. rural) and class identities that tend to be only loosely connected to policy preferences profoundly influence how people understand politics and, by extension, relate to broader partisan political projects. We still know little, however, about emerging social milieus that give rise to new partisan identities, and their link to and interaction with those more traditional rural or class-based milieus.

To better understand the difficulties that contemporary political parties face in making different and heterogenous groups of citizens feel part of a shared political endeavour, more extensive research on different 'socio-moral milieus' (Lepsius, 1966) and their inter-linkages is needed. Of utmost relevance seems to be the question of where and how different milieus overlap (if they do). For instance, where do the 'cognitively mobilised' younger and urban voters with socially liberal views meet and engage with older, rural and socially conservative voters who resent all things urban and liberal? What practices and social spaces, if any, do they share? To give a satisfying answer to the broader question of how political parties can integrate today, we will have to answer those questions first.

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## the author

Fabio Wolkenstein is Associate Professor of Political Science at Aarhus University, Denmark, and Adjunct Researcher in Political Theory at the University of Amsterdam. Originally trained in political sociology, he works on the political theory of parties and political representation, as well as on the history and theory of political ideologies. Major recent themes of interest include strategies for party reform, the political and constitutional theory of the European Union, and the history of Christian Democracy and political Catholicism. He is the author of *Rethinking party reform* (Oxford University Press, 2019).
Email: wolkenstein@ps.au.dk

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# Building a pan-European movement party: DiEM25 at the 2019 European elections

Jasper Finkeldey

## abstract

In this research note, I analyse the case of DiEM25, a pan-European movement that decided to contest for the 2019 European elections and ran in seven different countries with the same programme. Focussing on Germany, I discuss how the different logics of spontaneity in social movements and party politics both enabled and constrained the electoral campaign. Building on official documentation as well as my own experience as part of the campaign, I suggest that organizational complexity, lack of resources and reluctance to embrace electoral politics on the part of movement-oriented members finally contributed to the failure to secure seats in European parliament. The paper also contextualizes both the political junctures of DiEM25's emergence and the political opportunity structures in Germany at the time of the campaign arguing that the political space was quite narrow in light of political contenders and public opinion in Germany in relation to the European Union.

## Introduction

The Democracy in Europe Movement 2025 (DiEM25) was founded by Yanis Varoufakis and other 'luminaries of the European Left' (de Cleen et al., 2019) such as Slavoj Žižek and British Green MP Caroline Lucas in February 2016 in Berlin at Volksbühne theatre ('theatre of the people'). One of the main claims was that unless the European Union chooses the path of more democracy and allows for more people power, it will disintegrate. Prominent EU-scholars

such as Claus Offe (2015) argue that the European Union institutions suffer from democratic deficits and are unfit in solving the current interlinking crises of ecological disaster, financial turmoil, and more. Similarly, but somewhat radicalized, DiEM25' manifesto analyses the current political juncture in the following terms:

> Now, today, Europeans are feeling let down by EU institutions everywhere. From Helsinki to Lisbon, from Dublin to Crete, from Leipzig to Aberdeen, Europeans sense that a stark choice is approaching fast. The choice between authentic democracy and insidious disintegration. We must resolve to unite to ensure that Europe makes the obvious choice: authentic democracy. (Adler and Bechler, 2020: 21)

As I will argue in this article, the foundation of DiEM25 cannot be understood without the economic recession following Euro-crisis with a standoff between the newly elected Greek Syriza government with Varoufakis as brief albeit memorable Finance Minister in 2015 on the one side, and the troika (European Commission, European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund) on the other. One of the crucial architects of European austerity measures was the German government with former Minister of Finance Wolfgang Schäuble as a key player. DiEM25 accused the German administration of tearing apart the EU by pitting individual member states against each other. This along the perceived lack of credible political alternatives gave the movement the impetus to contest the European elections 2019 as a pan-European party.

Recent scholarship in political science but also increasingly in organization studies finds interest in the emergence of movement parties created as a consequence of the great recession and also organizational inertia of traditional political parties (e.g. Fougère & Barthold, 2020; Husted, 2020; Jun, 2019; Hutter & Kriesi, 2019; Gerbaudo, 2019a; Gerbaudo 2019b; Cervera-Marzal, 2018; della Porta et al., 2017; Fredriksson Almqvist, 2016). These studies also stress how movement parties innovate participatory democracy making extensive use of digital platforms.

Studying the case of DiEM25 can add to the ongoing debates on movement parties for at least two reasons. First, other the above mentioned movement parties, DiEM25 most and foremost self-identifies as a movement with 'electoral wings' with decisions conforming with whole movement's consent

(DiEM25, 2017). Other cases such as the 5 Star Movement, Pirate Parties, la République en Marche or Podemos have integrated more fully in existing party systems (which is also due to their respective electoral successes). Second, while most scholars focus on national movement parties, few have yet tried to grapple with movement parties running on European issues or in European elections or both (a useful exception is de Cleen et al., 2019). This is not very surprising as they are not many cases that can be consulted. In this sense, I am going to present DiEM25 as a movement party that in some respects sits uneasily in line with the above mentioned movement parties while sharing some organizational features.

While there is increasing interest in the study of populist discourse of movement parties (Fougère & Barthold, 2020; de Cleen et al., 2019), in the context of this paper I am more interested in the intra-organizational level of DiEM25's 2019 campaign; especially how during the campaign the movement and the party worked together and analyse the constraints of this case of a party *within* a movement. I will also point to some structural factors based on which I think the electoral campaign remained largely unsuccessful.

I fully and proudly disclose that I have been a candidate for DiEM25's electoral wing 'Demokratie in Europa-DiEM25' in Germany at the European elections. After contextualizing what lead to the participation of DiEM25 at the European elections, I briefly discuss some considerations on the document types I use to study the campaign. In my analysis of the electoral campaign, I will limit myself to the German campaign of Demokratie in Europa-DiEM25 knowing full well how rich the experience in other countries was where DiEM25 contested under the same electoral programme.

## DiEM25: The road to the European elections 2019

In this section, I want to provide the political context and portray some key events, main actors and processes that help to understand the path that led to DiEM25's participation in the 2019 campaign for the European elections.

The creation of the movement cannot be understood without the Eurozone crisis and the stand-off between the troika and far-left Syriza government that

took office in February 2015 in Greece. Syriza's election was enabled by what was called the 'Athens Spring', the mobilisation to resist the bailout terms formulated by the troika to cut public spending, privatize national assets and accept loans that eventually led to an economic depression Greece has yet to recover from (Stiglitz, 2017). After Syriza's election Yanis Varoufakis came to world prominence as Greek Finance Minister calling out Greece's bailout terms as unsustainable. However, the Greek government eventually succumbed to the pressure of the troika after Varoufakis resigned from his office in frustration that Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras was ready to sign the bailout terms (Varoufakis, 2017).

The confrontation was also a highly mediatized battle of ideas in which German Minister of Finance Wolfgang Schäuble drove the agenda of the troika and communicated widely on the topic to the German electorate. Schäuble's agenda to remain firm on the demand to accept the strict bailout terms even if it meant that Greece had to leave the Eurozone ('Grexit') was controversial. For example, US-Economist Joseph Stiglitz questioned the underlying economic assumptions of the German government in the Eurozone crisis:

> Germany's stance is predicated on the belief that profligate government spending leads to crisis – and that it led to the current eurozone crisis. That is simply wrong. (Stiglitz, 2017: 245)

In Germany, progressive commentators criticized the German government calling German's stance toward Greece 'Merkel's poison for Europe' (Augstein, 2015) and German economic policy 'a threat for Europe' (Flassbeck, 2015). The indignation among progressives in Germany and elsewhere who decried that the EU could fall apart in the face of missing solidarity and the vilification of the 'PIIGS' (Portugal, Italy, Ireland, Greece, Spain) called for intellectual leadership on the Left. Grievances around the perceived betrayal of the 'Athens Spring' and mismanagement of the Great Recession created a political widow of opportunity for a transnational movement to emerge. It is in this political climate of indignation and uncertainty that DiEM25 emerged making an open invitation to everyone interested to join a progressive agenda for Europe to join in. In early 2016, electoral politics was not part of the initial call to action. However, with the presence of a number of politicians from around Europe, contact to existing parties in Europe was close from the start.

Katja Kipping, chairwoman of the far-left party Die Linke and member of parliament joined the launch of DiEM25 stressing the importance of a transnational grassroots approach to solving the Euro-crisis as well as calling on a European approach to migration policy.

In the DiEM25 manifesto that was presented at the launch, the European Union was called an 'exceptional achievement' highjacked by a technocratic elite driven by monied interests (Adler & Bechler, 2020: 18). Unless Europe's structures would become more transparent and democratic until 2025, DiEM25 predicted that the Union will disintegrate until then. The Brexit referendum in the same year seemed to confirm some of the concerns presented in the manifesto. From the beginning, DiEM25 found support among progressive public intellectuals and activists such as Noam Chomsky, Naomi Klein or Julian Assange. Active supporters of DiEM25 are also actors and musicians such as Pamela Anderson and Brian Eno.

Since its launch in 2016, the movement has managed to sign up more than 135.000 members online. A number of local groups were subsequently founded in Germany and elsewhere in Europe. Currently there are 22 local groups active in Germany (DiEM25, n.d.a). These groups – called DiEM25's Spontaneous Collectives (DSCs) – are self-managed horizontal structures to spread the ideas of DiEM25, develop policy proposals, engage in demonstrations in line with the organisation, among other activities (DiEM25, n.d.b). Democracy within DiEM25 is managed through the active engagement of registered members on crucial policy positions, so-called all-member-votes (AMVs). Members from around the world are asked to vote on policy proposals or selection of candidates for coordinating bodies within DiEM25.

After the launch in February 2016, a number of well-attended events were organized in different European cities presenting different policy pillars. In Spring 2017, internal discussions on whether DiEM25 should run in the European elections 2019 started. DiEM25s Coordinating Collective (CC) put forward a proposal based on consultation with members. The political analysis was such that DiEM25s participation in the EP elections was a necessary and urgent step in light of 'visionless' traditional parties (DiEM25,

2017). The proposal entitled 'not just another political party' referred to the creation of a transnational party as 'one of its tools for democratising Europe' (ibid.).

> From the day DiEM25 was inaugurated in Berlin, in February 2016, we have been saying that we have no urge to contest elections, in the daily hustle of what passes for "politics". We would rather continue in our chosen areas of activism, while supporting existing progressive political parties. (…) Alas, Europe's crisis and slow descent into a quagmire of incompetent authoritarianism does not give us the right to do so. The window for us to effect change is closing and this has become even more pressing after the recent German election, which killed off the last remaining hope for a federalist democratic push by Macron and Merkel. Time is running short. (DiEM25, 2017)

After explaining why DiEM25 should run in elections, the text goes on to explain how DiEM25 would not cease to be a movement but instead reaffirmed to be guided by its members. 'DiEM25 will thus remain a movement, whose members guide the policies as they do now, while developing an electoral wing which catalyses political developments' (DiEM25, 2017). Further internal discussions on electoral politics led to an AMV on the question of whether DiEM25 wanted to participate in the European elections in May 2019. The result of internal decision-making was that political parties, or 'electoral wings' as DiEM25 calls them, were to be created in countries where existing parties would not adopt DiEM25's political programme.

From the start the vision was to run with a common policy programme in as many European countries as possible in spite of the European parliament rejecting the idea of transnational lists in February 2018 (i.e. the idea that candidates can be elected from all over Europe in a single constituency rallying for the same programme rather than running largely national campaigns for national parties with national programmes within the confines of the individual nation states). In March 2018, DiEM25 proudly presented the 'first transnational European list' in Naples with official delegates from France, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Denmark and Germany present and observers including the Party of European Greens and Party of the European Left (Pietrandrea, 2018). Benoît Hamon, the former Socialist candidate for French president joined the alliance to rally European movements and parties under a common policy programme and a *Spitzenkandidat* as a symbolic head of the

list for the position of European commission president (ibid.). In the communiqué of the Naples meeting, the project was portrayed in the following terms:

> We come from Europe's North, South, East and West. We come from Central Europe as well as from its islands and outermost regions. We are progressives, radical democrats, ecologists, feminists. We are citizens, activists, mayors, local councilors [sic.]. And we bring to Europe's first transnational party list our different cultures, languages, accents, political party backgrounds, ideologies, skin colours, gender identities.
>
> We are committed to getting back our cities, our regions, our countries, our environment, our Europe. We aim at becoming the credible, coherent, radical alternative in Europe's Parliament. (DiEM25, 2018a)

Three month after the Naples meeting, a gathering in Frankfurt on 2 June 2018 officially founded the German electoral wing called Demokratie in Europa-DiEM25 (DiEM25, 2018b). That day around 70 members signed up as members of the party. Statutes in line with DiEMs manifesto were also adopted that day. From the start the relationship between the movement and the party caused discussions among members. Most DiEM25 members had voted for a structure of co-existence between the movement and political party instead of a full-transition to a political party. After the event, selected members of the board of the German electoral wing officially partook in the gatherings to advance the New Deal for Europe in various meetings that had started in Naples. The next section briefly discusses some methodological considerations and in order to understand and explain DiEM25's mobilization potential as well as trying to explain the rather disappointing electoral results with a focus on Germany.

## Methods

Broadly speaking, political party research mainly focuses on three different areas: parties in government, parties as organizations and parties in elections (Noel, 2010). In principle, all three categories can also be studied for the cases of movement parties (although not a great number of movement parties have entered government yet). My analysis of DiEM25 focuses on the interface between parties as organizations and parties in elections. More specifically,

my main interest is flesh out how DiEM25 negotiated its aspirations to be a pan-European movement with electoral aspirations.

In my analysis, I draw on key documents published by DiEM25 and my own participation in the electoral campaign for the European elections in Germany. Key documents include the DiEM25 manifesto, the common electoral programme that was adopted by partnering parties in seven different countries, press articles and documents from the DiEM25 website.

## DiEM25's European election campaign

The vast ambition of DiEM25's campaign was to unite 'behind a shared vision of Europe as a realm of democracy, sustainability, prosperity and peace' (European Spring, 2019: 6). I present DiEM25's 2019 campaign by describing how these goals were put in practice in three different phases by the German electoral wing. First, building internal capacity and negotiating with allied political parties. Second, selection of political personnel. Third, organization of the political campaign. I argue that at every of the three stages the campaign was constrained by its organizational structure of being a social movement with an electoral wing.

The first phase started after the German electoral wing was founded in June 2019. Party structures had to be established from scratch.[1] German electoral law provides a prescribed timeline and procedures to formalize political parties that want to run for elections. On the one hand, this helped to structure the internal timeline and identify tasks. On the other hand, the formalization of the party proved to be quite demanding, technical and hence time consuming, not least because most activists never ran election campaigns before. In the following, 13 main tasks were identified including election strategy, press liaison, social media and fundraising in order to run a successful campaign (Demokratie in Europa – DiEM25, 2020).

[1] DiEM25's electoral wing in Germany decided to register as a Sonstige Politische Vereinigung (SPV) (literally 'other political association') which is not strictly the same as a political party, but has similar legal status which allows SPVs to contest European elections.

In the first months, a lot of resources were also allocated to negotiating possible alliances with other parties. Smaller existing progressive parties showed very interested in forming partnering with DiEM25 for elections. Discussions about possible collaboration with a newly established party called Democracy in Motion (DiB) were undertaken from very early on. Even though the negotiations took place in a cordial spirit and it was easy to agree on principles it showed more demanding to agree on procedures and the parameters of a final agreement. Finally, there was an agreement that both members of DiEM25 in an all-member-vote as well as from the majority of members of DiB approved. Later on, Mut ('courage') another political party based in Bavaria actively supported DiEM25's electoral wing's effort to enter the European parliament. Both DiB and Mut were particularly drawn to the DiEM25's initiative to build an umbrella organization to contest in European elections. This however also created a level of complexity that was difficult to manage as different parties and movements wanted their logos, ideas and personnel to prominently feature in the campaign.

By the time the alliances were agreed on there was a realization that outreach of the party had been quite limited. Some press articles had been written before the formalization of the party, but the media's interest had been insignificant for a few months. This changed when the personnel was chosen and DiEM25 announced that Yanis Varoufakis would run in Germany and not as was expected in Greece. Sueddeutsche Zeitung announced the 'return of the rebel' (Al-Serori, 2018). But the news of Varoufakis running in Germany was also picked up by international media including the Time Magazine and the Economist, among others (Perrigo, 2018; The Economist staff reporters, 2019). At this point Varoufakis affirmed that it was with reluctance that he ran of office calling it a 'necessity' and saying he disliked 'running and asking people for votes' (Economist staff reporters, 2019). This echoed DiEM25's 'not just another party' stance. The electoral project also found support at campaign events where list candidates spoke alongside other DiEM25 activists or supporters, which stressed that DiEM25 remained an organization primarily driven by political activism.

However, on a grassroots level not every local group was happy to campaign for elections. This showed when 4.000 signatures had to be collected and

presented to the German election panel after the candidates were chosen in November 2018. The collection of signatures took much longer than initially expected with relatively few local groups actively being involved in the collection in the streets. However after a rather sluggish start, finally more than enough valid signatures were collected due to increased communication with DiEM25 members to sign the supporting document and possibly also collect signatures themselves.

During the campaign stage, DiEM25 used traditional as well as non-traditional campaigning tools. 72.000 flyers, 25.000 business cards and 3.030 election posters were printed and distributed during the campaign (Demokratie in Europa, 2019). Compared to 25.000 posters that the Christian democratic party (CDU) hung in the city of Berlin alone, it shows how unequal resources were distributed (Berlin.de, 2019). Similarly, the Christian democrats spent 227.600 Euros for Facebook adds while DiEM25 spend 11.200 Euros (Pauly and Stotz, 2019). DiEM25 tried different ways of engaging voters online and offline. For example, a petition for a Green New Deal (Demokratie in Europa – DiEM25, 2019) and participation in a number of demonstrations. Campaign action was mainly undertaken in the cities where DiEM25 was able to organize election campaign groups (Berlin, Hamburg, Freiburg, Goettingen, Hamburg, Munich and Cologne). These are the cities in which DiEM25s electoral wing also scored its best results.

Another campaign effort was to register non-German EU-citizens to vote. European citizens with residency in Germany are allowed to vote, but other than Germans have to put their name on a voting register. The campaign was very much in line with the pan-European message DiEM25 wanted to send out. However, it was not recognizably from the party and obviously the action did not necessarily translate to voters deciding to vote DiEM25 in the end. While well intentioned, it showed that DiEM25's campaign was not as streamlined as existing parties' actions.

In a number of campaign actions different logos and messages sometimes caused confusion from on the part of the voters. When I talked about DiEM25's transnational structure and international supporters to a potential voter he commented that it the campaign sounded more like an 'art project'.

A volunteer from Göttingen lamented that: 'it was often difficult to explain Demokratie in Europa, because we did not have one name and one branding' (volunteer account, 2019).

From the above discussion, three limiting factors can be identified: organizational complexity, lack of resources and reluctance to embrace electoral politics on the part of the members. Adding to these factors, I want to finally add some structural factors that indicate that the window of opportunity was not as big as the campaign hoped. The two limiting factors were the existing political offers especially from the Green Party and Left Party and secondly the overall approval of the EU institutions and Germany's role in Europe (Eurobarometer, 2019).

The European parliamentary elections 2019 were contested by 41 parties (Bundeswahlleiter, 2019). With the enormous run of political parties to secure seats it was difficult for individual parties with a low budget to stand out. In the aftermath of the elections a number of activists suggested that DiEM25's call for a Green New Deal was often mistaken to be a Green Party campaign. The Green party scored a historical success winning 21 seats in the EP (ibid.). If voters who liked the idea of a Green New Deal voted for the Greens at the election in the assumption that they had seen Green party messages cannot definitively be answered. It rather showed that DiEM25 was scoring above average results in places where the Greens also performed much better than their national average like in Freiburg, Berlin or Hamburg. Voters in these cities still overwhelmingly voted for the Green Party and allowed DiEM25 only small vote share. Die Linke that is putting a particular emphasis on inequality with strong anti-capitalist factions lost seats in EP parliament but still managed to secure five seats. Progressive voters still trusted these parties' abilities to shape the EU on green and red issues that DiEM was campaigning on.

As a second structural factor, indications suggest that voters did not radically want to depart from the path Germany had taken in Europe and were overall content with Germany's role in the EU. In autumn 2018, only 28% of German respondents answered that the EU should change rapidly (which was DiEM25s position), while 61% were in favour of moderate reform pace (Eurobarometer,

2019: 10). The poll shows that on average Germans want slower change than the European average which showed that 36% were in favour of rapid change. In the same poll, German respondents also disproportionately predicted that stability for the year ahead. 71% of Germans expected that their lives will not change fundamentally in the coming 12 months (compared to only 58% in EU average). Inflation and pensions are the most pressing personal issues that German voters cared about (Eurobarometer, 2019: 13). These issues were not substantial part of debates in Germany at the EP elections. With DiEM25 calling for a rupture with the status quo in Europe, the above indicators suggest that the average voters were not feeling the same degree of urgency. Combined with the strong electoral results of the Greens and moderate results for the Left party there was not enough political space for a small insurgent party.

In the other European countries where DiEM25 put its programme to the ballot box no seats were secured either. Varoufakis himself analysed that 'our campaign speeches were far too timid' and that what was missing was 'a class analysis of the true reasons why Europe's establishment is turning down sensible, moderate policies … that would be mutually advantageous across Europe' (Varoufakis, 2020: 2). Indeed, the closest that DiEM25 got to a seat in the EP was in Greece where the DiEM25 party Mera25 very narrowly failed to reach the three percent threshold, but won nine seats in the Greek national elections of 2019 with Varoufakis as lead candidate (Smith, 2019).

Electorally, after the European elections, DiEM25's success in Greece in 2019 stands out. There were few DiEM25 supported candidates contesting for the French municipal elections and elsewhere. If DiEM25 will contest in upcoming elections will be subject to all-member-votes. On the part of the voters, this creates a level of uncertainty because of the case-by-case nature in which DiEM25 contests for elections. Depending on the local groups there is also an appetite to organize political campaigns that are not affiliated to party politics and a certain degree of frustration about electoral results in 2019. If DiEM25's electoral campaigns will succeed in the future will also depend on if the three challenges of organizational complexity, lack of resources and reluctance of the membership to embrace electoral politics will be addressed.

## Conclusion

On 26 May 2019, the day of the EP elections, Demokratie in Europa attracted 130.229 votes (Bundeswahlleiter, 2019). A little less than double the votes would have secured a seat in the EP. In only two out of sixteen provinces in Germany the party received enough seats to enter parliament (Berlin and Hamburg). Small successes in these city-states as well as in other cities with committed volunteers clearly points to a correlation between concerted efforts and election results.

In some sense electoral politics was an uneasy subject for DiEM25 from the start. As DiEM25 grew out of a movement it had always allowed members to be active in other political parties. Now that DiEM25 was running an election campaign this put some members sympathizing with other parties in conflict either to change party affiliation or campaign against DiEM25.

After contextualizing the events, processes and actors that shaped DiEM25's decision to contest in the European elections, I discussed three stages of the campaign. From inception the organization of the campaign was enabled and constrained by its pan-European ambition and collaborative character. Because the DiEM25 campaign was fought with more than one logo and an alliance of different parties as well as prominent DiEM25 supporters who were not on the ballot box this might have caused difficulties explaining the campaign to voters. The message that the exact same policy programme can be elected from seven different countries was not auditable enough even though it was a unique selling point of the campaign.

The analysis showed that electoral politics for movement parties might be difficult if the focus is on the movement and electoral politics perceived only a necessary evil. For example, Frederiksson Almiqvist (2016: 104) suggests that in the Pirate Party 'the primacy of institutionalized politics is not only a pragmatic choice by the most dedicated party activists but also consistent with the political imagination of their less organizing followers'. The same cannot be said about DiEM25's relation to electoral politics.

As I have also shown, movement parties must be understood in the context of a particular political juncture. At the beginning of the campaign challenging

the political machinery of existing political parties already seemed like a mountain to climb. I write this analysis knowing that some of the challenges presented here were already discussed when the decision to contest elections were taken. Still there was a great appetite to intervene and a felt necessity to defy the political odds. DiEM25 supporter Slavoj Žižek captures this urge to shift the political landscape nicely:

> One has to take the risk and intervene, even if reaching the goal appears (and is, in some sense) impossible – only by doing this can one change the situation so that the impossible becomes possible, in a way that can never be predicted. (Žižek, 2018: 9)

This research paper contributed by analysing internal organizational dynamics within a particular movement party. For future research, it would be necessary to better understand the particular subject positions of volunteers and candidates in movement party campaigns and how they might interpret their role differently from traditional party candidates.

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## the author

Jasper Finkeldey is Assistant Professor in Critical Management Studies at Paris-Dauphine University.
Email: jasper.finkeldey@dauphine.psl.eu

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# The 15-M laboratory of democratic transformation: How a contemporary Spanish movement contested neoliberal hegemony in an impoverished democracy

Alexandros Kioupkiolis

**review of**

Fominaya, C.F. (2020) *Democracy reloaded: Inside Spain's political laboratory from 15-M to Podemos*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (PB, pp 368, $29.95, ISBN 9780190099978)

Only nine years ago, in 2011-2012, history appeared to be 'born again' (Badiou, 2012) in the Mediterranean basin and across the world, through the Arab Spring, the '15-M' (or 'Indignados' movement) in Spain, the 'squares movement' in Greece, and the global Occupy movement. Today, the boisterous scenes of democratic uprisings, the contestation of neoliberalism and austerity policies, the glimpses of egalitarian 'real' democracy and popular aspirations to progressive change in countries such as Spain and Greece seem consigned to a remote past. The global hegemony of neoliberalism remains firmly in place, while reactionary right-wing politics is on the rise. A gradual normalization of 'the crisis' has taken hold in many countries, while mass mobilizations for stronger democracy are a rare occurrence in Europe. Yet, the looming ecological catastrophe, popular

disaffection with elitist politics, and the devastating consequences of neoliberalism for equality and democracy remain our historical horizon. More than ever, it is time to act, but also to step back, to rethink political strategies for change, to re-imagine democratic politics.

Cristina Flesher Fominaya's *Democracy reloaded: Inside Spain's political laboratory from 15-M to Podemos* is a valuable aid in facing up to these paramount political challenges in our times. Beyond a mere academic study of recent social movements in Spain, this is an extensive, well-grounded and insightful inquiry into how contemporary civic action can foster democratization and contest the neoliberal hollowing-out of liberal democracies. Investigating the 'Spanish laboratory' of new democratic politics since 2011 (and even earlier), she brings out specific practices and emergent political imaginaries, which can help us to tackle the question of how we can save democracy today, without offering, of course, a fully-fledged and definite answer.

The 15-M movement, named after the first date of its massive public appearance on the 15th of May 2011, stands out as one of the most popular, influential and transformative insurgencies of this period in Europe and across the world. Indeed, a core contention of Fominaya's research and argument in this volume is that

> the movement reconfigured Spain's political landscape and inspired a process of democratic experimentation that continues today not only in non-institutional spheres and social movement networks, but also in the municipal movements that in 2015 won elections to govern Spain's major cities, and in the new political movement/party Podemos. [4]

Substantiating the political impact of 15-M and fleshing out its transformative effects takes up the nub of the author's discussion in the book. Herein lies also her contribution to one of the key tasks for social movement studies: evaluating and explaining the impact of specific mobilizations [7]. In this respect, what marks off her distinctive account of the rise and the force of 15-M is (a) her contextualization of the movement in relation to the 'legitimation crisis' of liberal democracies and austerity policies; (b) her emphasis on activist networks whose intervention is required in order to

transform political opportunities (political-economic crises and popular grievances) into massive action; (c) her genealogical approach to the emergence of 15-M, which is combined with the analysis of organizational networks in order to refute simplistic notions of spontaneism and digital facilitation [8-10]. In more concrete terms, the thrust of her argument is that 15-M was an *autonomous social movement*, anchored in the recent tradition of such mobilization in Spain. Autonomous movements can effectively tackle the challenges of achieving broad outreach, strength and convergence across diversity through praxis and processes of political culture and collective identity formation, rather than through centralized power, ideological convergence, abundant resources and access to institutions. Showing how this can happen is presented by the author herself as a chief contribution of the volume [10-11].

The accent on political culture and related practices as configured by 15-M thus lies at the core of Fominaya's study. 'Ideational frameworks' of interpretations, beliefs, values and symbols which motivate action, along with the types of action they inform, make up political culture. Contentious social movements do not simply construct their own alternative cultures. They also engage with common sense and the hegemonic political culture, seeking to shift and resignify them so as to stimulate different forms of action and new practices. Hence, the efficacy of social movements needs to be also evaluated in terms of their imprint on culture and politics, which is hard to quantify and may take time to bear fruit. In the case of 15-M, the two 'master frames' concerned austerity – the contestation of its policies and its grounds – and democracy, coupling a critique of actually existing democracy with a revindication of this regime for the people. Another 'hybrid' cultural synthesis highlighted by the author is that between the political culture of autonomous movements – horizontal, egalitarian participation without strong leadership etc. – and neo-Gramscian populism, which strives to build a new hegemony of the people [12-16]. This is, indeed, a notable innovation of 15-M's political philosophy and action, whose tensions and significance need to be investigated in depth – and, as I will argue, in greater detail and in different ways than the author pursues in this volume.

## 15-M and democracy

The first part of the book delves into the relationship of 15-M with democracy, starting with 'Spanish democracy'. Notably, 15-M signaled a rupture with the culture of 'Transition', the passage from Franco's dictatorship to a liberal regime in the late 70s. This was the result of a pact among elites, which set up institutional mechanisms isolated from civic pressure. The lack of access to institutions, and the austerity policies ascribed to this institutional isolation, were targeted by 15-M, finding massive social resonance and sparking a debate about Spanish democracy, which repoliticized it. The quest for an alternative 'real democracy' spawned a diverse experimentation, which ranged from the consensus-oriented public assemblies to the 'municipal platforms' and new parties such as Podemos [24-29]. This questioning of elitist or domesticated democracy was fueled by the financial crisis, the rising unemployment and austerity policies. 15-M took issue with the dominant narratives about the crisis. It shifted the targets of critique from the welfare state and social policies to the banks, the elites, the democracy of the two-party system and the Transition. Discourses about the crisis and democracy became a battleground through the intervention of 15-M, which delegitimized 'actually existing democracy' but held on to the value of democracy itself and sought to resignify it. They thus forced on the political agenda new or marginalized issues: political corruption attributed to institutional mechanisms, and the need for electoral reform, greater civic participation and enhanced institutional transparency [30-37].

Coming to grips with hegemonic discourses and the common sense in order to swing it in other directions while connecting with it, e.g. through the valorization and re-interpretation of democracy, was one of the three main planks of 15-M's populist counter-hegemonic strategy in Gramsci's sense. The other was its identification with the 'people' and the endeavor to attain popular outreach. The third was reclaiming democracy and the need to grapple with state institutions in order to reform them in the interests of the many. These gestures differentiated 15-M from prior 'autonomous social movements' such as the Global Justice Movement, which tended to speak mainly to an 'activist ghetto' [37-41]. According to the author, challenging the necessity of austerity policies, tracing their causes to the qualities of the

dominant model of democracy, and stressing thereby the need to rethink and reshape democracy was the 'major impact' of 15-M on political culture and common sense, which is hard to quantify and likely to persist for some time [41].

## 15-M: A genealogy and anatomy of its political culture

Part II of the book is devoted to an in-depth account of 15-M itself, its moments or faces, its precursors, its distinct political culture and orientation. Key objectives of the argument are to debunk the 'spontaneist' approaches to the rise of 15-M, to uncover its 'autonomous' logic as a social movement and to trace out its genealogy, the precursor mobilizations and initiatives, which laid the groundwork for its emergence. Hence, the author differentiates between the original 'protest event' on the 15th of May 2011 across Spain, the month-long occupation of public squares with Puerta de Sol as the hub of this activity, and an ensuing movement, which was more diverse and diffuse in time and space. The logic of autonomy, which marked off the movement, according to the author, is governed by the principles of self-organization, direct democracy, diversity, direct action, autonomy from political institutions and formal political organizations and an 'anti-identitarian' spirit, which opposes the identification of the movement with any particular collective, acronym, symbol or political ideology/identity [43-49].

Fominaya's genealogical angle, which discloses the role of pre-existing trajectories of social contestation on particular mobilizations, is arguably a significant input of the author to research methodologies and interpretations in social movement studies. Such genealogies enable us to grasp how movement actors exploit effectively emergent political possibilities, how precursor mobilizations and movement learning processes inflect the structure and the orientation of later mobilizations and how a new creation is entangled with preceding political cultures and events. The roots of 15-M's political culture can be traced back to the Global Justice Movement and later protests in Spain. The Arab Spring was a main inspiration contemporaneous with its eruption. Predecessor movements close to the genesis of 15-M include *Juventud Sin Futuro* and, crucially, *Democracia Real Ya* (DRY), the co-

ordinating platform, which called and organized the 15-M protests. In both initiatives, we can discern the endeavor to break with classic leftist discourses and practices, to connect with social majorities through shared problems, to critically converse with common sense so as to swerve it in new directions, and to organize action through assemblies (the 'asambleario' orientation) [51-71].

Chapter 3 describes the event of the protest on the 15th of May 2011 and explains how it was an outcome of preparation and negotiation among movement actors rather than a spontaneous outburst. The twin critiques of austerity and the democratic deficit, exacerbated by the collusion of political with financial elites, were the cornerstone of this preparatory action. The framing around the revindication of democracy and political institutions, and the division of ordinary working people and citizens versus politicians and bankers managed to be widely inclusive, appealing across political parties and generations [73-80].

Unlike the demonstration itself, the second moment of 15-M, the encampments in Puerta de Sol, Madrid's central square, and in other cities in Spain, was neither planned nor authorized [81-86]. Chapter 4 narrates how the camp incubated the movement and generated core components of its political DNA, the 'asambleario' politics organized around a general public assembly and thematic groups, which attended to process [87-90]. According to first-hand ethnographic testimony gathered by the author, the collective identity of the camp gave rise to a distinct 15-M identity. This was shaped around the construction of a life in common, assembly decision-making and a hacker/technopolitical component, which nurtured a commitment to free software, open access and encryption/security [95-104].

The camp developed its own dynamic, beyond the plans of those of orchestrated the initial protest, involving newcomers, intensifying its energy and raising new challenges of organization amidst an apparent chaos. Nevertheless, Acampada Sol managed to sustain multiple assemblies and a complex internal structure over time. This was achieved thanks to experienced activists-facilitators but also to its hallmark politics – its commitment to inclusivity and nonviolence that welcomed anyone, with any

skills, who was willing to participate. Its political orientation crystallized by May 20, when the general assembly endorsed a manifesto calling for financial and political reform that would eliminate the privileges of elites, while asserting the right to housing, work, public services and the political participation of citizens. Crucially, the rise of a distinct feminist politics in the encampment sought to redefine mainstream politics, redirecting it towards care for citizens and the common good [105-119].

The camp decided to dissolve itself on the 12th of June 2011, but with the aspiration to expand, to multiply and to ramify into neighborhood assemblies and other modes of mobilization and political self-organization. It thus gave rise to the broader 15-M *movement*, whose central emphasis on democracy and its distinctive political culture, welding together autonomy, feminism and the hacker ethos, bore the indelible marks of the earlier Acampada Sol. Chapter 5 fleshes out the significance of the encampment for the ensuing movement, indicating how it consolidated a collective identity of citizens reclaiming their common political power and their participation in political decision-making. Core components of the 15-M political culture became also the deliberative processes of decision-making, which intended to be non-hierarchical (horizontal) and inclusive, and the collective care for people's material and reproductive needs, including childcare and food. Crucially, moreover, the Acampada brought together concerned people and ordinary citizens from all walks of life, embodying the will to reach out to society at large, beyond the 'activist ghetto' [123-127].

Hence, the thrust of this transfiguration of political culture lie in the endeavor to 'common politics', that is, to turn politics and government into an activity of any and all, reclaiming democracy for the people. More specifically, according to the author, the 15-M *heterotopia*

> expressed a rejection of dominant forms of social relations (violence, hierarchies, inequalities, exclusion, marginalization) and tried to embody an alternative to these forms: caring, solidarity, collective empowerment and endeavor, horizontalism [...] drawing on, inter all, feminist, autonomous, pro-commons, DIY, and anti-charity models. [128]

The political DNA of the 15-M movement took shape around three main political lineages and orientations: autonomy (commitment to participatory democracy, inclusivity, diversity, assembly-based decision-making, non-hierarchy, prefiguration); feminism (overturning patriarchy, care, non-violence); and hacker ethics (open source, collective intelligence, knowledge sharing, hacking as the collective search for better solutions, harnessing digital technologies). These political-cultural frameworks, the ensuing 'way of doing politics', combined with the ideational frameworks of reclaiming democracy and challenging crisis imbued diverse later mobilizations of the 15-M 'movement'. Communication networks, built before and during the 15th May protest and the subsequent encampments, catalyzed the organization of multifarious collective action, giving the lie to facile claims of a spontaneous, digitally enabled, aggregation of individual logics. The encampment generated, rather, a collective *commons* logic forged in assemblies, working groups, common spaces of encounter, shared experiences of organizing material life in common. This thesis lies at the heart of Fominaya's argument in her portrayal of 15-M as a political phenomenon [133-140].

In the aftermath of Acampada Sol, the 15-M movement exhibited a wild diversity of new or reframed older projects, protests, mobilizations, organizations, assemblies, initiatives and networks. What brought them together was the way in which they protested against austerity and sought to renew democracy, their re-enactment of key elements of the 15-M political culture and their self-identification with it [141-150].

## 15-M movement after May 2011

Part III of the book sets out to explore this rich ecology of 15-M social and political interventions from June 2011 onwards. The chapters 6 and 7 linger with two protest movements ('preferentes' and '15MpaRato'), which targeted particularly the banks and financial elites involved in fraud and 'crimes against citizens', but also the corruption of the political class across parties. Chapter 8 discusses PAH, the housing movement which predated 15-M, but was revitalized and inspired by it. Beyond the right to housing and the defense of indebted citizens against the banks, which evicted them, PAH contested the

dominant narrative about the crisis and protested against a democratic system which did not care for its citizens, while it strengthened a belief in 'people power' and fostered horizontal, collective self-empowerment [184-190].

Chapter 9 looks into the activism of 'indignant and precarious youth' connected with 15-M, featuring interviews with individuals, ethnographic narratives and in-depth accounts of various involved groups such as 'Juventud sin Futur' and 'Oficina Precaria'. These politicized the everyday reality of precarious people in the spirit of 15-M, and they paired anti-austerity with pro-democracy discourses. Their shared sense of belonging to 15-M and their common way of 'doing politics' shaped the contours of a broader 15-M movement, even without an overarching organizational structure or formal label [216-217].

## The electoral turn

The ultimate part IV traces the 'electoral turn' of certain sectors of 15-M towards the party Podemos, established in 2014. The author sets out to dispel the paradox of a movement against formal representation, which veered towards representative party politics. She claims, thus, that Podemos' founders participated in the preparation of the discursive terrain before its eruption in 2011 [224]. The 'electoral turn' was partly motivated by the 15-M disposition to reclaim democratic institutions, by the proximity of some 15-M actors to party politics and by the activism fatigue, which had set in by 2014. Certain 15-M participants did not regard autonomy as the sole appropriate political form, viewing it rather as complementary to other modes of political engagement. Podemos realized thus the desire of some 15-M components to move to the electoral terrain in order to exert influence on institutions [231-34, 244-245]. Podemos did not claim to represent 15-M but incorporated at the outset central elements of 15-M culture, from participatory democracy (through the initial 'circles' of grassroots participation), the hacker ethic and feminism to the anti-austerity and pro-democracy discourses. It thus seemed to construct a 'hybrid party' that embraced the tension between party and movement logics of collective action. This is the subject of chapters 10 and

11, which recounts how Podemos reneged on its promises, turning into a heavily centralized party under a strong personal leadership (of Pablo Iglesias) and embracing a new mode of technopolitical plebiscitarian populism.

The 'Conclusions' sum up and underline the author's unique perspective on social movement politics and her purported contribution to this field. Her in-depth study of 15-M sought to challenge the focus on formally organized, vertical and institutionally integrated movements, which are often held to be more effective in the literature (Giugni, 1998; Giugni et al., 1999). It also contests a statist bias in the assessment of the political effects of social movements. These tendencies, which lead to marginalizing or underrating 'autonomous' social movements, are exacerbated by an analytical emphasis on mobilization rather than movement culture and by the near self-concealment of autonomous movements, which do not rally together around fixed ideological or identity markers. Hence, a research approach, which digs into the subterranean spaces of experimentation, the internal dynamics of autonomous movements and their diverse genealogies. These critical methodological choices can help us to better grasp both the processes of movement emergence, and the impact of emergent movement cultures on the political system and political action more broadly [286].

Fominaya's distinct outlook and ethnography also brings out how, despite fashionable arguments to the contrary (see Gerbaudo, 2012; 2017), 'communication' as such does not organize digitally facilitated movements, in which communicative and organizational structures remain separate. Movements with digital engagements such as 15-M carefully and reflectively develop their communicative practices according to their organizational patterns, their deliberations and negotiations. Against portrayals of contemporary movements, which dwell on online initiatives and interactions, Fominaya highlights the decisive role of ideational patterns or 'imaginaries' even in the hacker component of 15-M [296-299]. Moreover, in the 'digital age,' too, the power of autonomous social movements derives from their logic of autonomy itself, which nurtures an open culture and identity, allowing for adaptation to complex contexts and variable opportunities [301]. In this respect, the innovative politics of 15-M consisted in combining the practice

of democracy in the movement with demands for reforming actually-existing democracy, breaking thus with the inward look of past autonomous movements [304].

The standpoint of the author is informed and, in turn, nourishes a particular understanding of the aims and the ethos of critical research into contemporary democratic movements, which is concisely formulated in the closing chapter 'Democracy reloaded'. Rather than seeking a new vanguard deploying the best strategy towards a predefined end, it is

> more illuminating to explore the cultural logics and ideational frameworks that enable a process of democratic experimentation, contestation, and regeneration to flourish, and to tease out their limitations and challenges, not as a prescriptive recipe for success but as a contribution to critical reflexive knowledge on political engagement that seeks a democratic society based on equality and the common good. [303]

Seen through these lenses, the political import of a movement such as 15-M to reinvigorating democracy has been the constitution of practices, spaces and ideational frames, which revindicated people's power and democracy for the common good. By dint of such practices and discourses, which put the blame for austerity and the economic crises on the elites and a hollowed-out democracy, the movement engaged in true counter-hegemonic politics. It took on hegemonic accounts of the crisis and democracy. It appealed to popular majorities. It shifted common sense by propounding alternative narratives about democracy and the crisis, but also by nurturing a different political culture. Furthermore, 15-M forged alliances among heterogeneous groups, pitting them against ruling elites, and it threw up new political opportunities in electoral politics, which enabled the rise of parties such as Podemos and the municipal 'confluences' in 2015 [304-5, 314].

Fominaya insists that it is the imprint on the dominant political culture and the prevalent democratic imaginary, which constitutes the main achievement of 15-M. The collective identity and political culture crafted from the original occupation onwards sustained the movement over time and space, across diverse actors, and enabled it to shift the public debate and political agenda about crisis, austerity and democracy itself [306-307]. To grasp this, we need to forsake the state-centered idea of politics, which measures success

quantitatively in terms of effects on policymaking, parties and ruling elites. Veering away from statism in political thought and practice allows us to capture how 15-M transfigured the political itself in the direction of collective empowerment, plurality, inclusivity, common care for the common good and life over capital. The rise of feminism in the movement triggered also a 'feminization' of the political, which nourished solidarity, care for relations, concern with everyday reproduction, empathy and listening over and against the patriarchal, competitive and domineering style of politics.

## An appraisal

This in-depth, comprehensive and insightful study from a researcher deeply immersed in social movements and, particularly, in recent democratic mobilizations in Spain, including 15-M, illuminates crucial grassroots fermentations, displacements and reconstructions of the political beyond the statist system of politics. The author uncovers how the political understandings and practices of 'ordinary people' were concretely transformed in this massive and protracted cycle of contention since 2011. While another recent contribution to the discussion, Donatella della Porta's (2020) *How social movements can save democracy*, focusses on how recent collective action reinvigorated participation and deliberation by promoting innovations in *institutional* political systems, her emphasis on 'political culture' enables Fominaya to explore more broadly these creative contestations and mutations in an alternative democratic direction, beyond a narrow attention to institutional changes. Her inquiry into how social movements spread emergent cultural norms is far from new in social movement studies (della Porta, 2020), but this does not detract from the value of the author's distinctive angle. It is from this precise standpoint that certain important ambivalences or gaps in her account can come into sight.

First, how can we establish claims about transformative effects of a certain cycle of contention on the hegemonic political culture? Second, would this endeavor call also for an analysis of the subjectivity of movement actors, its socio-historical formation and its residual attachments to the status-quo? (Substituting 'class-composition' for 'subjectivity' might add analytical

clarity and concision, but at the cost of reducing complexity and nuances by subsuming diversity under supposedly unified class subjects). Finally, how do shifts in political culture bear more specifically on questions of political strategy if the aim is wider social-cultural transformation?

The author surveys a wide spectrum of mobilizations, movements and party formations to highlight the appearances and impact of 15-M's political culture. But the depth and the scope of changes in this culture remain unclear. Hence the author's own ambiguous assessments:

> 15-M developed its own movement political culture, but it also, through its intense mobilization, transformed Spain's political landscape and *shook up, if not transformed*, national political culture. [310, emphasis added]
>
> Beyond transforming the political opportunities for the emergence of new parties, 15-M forced established parties to integrate at least *cosmetic* changes. [311, emphasis added; such changes included a rhetorical commitment to transparency and citizens' participation]
>
> Given how unresponsive the state has been to movement demands, it is remarkable how sustained the movements against austerity in Spain have been. This ability to sustain itself despite 'political failures'... [311-312]

If mobilization is in decline, party formations have regressed into vertical politics, municipalism did not live up to its promises of radical democratic change, while established parties have made only cosmetic changes, what evidence is there to substantiate the depth and the strength of the 15-M's influence on political attitudes, ideas and practices beyond the 5-6 years of intense civic activation and contestation? To answer this, we would need to inquire into broader social practices 'on the ground', which are still running and bear the imprint of 15-M, from economic activities to local self-organization, solidarity networks, and so on. We would also need to look into other contemporary cultural manifestations, for instance in art, media and theory, which are likewise infused with the 15-M spirit. Finally, we would need to conduct empirical studies on the political culture (political ideas, values, attitudes towards politics), which informs popular majorities today, several years after the eruption of the 15-M mobilization.

Such a broader investigation would need to probe in greater depth the subjectivity – modes of thought, evaluation, imagination, feeling and action – of a large sector of 15-M actors. Critical analysts such as Emmanuel Rodríguez-López have scrutinized the potentials and the limitations of 15-M transformative politics by dwelling on its predominantly 'middle-class' character. This is marked by residual attachments to the (neo-)liberal, capitalist value system and by lingering aspirations to individual ascent, consumerism, 'meritocracy' and a distance from labor unions. The fraying middle classes have not yet articulated a new social subject and project of rupture (Rodríguez-López, 2016). Even if such a reading tends to suppress heterogeneity, complexity, new fermentations and contradictions, the more enduring subjective 'substratum' of 15-M actors should receive critical attention in an attempt to evaluate both the ruptures and the limits of their political interventions.

The 'subjective ties' to the dominant order, which rein in transformative imagination and action, belong to the politics of hegemony in Gramsci's and Laclau and Mouffe's sense, the prevalent relations of power and associated dominant ideas, discourses and affects. Through the lenses of hegemonic politics, system change turns on a protracted and potent counter-hegemonic contestation, which effectively and persistently wrestles with power relations, institutions, popular discourses and affects. Fominaya rules out such a strategic path by starkly contrasting the logic of autonomous movements with the logic of populist hegemony [278, 289, 302]. This outlook obscures how autonomous movements can and do work out strategies of counter-hegemony, which could induce powerful system-changing effects.

Indeed, the 15-M movement (or 'Indignados') embraced pivotal aspects of hegemonic politics in Gramsci's (1971) and Laclau's (2005) sense: the quest for popular unity, the formation of a collective identity, the concentration of force, leadership and political representation. Hence, the movement converged around common ends, practices and signifiers (such as 'the 99%' and 'ordinary people'). It centralized the co-ordination of action in certain 'hubs' (such as Puerta del Sol in Madrid at the beginning). It sought to reach out to broader sectors of the population affected by neoliberal governance, and it strove to initiate processes of deeper democratic transformation ('real

democracy'). But 15-M also reconfigured these political logics and practices in tune with its own egalitarian vision of horizontalist participatory democracy. Hence, the 15-M assemblies and networks took aim at the institutionalized separation of political leaders from the people and the sovereign rule of representatives. The movement set out, instead, to collectivize political representation and leadership, opening them up to ordinary citizens. Moreover, diversity and openness became themselves the principle of unity in its collective action. Open pluralism has been persistently pursued through a multiplicity of norms, practices and organizational choices, such as the network form and the promotion of a certain political culture, which dismisses dogmatic ideologies in order to appeal to all people in their diversity, while it cultivates tolerance, inclusion, critical respect for differences, civility, and an affective politics of care and love among diverse people who struggle in common despite their differences (see Kioupkiolis, 2018).

When the aspiration is a long-term and profound renovation of the political in the direction of a 'real democracy' of the commons and common people, political culture should not be divorced from questions of effective political strategy. Rather than disjoining or opposing the two, the main query should be how a radical democratic culture can inform a powerful strategy for real change. Even if this question is not addressed in Fominaya's profound and detailed study of 15-M, the light this inquiry sheds on the alternative political culture of the movement is highly illuminating for those interested in taking on the challenges of effective strategy.

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## the author

Alexandros Kioupkiolis is Associate Professor of Contemporary Political Theory at Aristotle University, Greece. He has studied Classics and Contemporary Political Theory (Essex MA, Oxford University DPhil). His research interests are focused on radical democracy, the commons, social movements, and the philosophy of freedom. He has directed an ERC COG project on these topics (Heteropolitics, 2017-2020) and has published numerous relevant books and papers. Recent publications include the papers 'Movements post-hegemony: How contemporary collective action transforms hegemonic politics' (*Social Movement Studies*, 17(1), 2018) and the monograph *The common and counter-hegemonic politics* (Edinburgh University Press 2019).
Email: alkioup@polsci.auth.gr

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# Class struggle is like a box of chocolates…

Stevphen Shukaitis

**review of**

Hoffman, M. (2019) *Militant acts: The role of investigations in radical political struggles*. Buffalo: SUNY Press. (HB, pp 204, $22.95, ISBN 978-1-4384-7262-1)

There are a number of debates that if one has the good fortune of living long enough you will find yourself getting periodically sucked back into regardless of whether you want to or not: is this particular form of social practice really art? Who's the best footballer, Messi or Ronaldo? These debates likely will never be resolved. Therein lies much frustration for those who think the purpose of a debate is to come to a resolution. Rather they are interesting precisely because it is through ongoing debate that the changing shape of a particular field is constantly redefined, from our understanding of what the arts are and could be, or, the nature of sporting activities. It is through these discussions that fields are reshaped, expanded, and re-defined.

Similarly, within academic worlds, for anyone with even the vaguest sense of holding on to a politics, there are always ongoing and usually fairly intense arguments over the relationship between theory and practice, and more generally on the often troubled and tenuous connections between radical politics and academic labor. These debates are likely never to end. But keeping in mind the idea of ongoing discussions shaping and redefining a field, this is

perhaps not so much a problem but the way that our worlds change through time.

Marcelo Hoffman's new book *Militant acts* throws us back into these debates yet again. But before we collectively sigh a 'this again' I'd like to suggest there's something intriguing about such discussions in the present. Looking past the title to the subtitle we can immediately see the importance that the concept of 'investigation' has in the book. Arguably we are at a historical point where mentioning the idea of 'conducting an investigation' is far more likely to evoke associations with CSI-style televisual crime investigation, or perhaps the way that we are constantly investigated, monitored, and surveilled (did someone say Cambridge Analytica?). In any case, whatever the association held, it is far more likely to be with something other than radical politics. Hoffman wants to go back to all those moments when the associations with the concept of the investigation were far different, and more associated with attempts to radically transform the world rather than the mechanisms that shore up the existing forms of hegemonic power.

It is precisely this connection that Hoffman's excellent book seeks to explore. As Hoffman frames it, his goal is to 'rescue the investigation in radical political struggles and theories from this position of an obscurity reinforced by the predominance of investigations tied to the imperatives of capital and the state' [2]. I would somewhat disagree with the idea that these are obscure histories, this is in part as these are histories that I have myself been involved in re-visiting and re-invigorating, not to mention a range of articles in *ephemera* that have done likewise.[1] But rather than quibble over the details, instead it is much more sensible to praise Hoffman's work in how it brings together explorations of investigatory practices that have at times been quite influential movements and political organizations involving students, militants, workers, peasants, patients, and feminists across a wide variety of geographical and social settings. These histories are indeed 'dispersed across footnotes located in the density of texts, obscure pamphlets, short-lived newspapers and journals, as well as posthumously published questionnaires

[1] For some examples of this, see *ephemera* Volume 14 Number 3 (2014), Volume 5 Issue 4 (2004), as well as *Constituent imagination* (Shukaitis et al., 2007).

and reports outside voluminous collected works' [3]. *Militant acts* does a quite admirable job of bringing together this wide variety of materials and histories.

One of the most interesting aspects of this book is the way that it approaches investigations primarily as an organizational practice. As Hoffman frames it, his core argument is that militant investigation 'amounts to a highly fluid and adaptable practice whose value resides in the production of forms of collective political subjectivity rather than in the extraction, accumulation, and publication of purely informational contents' [3]. In other words, the primary purpose of the investigation is much more what it creates for those involved in it more so than the information it produces. With this deceptively simple idea Hoffman moves the stakes of what is important throughout the book.

The majority of the histories explored here, not surprisingly, can either be understood as part of a broader history of Marxist thought and politics, or having some connection to it. But regardless of what particular political milieu they emerged from, Hoffman argues that differing and disparate forms of investigation share a common trait of being based on 'an implicit or explicit skepticism with regard to official representations of workers and peasants' [27]. It is this skepticism about the official story regarding workers' conditions that underpins finding other ways to approach, understand, and intervene in particular social and historical contexts. But these circumstances vary widely, as 1970s France is clearly different from the 1860s UK, or Russia in the early part of the 20th century. Based on this Hoffman argues that there can be no universal method approach to militant investigation which can thus be repeated and replicated elsewhere. Rather there is a close connection of how investigations are shaped by the context and political background from which they emerge; they are not pre-given but 'flow, rather, from the political orientation of the investigation and determine its realization' [7].

*Militant acts* is thus structured around exploring the history of militant investigations in these varying contexts: what conditions it emerged from, how it responded to them, what it did for the involved at the time, etc.. The main sections of the book move from Marx's use of questionnaires to Lenin's, followed by adaptions and updates of these practices by French militants Socialisme ou Barbarie, the Johnson–Forest Tendency, autonomist Marxist

currents in Italy (Wright, 2003), and by French Maoists, and by Foucault and the Prison Information Group. Each of these histories present a different set of circumstances that are responded to as well as difficulties, which often led to the practices being abandoned after a time. Hoffman suggests that dynamics of failure 'figures as a central and powerful leitmotif in the literature on militant investigations' [14] as practitioners expand and rethink what they're doing to address the limitations of existing forms of organizing.

Not surprisingly, Hoffman starts his history of investigation with Marx's use of questionnaires to scrutinize workers' conditions. It is Marx's work that is the most noted and drawn from in subsequent versions of militant investigation. This is somewhat ironic given that measured in terms of response rate to the questionnaire, very little, if anything, is known to have been produced. But this is perhaps not the problem it might seem at first. Hoffman emphasizes that for Marx, as well as many taking inspiration from him, the main point of the investigation is to focus on the self-activity of workers, and more particularly on the lack of comprehensive knowledge workers often have about their own conditions. This focus on self-activity coupled with the limits of current knowledge is meant to nudge workers on to investigating and shaping their working conditions. Thus, for Hoffman Marx's questionnaire can be understood as 'exercise in consciousness-raising' [34]. But if the main focus is conducting an investigation as an organizational practice, then it is more about what it produces for the workers taking part and not the information produced: 'success did not necessarily hinge on written responses from them so much as the far more diffuse reception of the questions' [37].

This is an interesting contrast with how the much less known example of how investigations were taken up and used by Lenin very briefly before being abandoned. Lenin formulated an approach using questionnaires during his time in St Petersburg, though he ended up finding this a disappointing source of information gathering. For Lenin investigation thus was much more an informational practice, which explains why he ended up disappointed with it, and thus abandoned it quickly. If there were better and more comprehensive sources of information about factory conditions than what the surveys could produce, why not use them? As Hoffman frames this turn away from

investigations, for Lenin there 'is no need to instigate a process of consciousness-raising among workers through questions directed toward them because the answers to these questions already reside elsewhere' [42].

This more informational approach can be contrasted to how the US based Trotskyist group the Johnson-Forrest Tendency shifted their approach away from surveys and questionnaires in favor of soliciting worker's writing about their experience. In many ways this follows logically from the focus on workers' self-activity, and rooting that in the workers' concrete experiences. This approach was thought of as addressing the limitations of the questionnaire. This shift indeed meant losing some of the 'social scientific' aura of the survey, reoriented the investigation in a way even more focused on workers subjectivity, rather than attempting to provide the forms of comprehensive knowledge that Lenin was looking for. It also had the added benefit of producing writing that was arguable much more interesting to read and engage with, as well as shifting and potentially changing the role between workers and intellectuals. Hoffman suggests that while the Johnson-Forrest Tendency failed in its effort to undercut the divisions between workers and intellectuals, they nonetheless did manage to succeed in reworking it, instead aspiring to invert that relationship. In the materials produced it is workers' voices that are emphasized rather than intellectuals', including critiques of theoretical materials written by workers, i.e. workers reflecting on and critiquing theory rather than only serving as the basis for theorization.

If Trotskyist and post-Trotskyist groups tended to move towards workers' narratives rather than surveys, the employment of militant investigations in the Italian autonomist movements tended to embrace a more hybrid approach. While they shared a focus on using investigation more as an organizing practice, and as a form of consciousness-raising, there were a significant number of figures taking their inspiration and methodological approach from sociology. It was sociology that was argued to provide rigorous tools for developing conceptual frameworks adequate to the ways that forms of class struggle were developing in Italy during 1960s and 1970s. Hoffman describes how the publications of the Italian autonomists 'served as the intellectual space for the most extensive reactivation of Marx's workers' inquiry in the postwar period' [68]. The embrace of workers' inquiry by the

autonomists was largely inspired by the work of both the Johnson-Forrest Tendency and Socialisme ou Barbarie, though they tended to be both appreciative and critical of the use of workers' narratives.

In the autonomist movements there were contrasting views of the possible role of sociology as a tool in developing class struggle. The more sociologically oriented sections tended to want to move back towards using questionnaires and formal interviews.[2] This differed from what Hoffman describes as a vision of investigation that was 'a more militant one based on questions formulated through the interactions between researchers *and* workers' [71]. This more militant approach carried on the work that the Johnson-Forrest Tendency undertook in attempting to undermine, or even get rid of, the distinctions and dividing line between researchers and researched-subjects. Interestingly Hoffman observes that many of the most important theorizations of workers' inquiry appear in the autonomists' publications, although with a lag of several years after they had adopted these practices as their own [72].

The final section of Hoffman's book looks at how investigation as a political-research practice was adopted by French Maoists during the 1970s, in particular the Prison Information Group. He suggests that these groups and formations were more transversal in terms of their social composition, and this contributed to their attempts to bring together and fuse together the different sources and practices of investigation. In the more Maoist inspired conception of investigation the main focus shifted to utilizing it as a tool for testing the preparedness of emerging party formation for its organizational work. In other words, conducting investigations became part of party building, which is to say a particular kind of organizational practice, one more tied to producing specifics forms of organization and subjectivity. Hoffman observes that by drawing on Mao's wider ranging conception of investigation it became possible for their groups to find ways to employ investigations as tools working with populations significantly outside the usual remit of workers' inquiry, namely with groups including prisoners and psychiatric patients. In this broader Maoist-inspired conception, investigations 'served

[2] For more on this, see Shukaitis (2013).

as a means of generating knowledge about poor peasants and organizing them in the process' [86].

Foucault's role in the development of investigation as political-research practice is described primarily as a synthetic one: he participated in supporting inquiries around prisons, taking part in ways that served to fuse together different approaches to investigations. Thus Foucault drew on pre-Marxist approaches, serving to 'historicize the investigation in stunningly novel ways' at the time 'he practiced it in equally novel ways in the streets of Paris'; based on this Hoffman claims that Foucault is the only major theorist to 'have *simultaneously* historicized and practiced the investigation' [104].

The prison investigations conducted through the Prison Information Group were described and theorized as an intolerance investigation meaning that their stated purpose was to increase attention to and intolerance of existing prison conditions. This was understood as being quite distinct from a more sociological approach, or one based around curiosity. Rather investigations were meant to function as practical forms of solidarity within political organizing, treating prisoners more as comrades rather than objects of investigation. When attempting to make sense of why the prison investigations were much more successful in terms of response and materials produced when compared to previous iterations, Hoffman notes that this can largely be understood as a byproduct of drastically different temporalities of prison life compared to factories. Or, to be blunter about it, they had higher response rates because prisoners had more time available to them for responding (and a general lack of other things to do).

After describing how these more synthetic approaches to investigation were used through the 1960s and early 1970s, Hoffman chooses to conclude the main narrative of the book. There is a certain logic to this as the movements that he focuses on went into decline throughout the 1970s. Hoffman suggests that the more restricted concept of workers' inquiry likewise became less used during this period, though it also informed ranges of practices going beyond the factory walls (such as those informed by the autonomist concept of the social factory). Hoffman seems to agree with the argument that the decline of

the militant investigations during the 1970s is connected with the 'the hollowing out of the working class as the subject of social emancipation' [134].

In more recent years, there have been efforts to revive militant investigation as a political-research practice. But these attempts, while drawing from the histories Hoffmann discusses, have also tended to depart from them in notable ways. There has been much more attention paid to the dynamics of cultural and affective labor, more so than to Fordist or industrial forms of labor. While this strikes me as a fair characterization, I would argue that in *Militant acts* Hoffman has shown that there is much to learn from these histories of militant investigation, not as models to be copied, but rather as examples of attempts to forge new tools for responding to ever-changing but always demanding circumstances

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## the author

Stevphen Shukaitis is an Academic Worker. He likes to do things with his friends, some of which end up making books: https://www.minorcompositions.info.
Email: sshuka@essex.ac.uk

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# A genealogy of command

Enrico Beltramini

## review of

Agamben, G. (2019) *Creation and anarchy: The work of art and the religion of capitalism*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. (HB, pp. 84, $16.00, ISBN 978-1-503-60836-8)

## Introduction

Giorgio Agamben is a household name in management theory (Ek et al., 2007; Banerjee, 2008; Cunha et al., 2010; O'Doherty et al., 2013; Beltramini, 2020). Agamben's (2011) recent book, *The kingdom and the glory* (henceforth *The kingdom*), has received praise and criticism from management theorists, yet its impact cannot be underestimated. Agamben's theoretical work has broad historical philosophical ambitions, is unapologetically controversial, and attempts to diagnose and show the origins of the malaise that is affecting liberal democracies today. As far as management scholarship is concerned, *The kingdom* is effective in bringing theory back into the midst of discussions concerning organization and government. Alongside the classical paradigms of authoritarian political theories, Agamben also senses an 'economic' paradigm in which the governmental work of the sovereign (the authority, the king) is carried out by an almost autonomous and self-legitimizing bureaucracy.

The book under review, *Creation and anarchy: The work of art and the religion of capitalism* (henceforth, *Creation and anarchy*), although published later than *The kingdom*, is in terms of content a prologue to *The kingdom*. In the latter, Agamben works in the dominion of theology to offer, as the title of his book claims, a theological genealogy of economy and government. The key passage is the semantic shift of the term 'economy' from the being of God to His activity. In Christianity, three divine persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – constitute a single and unique God. This is, of course, the doctrine of the Trinity. The 'economy' is initially the intrapersonal activity within the triune God. Then 'economy' is a term used to mean the divine action, that is, the way in which a metaphysical being could causally influence the unfolding of history. Divine action, divine government, divine economy, salvation history, history of salvation, providence – all are synonyms for the notion that God is constantly at work governing the world; if He stops for a single instance, the world (His creation) would collapse. Once secularized, the notion of divine action, or providence, is reframed in terms of the 'invisible hand' of the market.

## On the problem of reading Agamben

Agamben may be a household name in management theory, yet readers of management scholarship often show symptoms of exasperation, or at least frustration, when dealing with his texts. The same reaction occurs with the texts of his commentators and interpreters, in the sense that they both attempt to provide readers possessing little or no familiarity with Agamben's writings some point of entry for exploring them, or in that they offer a critical analysis of his works for those already well acquainted with Agamben's thought. What troubles some of management readership about Agamben is his apparent propensity to indulge in long linguistic analyses, provide innovative meaning to words that seems to have one already, and coin new terms that might be too complex for some readers (i.e., 'potential-of-not'—see below). The final result is a dense, undeniably erudite style that requires a decent knowledge of Greek and Latin, substantial philological skills, and familiarity with philosophical complexities. Not your regular cup of tea, for sure. Despite the appearances, however, the difficulty of Agamben has little

to do with the complexity of his language. He is a precise and gifted author in Italian, something that translation often fails to deliver. He is a poet turned philosopher and has maintained a poet's love and respect for language. As a philosopher, he shares with another philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein, the idea that the scope of philosophical work is to frame problems related to the meaning of words in terms of questions. Thus, his linguistic analyses of the terms are not, as someone may think, digressions into detail; his inclination for coining new terms is not an unnecessary mastery; both reveal a degree of granularity in Agamben's thought that perfectly matches his method of analysis.

His method of analysis is that of genealogies, that is, history of concepts. His work consists in a series of genealogical essays in which a key concept is investigated historically. In the book under review, the concept in consideration is 'command' seen through the lens of the relationship between potential and action in the domain of power. The book deals with the relationship of power and powerlessness (with is not absence of power but rather inoperative power). According to Agamben, a hidden but fundamental relationship exists between operative power and inoperative power. It is a void—a blank—and this empty space is constitutive of power. I will return to this later. Back to Agamben's method: for Agamben, a genealogy is not simply the carrying over of, for example, a political concept (i.e., command) within the realm of politics. Oh, no. He loves to include in his analysis fields of studies that are usually neglected and to move into different, distant, apparently unrelated areas of interest: from classical philology to modern jurisprudence, from ancient Greek to modern German, from theology to art history to poetics and ontology. This massive, and honestly intimidating, display of erudition is functional to his project. Agamben's project is a subversive one: to change political theory (or at least some elements of the liberal political theory), not from within, i.e., changing the theory, but through a return to the philosophical and theological sources of that political theory, and start over. Agamben aims to change political theory by returning to its (philosophical and theological) fundamentals and, via a critical analysis of these fundamentals, develop another theory that better matches today's challenges. He thinks that political thought and political theory are derivates

of much greater conversations. That is why in his books he engages only with the founders of the philosophical discourse itself, the Scripture, and the giants of Christian theology. In sum, Agamben's project is, simply and plainly, to rebuild politics upon a new foundation. In a 2004 interview conducted by Ulrich Raulff in Rome, Agamben explained that he works with paradigms. And he added: 'this kind of analysis should not be confused with a sociological investigation' (Raulff, 2004). With 'paradigms,' therefore, the reader should not think of the sociological paradigms of Burrell and Morgan (1979), in which management scholars trained in social science studied the implicit assumptions of sociologists' organization theories. In Agamben, the topics under investigation are the implicit assumptions of the political sphere of Western civilization. The magnitude of Agamben's vision is so different that, I believe, Burrell and Morgan's sociological paradigms for him would be considered nothing more than variants of the same paradigm. Agamben's strategy may explain the sense of estrangement experienced by certain readers of management scholarship in addressing his works. Trained in social sciences, management scholars are used to deal with other disciplines in terms of assimilation; they are skilled professionals in the realm of sociological investigations and like to integrate insights from other disciplines into their own. Contrary to this, Agamben is disinterested in expanding his discipline; he does not engage in a work of edification of theories. He studies the foundations of the edifices (i.e., the roots of paradigms).

So, what to do with Agamben in management? It depends on how readers answer this question: do they believe in the notion that ontological assumptions are intimately related to economic ones? To put it differently, can they see a *fil rouge*, an intrinsic logic, between management, a modern phenomenon, and its ancient philosophical and theological roots? If one answers 'yes' to this question, then the study of management becomes the analysis of the concept of management in world philosophical and theological history. In this context, reading Agamben can be highly beneficial. In sum, Agamben is a helpful read for those who feel exhorted to rethink their notion of what management is for the reason that their current notion is not working. Agamben is helpful also for those who are not urged by a compelling impetus

to come up with an immediate remedy or replacement, but prefer to build from scratch. In fact, Agamben is a natural companion to those who believe that the edifice of management needs not just to change but to fall. Then one can start over and build a new edifice. That said, I now move to the review of *Creation and anarchy*.

## Coexistence of creation and potential of creation

*Creation and anarchy* is a collection of essays; together, these essays contribute significantly to Agamben's body of work on 'creation' and present the readers with the demonstration of his commitment to reframing this crucial concept. The book is the English translation of Agamben's (2017) *Creazione e anarchia: L'opera nell'età della religione capitalista* from Neri Pozza press. The Italian manuscript is actually a compilation of the reviewed versions of five lectures, originally delivered at the Mendrisio Academy of Architecture (Switzerland) between October 2012 and April 2013. Parts of the Italian manuscript had already been translated into English and included (with some variations) in Agamben's other writings, such as *The fire and the tale*, *The use of bodies*, and *The end of the poem*. The English translation, I assume, received approval from Agamben himself. Adam Kotsko translated the original Italian term *potenza* as 'potential' and *potere* as 'power;' he also translates *essere-in-opera* as 'being-at-work.' I will return to the issues of translation at the end of this review.

The book maintains the original structure of the lectures from Mendrisio: five short but intense chapters, each focusing on a single subject. Chapter one is about what constitutes a work of art or, the relationship between the artist and the work of art. Here Agamben proposes an archeology of the work of art (this is the title of the chapter), in which he explains that a transformation occurred in art from it being a practice to being a creative activity, and in the artist, from a craftsman to more of a contemplative. For the Greeks, the more elevated act is that which has its own goal within itself. According to Aristotle, the *ergon* (the work) somehow expropriates the agent of its *energeia* (being-at-work). With medieval theology, the situation is reversed: Thomas Aquinas, in fact, compares the creative action of God, who creates according to the

ideas that exist in his mind, to the creation of the architect: the artist is now configured as a creative individual and thus subtracts the primacy at work, which therefore presents itself as a residue of the architect's activity.

After classic philosophy and medieval theology, the third moment of archeology is the twentieth century. In chapter two, already published in 2013 as *Il fuoco e il racconto* (English translation: *The fire and the tale*), Agamben investigates the act of creation or, the relationship between having a faculty and bringing it to expression. In his view, an act of creation has little to do with knowledge or habit [22] and more to do with the dialectic between creation and creation-of-not (my words), that is, the potential (of creation) that does not become an act (creation). Similarly, the potential is the result of a dialectic between potential and potential-of-not. The potential-of-not is a suspension of the potential, which nevertheless remains intact [23]; in his words, 'there is a form or presence of what is not in action, and this privative presence is potential' [17]. What Agamben is trying to do here is to articulate a concept of 'power' that is both action and potential of action. Power is at once operative and inoperative and always potentially operative. The operative/inoperative question innervates, like a hidden red line, many of the pages of this chapter: power is defined by both its exercise and non-exercise and every instance of power is therefore also the impotence of the power itself (in relation to itself). In brief, for Agamben the inoperative exists, and this means that creation cannot be thought only from the point of view of the operative (the potential actualized, the potential becoming creation), but also from the point of view of the inoperative (the potential-not-to, i.e., the potential that is not turned into creation). In Agamben's words: 'If every potential is both potential to be and potential not to be, the passage to the act can take place only by transferring [also] one's own potential-not-to into action' [19].

Chapter three, a short and summarized version of a chapter included in *The use of bodies*, is about poverty or, the relationship between humans and ownership. In the previous chapter, Agamben sketches the character of the inoperative human being, the being who frees him/herself from 'biological and social destiny and from any predetermined task' [27] or, 'a living being without work' [25]. In chapter three, he discusses a variant of this character,

the living being without ownership. If the artist is defined in relation to the inoperative, for Agamben poverty should be addressed in terms of the inappropriable (this last word is the title of the chapter). Here is Agamben:

> I would therefore like to propose this definition of poverty: poverty is the relation with an inappropriable: to be poor means: to maintain oneself in relation with an innappropriable good. [37]

In brief, poverty is seen in relation with inappropriable goods; goods that cannot be appropriated, such as the landscape. Thus, being unable to appropriate is an exhibition of the potential to appropriate, which is not only transferred to the act, but turns in on itself. To put it differently, being able not to appropriate is a resistance internal to appropriation, which prevents the latter from being exhausted in the act and directs it to turn in on itself, to become capable of its own inappropriateness, that is, poverty.

Chapter four, 'What is a command', is focused on the relationship between 'beginning' and 'command.' Agamben is interested in the etymology of the Greek term *archè*, which is the word with which the ancient Greeks indicated both 'origin' and 'command'. This dual meaning is, for Agamben, revealing. He argues: 'In our culture the *archè*, the origin, is always already the command; the beginning is always also the principle that governs and commands' [52]. Here Agamben presents not one but two points: first, the beginning is the command; second, the development of the command:

> the origin is what commands and governs not only the birth, but also the growth, development (…). In a word: the history of that to which it has given origins. [52]

It means that the command perpetuates itself as government throughout the history of that to which it has given origins. To put it differently, it means that creation and management are closely entwined. This is the prelude to *The kingdom*.

Chapter five is about capitalism as religion (the title of this chapter). Here Agamben recovers a contribution made in *The kingdom*, that is, Father and Son (two persons of the Trinity) are not a hierarchical relationship to each other; they are equal. When placed in the realm of political theory, this

internal relationship between the persons of the Trinity sets the relationship between sovereignty and government: sovereignty (Father) and government (Son) do not depend on each other, but they are two polarities in a dynamic, economic relationship. The Son, the government, does not depend on the Father, but He is anarchic himself, that is, He has neither origin nor foundation in the Father. In Greek, in fact, *anarchos* stands for 'without *archè*.' It is the 'economic' paradigm in which the governmental work of the sovereign is carried out by the relatively independent and self-referencing bureaucracy, a concept I mentioned at the beginning of this review. To this previous contribution, Agamben adds a discussion of the religious background that provides meaning to the economic structures of capitalist society. The first of these structures is that of 'credit,' which Agamben rightly traces back to Latin, as a past participle of the verb 'to believe'. Credit is precisely a belief, therefore a faith, which has been behind the idea of credit: 'Businesses, to be able to continue to produce, must in essence mortgage in advance ever greater quantities of labor and future production' [71]. In brief, capitalism is a religion. Agamben ends the book with this contribution.

*Creation and anarchy* is a small but extremely complex book raising several and important arguments. I will limit my comment to three distinct points: (1) creation and management; (2) the implication for management scholarship; and, (3) translation.

*Creation and management*

In *The kingdom*, Agamben links the economic character of the divine action (i.e., providence, divine government, salvation history) to the economic character of the intrapersonal activity within the triune God. In *Creation and anarchy*, this link between providence and Trinity is replaced by another link, this time between providence and creation. This replacement clarifies and solidifies both arguments, i.e. (1) the general argument that modern government is a derivate of Christian theology, and (2) the more specific point that modern government finds its raison *d'être* in a specific theology of creation. In modern times, one typically thinks of creation—of the Bible—as a moment. In the beginning, God created it all. Modern minds have lost the original sense of the creation in the Greek and Semitic sense, that is, creation

is always creation to bring order. And if order is lost or even challenged, God re-creates the world. Creation is not a moment, but a never-ending activity of creation and order building. Creation is a beginning that never remains in the past because it maintains control, i.e., government, over the destiny of its creation. In the *Book of genesis*, God creates twice in the first two chapters, then recreates humanity after the Fall, then offers the Cosmic Covenant after the Deluge; then He reorganizes creation after the episode of the Tower of Babel, calls Abraham to a new covenant, and so on. God does not create and leave His creation to itself. This line of thought allows Agamben to make his point stronger and clearer: modern government is a byproduct of Christian theology, more specifically of the Christian theology of creation.

*Implication for management scholarship*

In *Creation and anarchy* the central contribution, as far as management scholarship is concerned, is the relationship between command and reason. By reconstructing the archeology of command, Agamben shows how western ontology presents a dual face from the beginning. On the one hand, it is *logos*, that is, logical and assertive speech; on the other, it reflects the nature of the command. In Agamben's words, there are (1) the 'ontologies of the apophantic assertion' [59], i.e., those logical and linguistic structures that are based on the true and/or false alternative, and (2) the 'ontology of the command' [59]. Religion and law belong to the latter, while philosophy resorts above all to *logos*. While *logos* is persuasive argument, that is, reason, which limits the chaos and ungovernability of the world, the command is expressed in true power.

In *Creation and anarchy*, Agamben points out that (1) the ontology of command has supplanted the ontology of *logos* and (2) that 'the ontological relationship between language and world here is not asserted (…) but commanded' [59]. Order is delivered by command, not by assertion. In a nutshell, management is power, not logic. In *The kingdom*, Agamben links the anarchic character of the Son to the anarchic nature of government. In *Creation and anarchy*, he connects creation to management, not in the sense of persuasion but power: the one who begins or who originates creation also governs it by command. It is in this sense that the reference of the book's title

to creation and anarchy should be understood: the Agambenian anarchy is to be understood as an absence of principle (founder) in connection with a will of command. It is possible at this point to see through Agamben's dense prose the audacious and subversive picture of modern society that he paints in this and in previous books. Agamben, in fact, sees anarchy, understood as the absence of foundation, in relationship with power, so that power is anarchic, because it bases its justification on itself; it needs no external basis.

It is another way to proclaim the existence of autonomous and self-legitimizing government. In *The kingdom*, that government was seen in terms of bureaucracy; in *Creation and anarchy*, that bureaucracy is characterized as power. Is it possible to free creativity, the act of creation, from the constraint of command? How can one escape this bureaucracy? If I understand correctly *Creation and anarchy*'s first four chapters, one can escape through a lack of correspondence to ownership (chapter three) and to the command (chapter four). In fact, refusing ownership in practice means claiming the possibility of a human existence completely outside the law [30], and refusing command in reality means claiming the possibility of a human existence completely outside power. Once government is unrelated to ownership and command, the ontological structures of the system itself begin to falter. As Agamben puts it, 'a power ceases to exist (...) when it leaves off giving orders' [55]. To put it differently, one is really free when he/she has no legal right and does not correspond to command.

Finally, a note about the translation: I believe the term 'potency' for *potenza* would have served the English translation better than 'potential,' particularly in the context of *potenza* that is both potential and potential-of-not. I think potency-of-not (to do or be) better recovers the original meaning of *potenza* (from Latin: *potentia*, derived from *potens -entis* 'powerful') in the sense of 'potenza-di-non'.

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## the author

Enrico Beltramini is Senior Lecturer in the Department of Religious Studies at Notre Dame de Namur University in California. He holds doctoral degrees in Business, History, and Theology. Dr. Beltramini teaches and researches in the fields of theology (theology of religions, theology of technology, Latin patristics) and management theory. His work on management has been published in academic journals including *AI & Society*, *ephemera, Philosophy and Technology*, and *Philosophy of Management*.
Address: 1500 Ralston Avenue, Belmont CA 94002, United States.
Email: ebeltramini AT ndnu.edu