Laclau, the Populist Mind, and Competing Populists. Elaborations on Cathexis and Alienation[1]

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Abstract: While acknowledging Laclau's invaluable contributions to understanding populism from a discursive perspective, I will illustrate that his framework holds a latent psycho-political dimension that this essay lifts out and elaborates. Guided by the simple question, what are the characteristics of a populist mind, I will assess this latent dimension via an elaboration of Laclau's adaptation of cathexis (emotional investment) to the issue of identity formation. Moreover, I will refer to the case of competing populist discourses and leaders as a means of highlighting the importance of a psycho-political approach to populism. Through insights drawn from *On Populist Reason* (OPR) and *The Rhetorical Foundations of Society* (RFS), I will bring Laclau's framework closer to the reality of competing populists by developing the latent psycho-political dimension of his theory on populism. I will illustrate that in the context of constitutive heterogeneity, the formation of a populist identity as the workings of a populist mind, is something affected by other psychological factors surrounding cathexis, the impact of pre-existing identities, and a person's dis/alienation with political actors and objects. Overall, this study seeks to connect Laclau's framework with contemporary research on populist psychology, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of populism that links discourse, rhetoric, cognition, emotions, and behavior without rejecting constitutive heterogeneity and contingent hegemonic struggles.

Keywords: Alienation; Laclau; Populism; Power; Psychology.

ENG Laclau, la mente populista y los populistas en competencia. Elaboraciones sobre la catexis y la alienación

Resumen: Si bien reconozco las valiosas contribuciones de Laclau para comprender el populismo desde una perspectiva discursiva, ilustraré que su marco teórico contiene una dimensión psico-política latente que este ensayo extrae y elabora. Guiado por la simple pregunta de cuáles son las características de una mente populista, evaluaré esta dimensión latente a través de una elaboración de la adaptación que hace Laclau de la catexis (inversión emocional) al tema de la formación de identidad. Además, me referiré al caso de los discursos y líderes populistas en competencia como medio para resaltar la importancia de un enfoque psico-político del populismo. A través de ideas extraídas de *On Populist Reason* (OPR) y *The Rhetorical Foundations of Society* (RFS), acercaré el marco teórico de Laclau a la realidad de los populistas en competencia mediante el desarrollo de la dimensión psico-política latente de su teoría sobre el populismo. Ilustraré que en el contexto de la heterogeneidad constitutiva, la formación de una identidad populista como el funcionamiento de una mente populista, es algo afectado por otros factores psicológicos que rodean la catexis, el impacto de identidades preexistentes y la des/alienación de una persona con actores y objetos políticos. En general, este estudio busca conectar el marco teórico de Laclau con la investigación contemporánea sobre psicología populista, contribuyendo a una comprensión más completa del populismo que vincula el discurso, la retórica,

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la cognición, las emociones y el comportamiento sin rechazar la heterogeneidad constitutiva y las luchas hegemónicas contingentes.
Palabras clave: Alienación; Laclau; Populismo; Poder; Psicología.

Summary: Popular Identity and the Irreducible: Laclau and Constitutive Heterogeneity. A Psycho-political Approach to Popular Identity: Elaborations on Cathexis. Power, Hegemony, and Alienation. Watching Populists Compete: Some Concluding Remarks for an Unfinished Project. References.

Why do citizens support one populist over another? There are cases where there are clear lines between populists and non-populists. However, beyond the usual suspects, such as Donald Trump, Viktor Orbán, or where there are rival populist movements of contrasting shades and colors, the question becomes more salient. In other words, in the context of competing populists, why should a citizen identify with an image of a People —its characteristics, interests, power, demands etc.— over another? Why should one representation of the "People"[2] resonate more than another? Yes, it is probably because one populist is more "powerful" than the other. But what would account for such a power, especially when thin margins separate electoral results? To address these questions, we turn to the political psyche of individual citizens confronting differing populist discourses.

I begin with two cases. Indonesian politics since 2014 was defined, first by a heated competition between two distinct populist discourses before it turned into a counter-polarization campaign. On one hand, there is a reformist populist discourse gravitating around Joko Widodo (Jokowi) and on the other, an authoritarian populist one with Prabowo Subianto (Mietzner, 2009, 2014, 2015). Both were critical of their predecessor Susilo Yudhoyono, and both promised to resolve the problems caused by the failures of his administration. However, while Jokowi vowed to sustain liberal democratic institutions, Prabowo Subianto vowed to tear them down, appealing to Indonesia's authoritarian legacy during the post-war period. Thin margins separated these two during the 2014 and 2019 presidential elections and despite Jokowi emerging victorious in both, his rival remained prominent enough to be appointed as minister of defense by 2019, hailing Jokowi's eventual authoritarian turn (Power, 2018).

By 2024, Prabowo Subianto won the presidential elections with Jokowi's son serving as his vice-president. This came after a much publicized counter-polarization campaign that solidified the alliance between the two via a discourse of national cohesion and protecting democracy—the latter was based on Prabowo Subianto changing his formerly authoritarian rhetoric. If we consider this series of events as a result of hard-nosed political maneuverings by the ruling elite, then we will not be wrong. But such an explanation could not capture the entire picture, especially the minds of those who threw their support, first to either of these two and eventually, to their populist rhetoric of unity. What happened in the psyche of their supporters? How could they make sense of a seemingly dissonant series of events while remaining active during elections instead of simply withdrawing out of confusion or dismay?

Another case is the Philippines during the 2010 and 2016 presidential elections. The 2010 presidential elections marked a victory for liberal reformism. However, it was also a competition between two populists running on similar pro-poor platforms. On one hand stood Manuel Villar, former senate president and real estate tycoon whose pro-poor platform was based on his image as a self-made man. On the other, Joseph Estrada whose presidency was cut short when he was ousted after graft and corruption scandals and a subsequent impeachment trial. His candidacy in 2010 was based on a pro-poor platform tied to a politics of redemption for his supporters. This combination made his campaign distinct, with his supporters seeing it as a means for reclaiming the power that the middle and upper classes stole by ousting their champion (Kusaka, 2019).

Nonetheless, both lost to Benigno Aquino III and his liberal reformist platform that resonated with widespread discontent against the previous administration. Despite this, votes for both Estrada and Villar amounted to 41.67% against Aquino's 42.08%. It was a thin margin suggesting a strong pro-poor populist tendency that eventually morphed into another set of variants. For the 2016 presidential elections, it was a three-way between differing populist tendencies. Two of them appealed to grievances against poverty and bad governance, while Rodrigo Duterte conveyed a message of hate against crime, anti-oligarchic sentiments, and a general promise of hope and progress through iron-fisted rule (Curato, 2016; Thompson, 2016). Duterte won with 39.1% of the vote with the other two populists gaining 34.1% between them. The rest is a history with Rodrigo Duterte enjoying high levels of support throughout his administration, with a violent regime revealing the hidden flaws of the Filipino political psyche.

How can one make sense of the cases of Indonesia and the Philippines? If we say that the discourse gravitating around one populist is more resonant than the other, then we must ask, what makes a populist discourse more resonant? This question drags us back to the reality of variations and complexities, and if

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[2]   I am referring to claims made on behalf of and for the People as well as characterizations of the People as a collective.

we try to find its essence beyond mere description and categorization, we can end up with the issue of the populist mind.

From the preliminary examination above, the populist mind appears as deceivingly simple as both an issue and a phenomenon. It seems that a populist mind can easily support a discourse containing its hopes and grievances—a mind that is highly vulnerable to demagogues. Works on this matter have yielded findings regarding its relationship with the following: (1) the allure of authoritarianism (Covington, 2018; Subedi & Scott, 2021), (2) the discontent, anxieties and even fantasies emanating from the impacts of economic crises (Hawkins, Rovira Kaltwasser & Andreadis, 2020; Kinnvall & Svensson, 2022; Magni, 2017; Margalit, 2019; Rhodes-Purdy, Navarre & Utych, 2021), and (3) a sense of alienation and disempowerment towards an incumbent regime constituted by either "evil" or "depoliticized" elites and their political parties (Berger, 2017; Elchardus & Spruyt, 2016; Erisen et al., 2021; Fieschi & Heywood, 2004; Freeden, 2017; Geurkink, Zaslove, Sluiter, & Jacobs, 2020; Jacobs, Akkerman & Zaslov, 2018; Schulte-Cloos & Leininger, 2022; Spruyt, Keppens & Van Droogenbroeck, 2016; Steenvoorden & Harteveld, 2018; Stoker, 2006). In general, the literature on populism's ideational dimension surveys the various psychological factors affecting the formation of meaning (cf. Chilton, 2017; Komáromy, Rooduijn & Schumacher, 2024; Rovira Kaltwasser, 2021) with attitudes serving as the primary unit of analysis for the populist mind.

This is where Ernesto Laclau's seminal contributions become relevant. His discursive turn in the study of populism lies at the core of studies on populist rhetoric. His emphasis on demands and grievances as components of populist discourse, especially against incumbent elites and state institutions had influenced empirical works that focused on populist attitudes. However, why consider his framework from a psycho-political perspective? What do we have to gain from this? As I will illustrate in the succeeding section, revisiting Laclau's insights from a psycho-political perspective allows us to both examine the limitations of his frameworks while allowing his more nuanced insights to inform a literature that remains stuck at the level of attitudes in measuring the populist mind.

Regarding the limitations of Laclau's theory of populism, I note that his response to developments in crowd psychology, though insightful was not pursued towards the question of agency (i.e. decision-making and cognitive processes leading to behavior) in favor of both his discursive approach and his aversion towards sociological and methodologically individualist approaches to populism. Furthermore, his analysis of cathexis and its role in identity formation leaves much for future inquiries. This renders Laclau's political psychology as a latent feature of his theory of populism with the question of agency being assumed away in his framework along with any space for examining the cognitive processes behind populist discourse and articulation.

One can endlessly speak of demands and how they are consolidated into materials for populist discourse —constructing a long list of grievances and chains of equivalences between such grievances. However, certain questions remain even if we assume that variations and similarities in experience account for the convergences and divergences among demands. How can a mind become a populist one, and how could it end up identifying more or less with one populist discourse and not another? Furthermore, how can a person be convinced that populist politics is necessary? Focusing on populist attitudes in trying to address these questions merely scratches the surface of the populist mind. We still have lingering questions of values (or ideals and how we want them realized) and beliefs (what we know and consider as true or false). By taking these other factors into account, we can arrive at a more comprehensive picture of the populist mind.

To this end, we go back to Laclau's insights on cathexis and identity formation in the context of constitutive heterogeneity. By building upon these, we can analyze the minds confronting, shaping, and being shaped in turn by populist discourse instead of merely construing the latter as a game of leader and followers, representatives and represented, and I daresay, rulers and ruled.[3] Such an approach could not easily make sense of competing leaders, representatives, and rulers who are joined at the hip through similar and simultaneous appeals to the People. Thus through insights drawn from *On Populist Reason* (OPR) and *The Rhetorical Foundations of Society* (RFS), I will bring Laclau's framework closer to the reality of competing populists by developing the latent psycho-political dimension of his theory on populism.

Is this a deviation from Laclau? No, despite my disagreement with Laclau's apprehensions over the sociological and methodologically individualist approaches to populism,[4] I share his core category of constitutive heterogeneity and his overall analytical thrust towards a more holistic and non-essentialist understanding of populism. Hence, this essay is more of an addendum to Laclau's theory. And as an attempt to build on his contributions, I return to the relationship between collective and individual popular identity— a relationship built on a blurred line between the individual and collectives, and mediated by the dynamics between representation, endless hegemonic struggles, constitutive heterogeneity, and demand/s.

What are the characteristics of a populist mind? To address this question, I raise two more, and the succeeding sections below will be organized accordingly to set up my premises. On one hand, what is an

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[3]   One of the reviewers pointed out that the article forgot that the agents in Laclau's framework are leaders and the people— and to an extent, this was an apt observation. It was probably because I gave one of the contemporary fathers of radical democracy the benefit of the doubt instead of simply saying that his framework is but a landmark on a road to popular dictatorship wherein "the people" is but an optimistic veil for "the led".

[4]   Recent developments in the psycho-political and sociological literatures on populism have rendered his dismissal of these approaches as an obstacle to a more holistic understanding of populism that establishes a link between discourse, rhetoric, and behavior. From the literature on the political psychology of populism as well as Laclau's own appeal to social agents in the OPR, I will assume that rhetoric must be received and processed by someone for us to call it either resonant or rejected, and discourse requires an exploration of agency if its analysis seeks to reflect reality.

appropriate analytical approach to a populist mind? By developing the latent psycho-political dimension of Laclau's theory of populism and supplementing his adaptation of cathexis on the issue of identity formation, I will illustrate that an approach to the populist mind must take a psycho-political approach that locates cognitive and emotional processes at the core of popular identity/identification while taking pre-existing identities, popular or otherwise, into account. In doing so, I will bring in basic conceptualizations of values, beliefs, and attitudes and relate it to the generation of demands and grievances. I will also refer to Rogers Smith's (2003, 2015) theory of peoplehood that situates the formation of popular identities within a landscape of leader-citizen relations and pre-existing political identities.

On the other hand, how does a populist mind confront and respond to varying representations of the People? This prompts us to analyze variations and engagements among populist discourses, mobilizers, representatives, leaders etc., in relation to hegemony and alienation. Specifically, I will supplement Laclau's limited analysis of alienation in the OPR via Rahel Jaeggi's (2014) recent theory of alienation. My choice is based on Jaeggi's anti-essentialist and anti-dogmatic approach to alienation that is aligned with Laclau's own approach to populism. As I will illustrate below, a non-essentialist understanding of dis/alienation and reification allows us to pursue the analysis of the distance between an ego and an ego ideal in terms of degrees, processes, and cycles, thus avoiding the assertion that populism, or any other tendency or movement, can achieve a closure via a true consciousness or an absolutely disalienated life ala Žižek in his critique of Laclau (see Butler, Laclau, & Žižek, 2000; Žižek, 2006).[5] In other words, between Jaeggi's non-essentialist approach to dis/alienation and Laclau's anti-foundationalist approach to populism, I argue that the formation of popular identity is driven by a constant struggle for disalienation/appropriation made manifest in asymmetrical power relations.

As for the characteristics of a populist mind itself, I argue that first, in the context of constitutive heterogeneity, the formation of a populist identity, is something affected by other psychological factors surrounding cathexis, the impact of pre-existing identities, and a person's political dis/alienation. Second, a populist mind is formed when a person seeks for and identifies with a hegemonic representation of their demands and grievances under the name of the People. This in turn is a process and cycle mediated by power (alienation and disalienation) and psychological (cognitive and emotional) relations between the represented and their representatives. Lastly, variations in the aforementioned relations can account for divergences in the creation and reception of claims made for and on behalf of the People.

Overall, these is a need to ensure that analyses of existing populisms —especially competitions among populists of varying shades— contribute to the development of more general categories like popular identity and popular sovereignty. Even Laclau in the OPR didn't settle with populism. Rather, he explicitly extends his theory to inform his own redefinition of politics itself. Thus, if this essay appears to gradually veer away from populism, then I beg the pardon of my readers with the hope that they will consider it, not as a distraction but an invitation to ask questions beyond populism itself.

Popular Identity and the Irreducible: Laclau and Constitutive Heterogeneity

One could not easily avoid the human psyche whenever we speak of identity in the context of human relations. A psyche holds it as a source of coherence in the face of a complex world and since identity formation is central to the workings of a populist mind, a psycho-political approach becomes necessary in fleshing it out as it faces real diversity and complexity. Even Laclau could not avoid an appeal to the human psyche and despite his discursive turn —placing demand as a basic unit of analysis with articulation-rhetoric being the primary manifestation of human agency in his theory of populism— Laclau has placed cathexis (i.e. the emotional investment or libidinal attachment that people place in particular political symbols, identities, or demands) in a key position when analyzing the emergence of the People at the level of identity formation.[6]

I build upon Laclau's insights on cathexis and identity formation as a way of developing an otherwise latent political psychology. Moreover, with constitutive heterogeneity serving as a core assumption about the overarching conditions that render identity formation as an endless process, the psycho-political approach that I derive from Laclau will not lead to any totalizing essentialism about the nature of man and masses.

Thus, my contribution is simply to elaborate this process in terms of the following: (1) exposing the other factors affecting cathexis and the formation of demand/s, (2) recognizing the process as a cycle built on pre-existing identities, popular or otherwise, and (3) elaborating on power relations constituting the process and cycles of popular identity formation. We will tackle the first two in the current section before moving to the third one in the succeeding section on alienation. But first, what does it mean to assume the centrality of constitutive heterogeneity?

Earlier theories consider populism as either too vague and indeterminate to be analytically viable, or shallow enough to be reduced to mere rhetoric —a style or ornament with no distinct substance or logic. In response to this, Laclau (2005) argues that instead of considering vagueness and indeterminacy as

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[5]   I note that Jacques Lacan looms over the Laclau-Žižek debate and though I am not equipped to deal with this topic, a rereading of the debate from the lenses of Lacan is a potential topic for future inquiries. Moreover, we can also entertain the possibility of its existence within a populist movement and about populist rhetoric; that is, the presence of alienation and reification within actually existing populism/s can account for the incompleteness and openness of any constructed popular identity.

[6]   From the OPR and the RFS, the formation of popular identity for Laclau could be characterized as follows: (1) it is a consolidation of diverse social demands in such a way that one particular demand claims universality (i.e. hegemony) despite such a claim being ultimately contingent; (2) it is relational, constant, and driven by antagonisms; (3) it is anchored on leadership and political representation as means for consolidating and articulating demand/s. This essay grapples with these key characteristics with the first two being dealt with in the current section while the third one is subject to scrutiny in the succeeding section on alienation.

shortcomings, these must be recognized as a characteristic of social reality itself. Moreover, rhetoric could not be swept aside as mere style since it is "epiphenomenal"—an accompanying effect of self-contained conceptual structures that "finds its internal cohesion" by "appealing to rhetorical devices" (Laclau, 2005, p. 68). The acceptance of heterogeneity as a core feature tied to lifting rhetoric as a serious object of analysis —a form of gateway to more fundamental issues like identity and social organization— constitute Laclau's discursive turn in the analysis of populism.

Thus, with demand/s serving as the basic unit of analysis for a non-foundationalist and discursive approach, Laclau defines populism as the emergence of the People through the following: (1) "equivalential relations hegemonically represented through empty signifiers," (2) "displacements of the internal frontiers through the production of floating signifiers," and (3) "a constitutive heterogeneity which makes dialectical retrievals impossible and gives its true centrality to political articulation" (Laclau, 2005, p. 156).

Focusing on constitutive heterogeneity for the time being, Laclau's non-foundationalist approach places it at the center of his theory. He states that heterogeneity is not pure plurality or multiplicity since "the latter is compatible with the full positivity of its aggregated elements" (Laclau, 2005, p. 223). Rather, one defining feature of heterogeneity is "deficient being or failed unicity" (Laclau, 2005). Consequently, if heterogeneity is conceived as something irreducible to another level of homogeneity, then it refers to the presence of an absent unity —a unity that we are made aware of because of its absence and ultimately, its impossibility. Moreover, Laclau (2014, p. 169) states that heterogeneity takes primacy in a dialectical relationship with homogenization, especially in relation to the formation of social identities. An identity founded on a claim to homogeneity (e.g. that we are like this and that because we have shared attributes and demands) becomes a contingent result rather than a starting point.

What makes heterogeneity constitutive is in its relationship with identity formation via hegemonic articulations. A hegemonic articulation, as far Laclau is concerned, refers to a process of establishing a chain of equivalence between a myriad of demands in such a way that a particular demand achieves a level of universality —a point of convergence of otherwise disparate demands and grievances against a set of actors and institutions. This claim to universality is a homogenizing and totalizing force but in relation to the real primacy of heterogeneity, it is rendered incomplete. Hegemony becomes contingent and we are left with a constant struggle to establish chains of equivalence and eventually, a struggle to establish and articulate identity. Between heterogeneity and the formation of the People as a contingent collective identity is a hegemonic struggle to form a chain of equivalence between various social demands. The emergence of the People entails the political-hegemonic consolidation of partial social demands to a contingent chain of equivalence —the establishment of a series of partialities into a contingent whole— that inevitably remains incomplete and subject to changes.

In more specific terms, establishing a great "We" or the "People" is a constant struggle because it happens despite the corrosive impacts of heterogeneity, rendering such a collective identity as incomplete in relation to the irreducible world of demands.[7] He states that if heterogeneity is to be considered constitutive and made manifest in hegemonic articulations structured as narratives, then "the reflection of heterogeneity in the constitution of social identities will itself adopt the form of a disruption…of the homogeneous by the heterogeneous" (Laclau, 2014, p. 170). Such a disruption can be summed up as a heterogeneous object spilling out of a homogenizing identification made manifest, for Laclau, in the inevitability of catachresis in discursive representation —a misuse or distortion due to the representation of something inherently irrepresentable.[8] Thus, whenever the People is invoked, it is both a homogenizing and corrosive force —homogenizing in relation to the chain of equivalent demands and grievances, and corrosive in the face of incumbent elites and institutions, especially to those claiming to be based on the People.

A Psycho-political Approach to Popular Identity: Elaborations on Cathexis

Where is political agency in all these? The answer lies with subjectivity in the context of constitutive heterogeneity. From the OPR and RFS, it appears that subjectivity is intertwined with discourse-articulation-rhetoric to such an extent that the former is assumed with the latter. This was due to his break with earlier theories of populism and crowd psychology—a break that blurs the line between individuals and collectives while lifting out language (i.e. discourse, rhetoric, and articulations) as an alternative object of analysis instead of individual or collective psychology. Nonetheless, it was not a clean break. Rather, it was an aborted effort that left questions on emotional investments despite assuming it under the categories of demand/s and representation.

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[7]   Populism becomes a matter of trying to establish the People as a collective identity that is both necessary and impossible by taking a partiality (a partial yet homogenizing chain of demands abstracted from a heterogeneous whole) and lifting it up as a contingent totality.

[8]   More specifically, Laclau (2014, p. 64) states that the centrality of catachresis lies with constitutive heterogeneity making itself manifest in an absence, rendering representation (for this case, representing the People) as a matter of representing the presence of an absence.

For one, Laclau (2014) eventually descends to the level of the psycho-political by positing cathexis as a crucial factor in the representation of and response to antagonisms.[9] For him identity could not be considered as a set attribute. Rather, it is constructed along a plurality of contingent investments. Laclau states that there:

> is no ontic content that, by itself, has a precise ontological signification. But, conversely, there is no ontological signification constructed other than through an investment of an ontic content... investment would become foundational and constitutive and, for that very reason, it would become ontologically unrepresentable. If this were the case, as I think it is, the interruption could not be inscribed in anything different from itself. I can name that interrupting gap, but I cannot conceptually apprehend the content of that name. This gap, nameable but not conceptually apprehensible, is, exactly, *the place of the subject*. (2014, p. 115)

Admitting this, identity is both constructed and contingent—an object for a constant struggle of representing the impossible yet necessary. What are the characteristics of this place of the subject? Using himself as an example, Laclau states that:

> If I *identify* with a certain content, the latter ceases to be mere content; it is invested in such a way that it becomes a symbol of my own being. That is, it comes to fulfill a different ontological role. But this new role is only possible insofar as another 'positive' content becomes a threat to my own identity. And this threatening content is also invested with a new ontological function: that of symbolizing the very possibility of my not being. As nothing is *only* what it is, for the possibility itself of this being is threatened by this excess of investment (positive or negative), the exact overlapping between the ontic and the ontological orders is impossible. Certain particular objects will be invested with a new dimension transcending their ontic reality. Thus, an *ontological difference* emerges splitting the field of objectivity. This difference is, at the same time, a condition of possibility of that field and also a putting-into-question of its merely objective character. (2014, p. 113)

But what are the factors affecting cathexis? Within the limits of this paper, I argue that cathexis is facilitated by beliefs, values, and attitudes towards political objects (actors, institutions, organizations, movements, etc.) that are linked to a person's understanding politics and eventually of the People —its identity and role in public affairs as well as its supposed power or lack thereof. Moreover, examining variations among these factors allows us to analyze the formation of individual and collective demands, the direction and intensity of cathexis, and ultimately the formation of popular identity based on contingent chains of equivalent demands and grievances.

But what do we have to gain from recognizing this and elaborating on the latent psycho-political dimension of Laclau's theory of populism? Muted in favor of discourse, the populist mind is conflated with articulation. Consequently, his examination props up the leaders and the led, or more generously, the representatives and the represented as the primary actors in his schema. In other words, his framework might appear to be populated by dominant performers speaking to audiences bereft of any reflexivity at most, or representatives enjoying an untroubled resonance among the represented. This led Ballacci (2017) to argue that Laclau "completely disregards the role of deliberation and judgment in the construction of the 'people'" (p. 68). Specifically, a fixation on articulation-performance presupposes and promotes "a homogenized, passive, and unreflective idea of the People to the extent that they don't include any sort of deliberative engagement" (Ballacci, 2017, p. 55).

In a more positive light, a recent neuro-cognitive and linguistic analysis of populist discourse affirms the centrality of cognition in the study of populist discourse (Chilton, 2017). In trying to explain why populist rhetoric resonates instead of simply describing its content and form, Chilton (2017) illustrates that populist discourse "works by activating emotion-laden and value-laden schematic concepts and concomitant emotions, rather than using overt argument and evidence" (p. 11). It does so by appealing to a person's sense of self, either as an individual or as part of a projected collective. What I emphasize is that despite remaining within the realm of linguistics, Chilton (2017) opens the way for further analyses of the emotions and values that receive and are affected by populist discourse.[10]

Hence, by highlighting cathexis, what we have is a gateway to a myriad of factors ranging from memory and cognition, to neurological process, to early childhood development (McIntosh, 1993; Tucker & Luu, 1998).

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[9]   In the RFS, Laclau (2014) presents a conceptualization of antagonism in contradistinction to dialectical contradictions and real opposition. For Laclau (2014, p. 106), antagonism "is a relation between inimical forces, so that negativity becomes an internal component... Each force negates the identity of the other". In other words, it is a rivalry that demands negation. In the context of constitutive heterogeneity, antagonism then becomes an endless and dynamic process. Laclau states that an antagonism is not a relationship between objects. Instead, it is a relationship that shows "the limits that society encounters in constituting itself as an objective order" (2014, p. 113). Thus, the social, as an ontological rendering of an ontic society, will always be an incomplete representation and imprecise signification. The ontological could never exhaust an ontic content with interruption rendering complete identification an impossibility and antagonism an inevitability. Thus, the success of an hegemonic struggle to lift a partial signifier into a contingent claimant for totality via a chain of equivalent demands and grievances is based on whether that signifier is invested with enough affective-emotional substance. To illustrate it, Laclau (2014, p. 68) states that the "symbols of *Solidarność* in Poland derived their success not from any structural centrality of the Lenin shipyards in the country, but from the fact that they expressed radical anti–status quo feelings at the moment in which many other social demands were frustrated by not finding institutional channels of expression within the existing political system."

[10] Though I will not go so far as saying that Laclau's framework is anti-democratic, it must be noted that avoiding the populist mind or placing it as a secondary consideration in favor of discourse contradicts his own opposition to reductionist simplifications ranging from derogatory ideas surrounding supposedly monolithic masses to dualistic splits between individuals and groups.

I could not exhaust all these factors in this essay but by exploring some, I hope to keep this gateway open. I begin with the relationship between other-cathexis and self-cathexis. In his review of early psychoanalysis Macdiarmid (1989) illustrates that a key point of convergence is the ideal balance and marriage between other-cathexis (i.e. emotional investment on another person ranging from individuals to groups for the sake of warmth and worth) and self-cathexis (i.e. emotional investment on one's self as the source of warmth and worth) in order to ensure that one's life in society results in both healthy socialization and the development of one's individual sense of self. An imbalance can lead to either mode being pushed to extremes like self-sacrificing dependence on others or self-isolation. This threat of imbalances emanating from the trajectory of a person's development —which is one massive field of study on its own— directs us to the question of quantity since cathexis is also concerned with quantity-intensity.

What kind of cathexis is a representation of the People requiring from its audience? Rhetoric conveying an image of the People as bound together by a destiny or a common goal requiring self-sacrifice requires an intense other-cathexis. Contrary to this, if we look at neo-liberal and conservative images of the People as a group of law-abiding but self-reliant individuals, then self-cathexis might be its apt requirement. For the latter, we can simply look at neo-liberal rhetoric that appeals to the ideal of self-made and self-reliant citizens constituting a supposedly free People. Second, what kind and degree of a cathexis does a populist mind engage in when it identifies with a certain representation of the People. Through this we can separate fanaticism from casual, contingent, or even critical support for populists, with fanaticism being based on an intense cathexis that can make one support a monolithic People, a free People constituted by isolated and selfish individuals wary of their own backyards, or other representations in between.

In dissecting the relationship between cathexis and identity formation I propose a reconstruction of how a mind responds to competing demagogues[11] and turns populist, or in Laclau's terms, how popular identity emerges through hegemonic articulations in the context of constitutive heterogeneity. If the response is based on impulse, then we can appeal to unconscious factors. I leave this for future inquiries. However, if the response is deliberate, especially in the context of competing claims for and on behalf of the People, then we must first ask if a person sees him/herself as part of that People. For this, we can turn to the question of belief (i.e. what persons consider as true or false). This will allow us to measure whether a person thinks that his current conditions and experiences match a characterization of the People based on frontiers set by such a claim. Who is in and who is out is not exclusive to the one claiming it to be. Rather, a mind must consider such lines to be true and must consider themselves to be truly within such borders. The same logic applies to those that they consider as outside the People ranging from the elites to unwanted foreigners.

For Laclau, populism is not only about claims on some shared characteristics. It is also about shared demands and grievances. If a representation of the People is tied to a consolidated chain of demands and grievances, then we are led to the questions, first of values then of attitudes. Regarding values, they refer to a person's ideals and how such ideals are realized (Feldman, 2003; Rohan, 2000). They serve as lenses that allow us to determine important objects and evaluate them, with attitudes referring to such evaluations. From these, we can construe demands as an articulation of values on one hand, and grievances as an articulation of negative attitudes caused by the frustration of certain values (obstacles to their realization).[12]

If a demagogue claims that the People are demanding something or are aggrieved by some failure (e.g. expressing a negative attitude to bad governance, faulty institutions, corrupt elites etc.), then the resonance of such a claim depends on whether a person prioritizes the object in question (e.g. land, bread, peace etc.) as reflection of his/her value system in that specific time and space. It is likely that a person will be more emotionally invested on prioritized values, especially those that are perceived to be under grave threats. We can further surmise that in relation to hegemonic articulation, the particular demand that can serve as a universal but contingent claim, is the one that is prioritized by more people under specific historical, social, economic, and political conditions. Overall, I argue that a mind becomes populist not only because it identifies as part of the People. Rather, it is also because that People, made manifest through articulated demands and grievances, also embodies the beliefs, values, and attitudes of the mind that identifies with it. In Laclau's terms, popular identity emerges when a proposed chain of equivalent demands and grievances gains hegemony by being aligned with shared beliefs, prioritized values, and attitudes towards significant political objects.

The aforementioned list of psychological factors, despite being partial, if subsumed under the general category of political identity before placing it on a temporal plane allows us to recognize the impact of pre-existing identities —popular or otherwise— resulting from previous cycles of identity formation. Laclau's application of his idea of identity upon himself can be considered as a general account of a present round. However, if we dive into the nitty-gritty of it, this account reflects his pre-existing identity as a philosopher, at the very least, and this allowed him to provide a lucid summary of an otherwise unconscious process. This may sound mundane but a more systematic approach will allow us to effectively historicize the formation of popular identity. For this reason, we turn briefly to Rogers Smith's theory of peoplehood.[13]

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[11] I refer to the classic notion of demagogy as an appeal to the emotions of the People.

[12] Furthermore, values can be structured/systematic in order to provide a level of coherence for a person even if such is subject to changes (Rohan, 2000). In other words, value systems, measurable through a person's priorities, are in themselves contingent.

[13] The primary cord that ties Smith with Laclau is identity formation as an object of analysis. Despite not referring to each other, they also share a non-essentialist and discursive approach to popular identity. However, unlike Laclau's latent political psychology, Smith's theory of peoplehood includes a more explicitly psycho-political dimension that I consider as useful in extending Laclau's own theory towards that direction.

Smith (2003, 2015) argues that the politics of peoplehood (i.e. the formation of popular identities) operates within a complex landscape of pre-existing political identities (cf. Vulović & Palonen, 2023) —it does not happen on an empty slate. Rather, it must first deal with pre-existing identities, popular and otherwise, that serve as a point of convergence for various social, historical, and psychological conditions among individuals and groups. Such pre-existing identities can be rejected, adopted, or adapted with a proposed political identity —in this case, the People. Consequently, this leads to a confrontation between would be representatives/leaders/rulers and the represented/led/ruled holding such pre-existing identities and political leaders cannot simply fabricate identities from nothing. Smith (2003) states that aspiring leaders "always confront populations already endowed, individually as well as collectively, with a great variety of senses of membership, identity, and affiliation, with entrenched economic interests, political and religious beliefs, historical and cultural attachments, and animosities" (p. 34). These can then serve as constraints on the resonance and content of representations of the People while also substantiating the visions of those claiming to know, work, and speak for it.

In a later work, Smith (2015) elaborates this schema by further highlighting the role of values in politics of peoplehood. For him, we absorb and embody values drawn from and perpetuated through stories of how we are part of a People. And these rather than any essential culture or ethnicity can better explain our membership in political communities. In other words, the values we internalize through stories and articulation can help determine what we aspire for, how we see ourselves as part of a collective, and what authorities we recognize and comply with.

Thus, the emergence of a populist mind is shaped by the impacts of history construed as results of previous rounds of identity-formation, socialization, and a myriad of psychological factors gravitating around individual and shared beliefs, values, attitudes and emotions. And its emergence ultimately leads to membership in a collective. But where is power in all these? Both Smith and Laclau have recognized the looming shadow of power. However, while the former integrates it into his framework as a general feature, Laclau focuses more on power in relation to struggles against and within the capitalist state. We will now situate ourselves between Smith and Laclau in the succeeding section by elaborating on power relations constituting the process and cycles of popular identity formation.

Power, Hegemony, and Alienation

Why talk about power? A psycho-political approach that recognizes cathexis as a necessary process in identity formation must ultimately deal with the question of control. To have a balanced and healthy relationship between self-cathexis and other-cathexis entails a measure of control over our own individual identities while being related to others. In turn, healthy membership in collectives entails on one hand, a measure of control for a collective (may they be leaders, norms, etc.) over its members, while on the other is a capacity for members to help shape the collective itself. Ideal as it sounds, this is in stark contrast to pathological conditions wherein individuals lose control over their identities (if they sacrifice themselves to others) or their social lives due to an isolationist self-cathexis. Collectives, especially their leaders, can also try and might very well succeed in depriving their members of any control over collective identity. This topic drags along other issues ranging from propaganda to ideology and would require a paper on its own. For now, we can focus on power relations in general, especially between representatives and the represented, the leaders and the led, etc.

Smith (2003) highlights the role of power relations between leader and constituents. He argues that the formation of popular identity happens under conditions of power asymmetry made manifest in the creation, espousal, and institutionalization of vertical (hierarchical and differentiated)[14] or horizontal (non-hierarchical unifying)[15] notions of peoplehood, or more commonly, a hybrid of both. Simply put, the formation of popular identity is neither absolutely organic nor unconscious. Instead, it is built on the relationship between leaders and their constituents, conditioned by pre-existing identities while being characterized by asymmetrical power relations. Laclau (2001) also recognizes asymmetry —the unevenness of power— in his theory and sees it as a feature of a hegemonic relation. Assuming that all groups are mere particularities structured around specific interests, the aforementioned asymmetry must therefore be understood as an unevenness between the particularity of social agents and the universality of what they are trying to represent (i.e. the community as a whole). Consequently, states that:

> if a certain particularity is able to lead the struggle against a regime perceived as a 'general' or 'notorious' crime, it is not so much because its differential, ontic particularity predetermines it to play such a hegemonic role, but because —given a certain constellation of forces— it is the only one which has the power to do so. (Laclau, 2001, p. 7)

But what does it mean to have the *power to do so*? Conversely, what does it mean *not having the power to do so*? Laclau's analysis of power asymmetry constituting a hegemonic relation remains within the realm of discourse. It lacks a broader understanding of disempowerment and alienation as the reality for large

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[14]   For Smith, those in power can "form a ruling class that defines itself as a distinct group or People entitled to rule over one or more lesser groups or "peoples." Even in such accounts, let me stress, both rulers and subjects are still understood to be members of a larger political order that represents a kind of common political "peoplehood." It is, however, a kind in which the different classes occupy very different places and are presented as possessing sharply different characteristics" (2003, p. 33).

[15]   For Smith "leaders may instead articulate a fully horizontal, unified conception of membership in which they claim to be no more than representative members and humble agents" (2003, p. 34), of their constituents.

swathes of citizenries around the world. His analysis is anchored primarily on the case of capitalist states and its ruling elite whose actions generate grievances from everyone else. His understanding of populism as built on chains of equivalent grievances that incumbent institutions could not address. This is especially true for the rise of populist movements that recent works have associated with growing disaffection, powerlessness, and a sense of separation from incumbent institutions and political organizations ranging from parties to governments.[16] Thus, a more holistic appreciation of power relations requires an analysis of disempowerment. To this end, I turn to alienation as a concept that Laclau (2014) rejects on the grounds that it is based on presupposing an essential and achievable unity (e.g. a true consciousness as opposed to a false one).

Aligned with Laclau's non-foundationalist approach, Jaeggi's (2014) reconceptualization of alienation appears as an apt place to start. As the result of her navigation away from dogmatic and essentialist determinations of a dis/alienated life, Jaeggi's (2014) conceptualization of alienation is more dynamic, realistic, and less susceptible to any idea of a true or false consciousness (cf. Žižek, 2006). Consequently, her non-essentialist approach necessitates an understanding of a person's conception of what an ideal life is and uses this as the basis of critique instead of appealing to a preconceived notion of a disalienated life. In other words, analysis shifts towards the factors shaping a person's vision of a disalienated life. With these considerations in mind, we can contemplate alienation as a practical process driven, constituted, and sustained by the very cleavages and disempowerment it generates.

Jaeggi (2014) defines alienation as the interruption of an appropriation of a reified object. Appropriation[17] here is a struggle to access and creatively control a valued object through existing factors resulting from previous rounds of appropriations. Such factors range from a person's values, attitudes, and behavioral habits, to perceived opportunities and constraints that political structures provide —structures that can be built on an act of appropriation like the results of elections, the outcome of revolts, or the general pulse of public opinion measured through polls. As the target of appropriation, reification refers to a condition wherein valued objects are perceived to have developed a dynamic of their own, and have gained a measure of rigidity (i.e. constancy and invulnerability to change). It also involves veiling practical questions —determining what is possible and impossible to do in relation to a reified object without ending its reification— in order to shape agency and protect a current system from change by maintaining habitual behaviors in it.

What I emphasize is that within a reifying and reified system, we are not coerced to follow. Instead, as Jaeggi (2014) asserts, we fail to develop a tendency or will towards control and/or change. This is because the alienated are incapable of seeing a valued object as vulnerable to their appropriation —that is, as subject to their decisions and actions. Does it mean that the politically alienated are necessarily conscious of their alienation? What about those whose political values gravitate around disempowerment and sustained acquiescence, are they still politically alienated? How can we understand demands and grievances without a presupposed ideal life?

To answer these questions without slipping into unrealistic assumptions, Jaeggi's un-essentialist approach prompts us to pay attention to the values, beliefs, attitudes, tendencies, and life experiences of a person. We can consider these as factors that allow a person to make sense of the conditions he is in —they are the base upon which analysis can describe an agent's ideal life. In more specific terms and referring to the factors affecting cathexis, if we construe political values as a person's idea of how political life should be (i.e. a citizen's role in politics and the means he could use to appropriate political objects), and how politics itself should look like (i.e. how the government should work and how public discussions should proceed), then political reification refers to how distant political realities are to such political values, and how a person perceives, understands, and responds to such discrepancies (cf. Borja, 2015, 2017).

Thus, a person experiences political alienation, not because some disalienated sage, demagogue, or liberating political party told him so —though we cannot discount the impact of such external actors on a person's cognition. Rather, it is because his life, as he sees (his beliefs) and judges it (his attitudes) is far from what he thinks it should be, and what he thinks he deserves (his values), and what he deems as having control over it.[18] Grievance comes into the picture as an indicator for a perceived discrepancy between a person's ideal political life and his actual experience. How this plays out, however, depends on a person's perception and processing of his political experience in relation to the political activities of others —his fellows and the political elite.

For example, if a person values popular power over government, then he is alienated if he considers political reality as the opposite —a reality ruled by a government that is neither accessible nor accountable to ordinary citizens. His grievance can then be a part of a chain that promises such control or access to

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[16] But what about the supposed leaders of the People and their constituents? Is the hegemonic struggle for universality something socially and politically relational rather than mere concoctions of the most articulate and instrumentalist representative?

[17] Jaeggi states that appropriation involves "having access to or command over oneself and the world...the capacity to make the life one leads, or what one wills and does, one's own; as the capacity to identify with oneself and with what one does" (2014, p. 37). What is appropriated is itself altered, structured, and formed in the process of appropriation. It is a sustained process of trans-formation bound to incumbent and "previously existing content and thereby also to an independent meaning and dynamic over which one does not have complete command" (Jaeggi, 2014, p. 39).

[18] Furthermore, if the political life of a person is characterized more by repeated and sustained exclusion and disempowerment rather than inclusion and efficacious participation, and if he sustains a want to be included and effective in politics, then his sense of political alienation is reinforced (cf. Borja, 2017). Conversely, if a person lowers his expectations to such lengths that he is convinced that he got what he deserved, then political alienation at a psycho-political level can disappear despite alienating structures. In other words, if a person adopts political disempowerment and acquiescence as core political values, then political alienation becomes a non-issue. Any attempt by another to tell him that he is politically alienated is just external discontent trying to convince internal contentment.

government decisions. On the contrary, if a person doesn't value popular power and would prefer receiving government services passively etc., rather than having a level of control over the latter will not resonate unless it equates such power with such a politically passive status. Promises of popular power will fall on deaf ears to those who see their identity as a part of a People that is merely ruled, fed, and satisfied rather than one that is politically empowered.

Much hybridity lies in between these two polar conditions but they prompt us, nonetheless, to ask whether a person is alienated from those claiming to speak about and for the People? What are the means for appropriating them that he deems as viable? Is his alienation from them a vicious or a virtuous cycle? Is popular power a reified object? Ultimately, returning to an earlier concern, how and to what extent will cathexis for a representation of the People proceed? I argue that the same applies to the populist mind —that the formation of popular identity is something driven by a constant struggle for disalienation/appropriation— and to elaborate and as a way for a conclusion, the next section returns to the case of competing populists in order to illustrate how a populist mind works under such conditions.

Watching Populists Compete: Some Concluding Remarks for an Unfinished Project

The formation of popular identity is a question of political support. What does it mean for a populist mind to support a populist leader? Between Laclau, Smith, and Jaeggi, it becomes a matter of an emotional investment on someone whose articulations about the People —who they are and what they should be through their demands and grievances— aligns with and projects a person's beliefs, values, attitudes, and overall political identity. This alignment —this resonance— is based on a sense of appropriation wherein a populist mind is convinced that supporting a populist leader can lead to its appropriation of politics via the realization of its values, the resolution of its grievances, and a confirmation of its beliefs. To elaborate on the dynamics of this alignment, I note the following concluding points based on the discussion above.

First, a populist mind draws lines, first between himself as part of the People and those who are not, then between a populist leader and a target elite (e.g. the corrupt elite). This drawing of borders, as far as Laclau's (2005) approach is concerned, is situated on a messy middle ground wherein individual and group identities are intertwined with each other. For him, how individuals and groups know themselves and what they want to be are shaped by homogenization (i.e. the establishment and development of group identity through imitation, setting equivalences, etc.) and differentiation (i.e. the establishment and development of individual ego or the distinction of one group vis-à-vis another) with neither achieving perfection due to the realities of heterogeneity. Hence, the lines between who is in and who is out of the People, as well who is a populist leader and who is not are contingent and would vary through shifts and realignments in a person's beliefs, values, and attitudes.

Second, why should supporting a populist leader lead to the appropriation of an otherwise reified public sphere? Is supporting a populist leader empowering or disempowering, or even both in a certain cycle? Furthermore, what form of support does a populist mind consider as effective in appropriating a political object? In other words, what form and intensity of support does a person consider as an embodiment of popular power? These questions raise the issue of whether a populist mind gains a measure of power and control by supporting a populist leader and complying with that leader's recommended form of action. I could not address all these now but they lead us to the relationship between popular identity and political participation. Briefly, a person with a populist mind sees and judges himself as a political actor vis-à-vis: (1) the actions of those representing the People, (2) his relationships with them, and ultimately (3) his own experience of politics with or without populist leaders.

Lastly, in the context of constitutive heterogeneity, what accounts for the stability or breakdown of support to a populist leader? The latter is of special importance since this leads us to consider two possibilities, namely, the withdrawal of support from a populist leader and a shift of support from one populist to another. We can even take this in more general terms by considering shifting identification with one representation of the People to another (e.g. from one populist leader to another) but I will leave this to future inquiries.

Hence, when confronted by multiple and contradictory claims made on behalf of and for the People, a populist mind will invest on those that achieve alignment/resonance better than others. And such an investment —this cathexis— is shaped by other psychological factors tied to pre-existing identities with the encompassing goal of appropriating popular power. Under conditions of heterogeneity, this investment will remain incomplete and contingent. It is subject to the shifts and turns of reality and how a populist mind responds to it.

To illustrate it, and returning briefly to the cases of Indonesia and the Philippines, I note that between competing populists, the game of electoral numbers can be shaped by the resonance of specific components of a populist discourse; that is, specific parts of a chain of equivalent demands and grievances. For one, despite being linked at the hip with the value of strong leadership and their critique of Yudhoyono's administration —its weakness and impacts on governance— Jokowi's reformist populism resonated with those still valued incumbent liberal democratic institutions. The contrary is true for Prabowo's supporters whose negative attitudes towards Yudhoyono's administration extended to incumbent liberal democratic institutions due to a nostalgia for authoritarian rule and a preference for a more rigid Islamic society. For the Philippines, it is probable that Rodrigo Duterte emerged victorious from a three-way populist competition by appealing to deep political intolerance among Filipinos (Borja, 2023), something that his fellow populist candidates did not venture into.

As for shifts and turns, support for Jokowi's authoritarian turn and Prabowo's apparent moderation suggests populist minds reorienting themselves away from polarizing politics to a more unifying one. Currently in the Philippines, I can say that the populist minds of those who carried Rodrigo Duterte to the presidency are undergoing a form of crisis emanating from a myriad of reasons. One of which is the breakdown of his alliance with Ferdinand Marcos Jr., the incumbent president and scion of his namesake Ferdinand Marcos Sr. whose authoritarian rule left legacies that Rodrigo Duterte appealed to during his 2016 campaign. Another is his daughter, Sara Duterte's lackluster performance and controversial antics as the current vice-president. Those who supported both Marcos Jr. and Sara Duterte during the previous 2022 elections are facing at least two options. On one hand, they can cling on to the promise of unity that the Marcos-Duterte alliance projected. On the other, they can revert back to their old identities as either Marcos apologists who are anti-Duterte or vice versa as anti-Marcos but pro-Duterte. Either way, future studies on the Filipino political psyche can start measuring the tendencies resulting from such drama. And with that, I conclude by leaving the following objects and considerations for future inquiries.

First is the relationship among the represented. If the formation of popular identity doesn't happen on an empty slate, then we must recognize that individuals already hold identities formed vis-à-vis their relationships with others. In more concrete terms, how likely will an individual in a specific condition (e.g. poverty, displacement, wealth, high social mobility etc.) recognize someone else's claim to be like them —to be under collective identity like the People— if that other is in a different condition? If yes, then how does it lead to a social bond that can substantiate a collective identity? If not, then are we dealing, not only with competing populists but with competing "Peoples"? This calls for a more integrated approach between political psychology, Laclau's discursive approach, and a more sociological approach. The breakdown of civic relations being experienced by polities under high levels of polarization gives credence to such concerns.

Second is the issue of ideology itself, especially from a psycho-political perspective. If we integrate Jaeggi's non-essentialist approach to human agency and Laclau's anti-foundationalist approach to discourse and ideology, then we arrive at the following considerations applying some of the concepts listed above:

- Is a representation of the People a projection of consolidated ego-ideals emanating from those who identify with it? If a person holds an idea concerning the political role of the People, then is it a manifestation of an ego-ideal regardless of whether that role is powerful or not?

- Can we construe a hegemonic struggle as a means of appropriating an otherwise reified object? If this reified object is something that an agent values, does a hegemonic struggle involve an opening of practical ways or options wherein such objects can be appropriated. In Laclau's terms, if this reified object (e.g. government) generates or is constituted by politically frustrated demands (e.g. lack of economic security etc.), then should a hegemonic struggle involve opening a way to satisfy such demands via a particular demand raised to a hegemonic position (e.g. change through reform, change through a benevolent leader etc.).

- The inevitable contingency and incompleteness of a hegemonic claim is aligned with the endless struggle for appropriation. The characteristics of a demand or a grievance can change via shifts in values, beliefs, and priorities by the agents who share, articulate, and pursue such demands. Political demands and grievances experiencing the ebb and flow of relevance might be due to the results of non-political appropriations qua reified objects. For example, someone can learn how to cope with and/or alleviate their own poverty through non-political means. Moreover, the success or failure of an act of appropriation can lead to changes in a person's value system, thus shaping the demands and grievances tied with it.

- If we admit Laclau's understanding of populism as politics itself, then from the discussion above, we can specify this further as politics being a constant and irresolvable process between two struggles. On one hand, you have the concrete People trying to appropriate abstractions of itself–abstractions ranging from a supposedly popular government to movements proclaiming to represent it. On the other, you have abstractions of the People trying to establish hegemony over the concrete People–of trying to appear as if it is the concrete People in its entirety.

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