

## From ‘the people’ to ‘the citizens’: the possibilities and limitations of populist discourse in Argentina.

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Ernesto Laclau’s death in Seville on the 13<sup>th</sup> December 2014 was followed by wide-ranging comments in the Argentine press and on online communities. Some observers reflected on Laclau’s intellectual trajectory, from his work in the University of Buenos Aires and his left-wing militancy in the 1960s<sup>1</sup> to his academic career in the United Kingdom and his long-term engagement with radical political theory. A recurring theme in these commentaries is the influence of his theories on the then-President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (La Nación 13/04/14; Ambito 13/04/14; Díaz 2014), with many of Fernández’s critics expressing misgivings towards Laclau’s theory of populism. Díaz (2014) for example, describes Laclau as an ‘an agitator for permanent conflict, political polarization and social divisiveness’, whose theories lend support to Fernández’s antagonistic political strategies and ambitions. On the other hand, the philosopher Rapisardi (2014), who describes Laclau as the ‘uncomfortable populist’, reflects on the emancipatory potential that Laclau’s theories provided for ‘[f]eminists, indigenous groups, LGBT rights’ activists, emerging from the interstices of the academy, the alternative spaces of militancy and political parties of the Latin American left’, at the height of neoliberal capitalist hegemony in the 1990s. These different perspectives on the man and his work resonate with broader discursive tensions in relation to the notion of populism, a topic that has been widely associated with Laclau’s contribution to political theory.

For Rapisardi and others, one of Laclau’s most significant legacies is his recognition of, and commitment to, the interrelatedness of theory and practice (Rapisardi 2014). The connection between theory and political praxis is integral to his long-term project of devising tools to reconceptualise populism as an element of political discourse, starting from a concern with the challenges confronting socialist strategy in his earlier work (Laclau and Mouffe 1985) to an engagement with ‘radical democracy’ (2015). Laclau’s theory of populism builds on earlier critical engagements with the concept, particularly with Worsley’s insightful exploration and emphasis on the participatory qualities of what he calls the populist dimensions of the political (Laclau 2005). For his part, Worsley builds on the work of Shils (in Worsley 1969), highlighting his emphasis on populisms’ focus on the will of ‘the people’<sup>2</sup> and its privileging of direct, unmediated relationships between the leaders and

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<sup>1</sup> In the 1960s Laclau edited two political journals (*‘Izquierda Nacional’* and *‘Lucha Obrera’*) linked to the *‘Partido Socialista de Izquierda Nacional’* (Socialist Party of the National Left).

<sup>2</sup> Dussel observes that in Latin America the term ‘pueblo’ or people has a more complex set of meanings than it carries in Romance languages, as a result of the widespread influence of indigenous languages. He also observes that ‘pueblo’ establishes an internal frontier within the political community so that citizens of a state are not necessarily part of the ‘pueblo’ (Dussel 2008). See also Gledhill in this volume regarding ‘o povo’ in the context of Brazilian politics.

the people<sup>3</sup>. Rejecting populism as a substantive category, Worsley argues that the populist 'dimension' is neither democratic nor anti-democratic, but instead should be understood as 'an aspect of a variety of political cultures and structures.' (Worsley 1969: 247). On the other hand, he argues that 'Insofar as populism plumps for the rights of majorities to make sure – by 'intervening' – that they are not ignored (as they commonly are) populism is profoundly compatible with democracy' (247).

Despite this history of debate that enriches our understanding of political phenomena, 'populism' continues to be yielded as a blunt instrument that simultaneously characterizes and critiques a range of political movements, leaders and governments. Ultimately, these characterizations serve to pathologize the phenomena under scrutiny, and are a distraction from the task of analysis. The pathologization of populism extends by contagion to entire political cultures, to movements, leaders and followers. The parallel existence of populism as a critical-analytical concept and a characterizing-pathologizing notion deserves reflection and discussion, a task that lies beyond the scope of this chapter. Nevertheless, the chapter aims to shed some light on the tensions between these understandings of populism through a discussion of 'actually existing populisms'. 'Populism' will provide the basis for a loose, vernacular classification of political forms, while it will also work as a concept in the 'Laclauian sense' (Retamozo 2017; Laclau in Howarth 2015) to explore the dynamics of some recent expressions of 'populist' politics in contemporary Argentina. Reflecting on the gendered qualities of populism (Kampwirth 2010), the chapter considers the tensions and the ambivalences of populism (Rovira Kaltwasser 2012) to understand how historically, and in different ways, in different contexts, 'populism offers significant opportunities for opening up space for change, but it also imposes constraints and sets traps' (Kampwirth 2010: ix).

Latin America has provided a number of exemplary cases of populist movements, leaders and governments; many of these have shaped the ideas and the debates on the subject. This is especially the case with the 'classical' forms of populism of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, as discussed in Gledhill's chapter in relation to Varguismo in Brazil, with renewed interest in the region associated with the rise of 'radical populism' and the 'pink tide' of 21<sup>st</sup> century governments that have defined themselves in opposition to neoliberal orthodoxy<sup>4</sup>. While

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<sup>3</sup> As Worsley points out, Shils was referring to North American populism in particular. His analysis resonates particularly strongly with recent developments in the USA, although they also find echoes in the arguments put forward during Britain's 2016 EU referendum. A striking feature of the 'leave' campaigns' position since the referendum has been the defense of 'the will of the people' that must prevail above all other factors; another parallel with Shil's analysis is the 'leave' campaign's promotion of distrust of experts, academics, business leaders and the 'over-educated' and 'not-the-people' (Worsley 1969: 244).

<sup>4</sup> There is some consensus on the classification of Latin American populisms in identifying three historical periods and their corresponding populist forms. The classical populisms of Lázaro Cárdenas in Mexico, Getúlio Vargas in Brazil and Juan Domingo Perón in Argentina in the early and mid-20<sup>th</sup> century were followed by what is described as the neo-populism of the 1980s and 1990s exemplified by Salinas de Gortari in Mexico, Collor de Melo in Brazil and Menem in Argentina. At the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century a radical populism emerged under the leaderships of Chávez in Venezuela, Morales in Bolivia, Correa in Ecuador and

there are significant differences, reflecting different contexts and historical moments, these examples provide a useful starting point to identify some significant features.

These historical cases emerged at times of significant shifts in social, economic and political structures, articulating a discourse of rupture, transformation and new beginnings. A less discussed feature relates to the gendered qualities of Latin American forms of populism and their entanglement with specific models of femininity and masculinity, which find expression in claims, policies, and performances (Kampwirth 2010). Furthermore, the examples illustrate the importance of sentiments in forging relations between leaders and supporters and in constituting the collective identity of the people (Laclau 2005). The discussion of these features is significant in a context in which major changes in the global political economy, as outlined by Narotzky in this volume, have generated tensions and contradictions which, in Latin America, have had implications for the politics of redistribution associated with a number of national policies during the first decade of the 2000s. These are in turn reflected in attempts to redefine the terms of political discourse (as outlined in the chapter by Hinkson and Altman), where the rejection of particular popular and/or populist forms of leadership and policy are placed at the heart of new claims for new beginnings. This is the case of the constitutional coup against Dilma Rousseff in Brazil discussed in Gledhill's chapter. According to Eric Nepomuceno, the coup was not only intended to undo the policies of the Workers' Party under Lula and Rousseff, but had the more ambitious scope of undoing gains made in the fields of social and labour policy over the last 70 years (Nepomuceno 2018). Nepomuceno's claim resonates uncannily with speeches made by Argentine President Mauricio Macri in September 2018, in which he proposed a new way forward pitted against the influence and 'decadence' of the last 70 years, a period that encompasses the governments of 'classical' populist Juan Domingo Perón as well as those of Kirchner and Fernández (Granovski 2018).

### **Rupture, newness and new beginnings**

Néstor Kirchner formed his government in 2003, in the aftermath of the 2001 economic and financial crisis and in a context of mass mobilizations and experimentations in the social, economic and political fields (Levey et al 2014). The dire conditions of the economy following the crisis and the impact of the 2002 default on foreign debt, historically unprecedented levels of unemployment and poverty, all required urgent, radical and concentrated action. The demands for change - '*Que se vayan todos....que no quede ni uno solo*' (They must all go...not a single one should remain) – were symptomatic of the deeply

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arguably Kirchner and Fernández de Kirchner in Argentina. A different categorization was proposed by Zabaleta (1997) who describes Sandinismo as a radical popular nationalist government, whereas Peronism, Varguismo and Freismo in Chile are described as bourgeois popular nationalist, with Chile's Allendismo characterized as workers' democratic populism. At the same time, these phenomena are also subject to periodization. For example, it has been argued that Kirchnerismo, relating to the governments of Néstor Kirchner and Cristina Fernández from 2003 until 2015 should not be seen as a single, uniform phenomenon. Rather, as Kulfas proposes, Kirchnerismo is best understood as three distinctive periods that reflect changes in the global political economy on the one hand and political and policy shifts on the other (Kulfas 2016).

felt rejection of the status quo, while the innovations and social experiments carried out by individuals, groups, neighbourhoods to devise solutions to collapsing livelihoods and address the democratic deficit reflected both the intense needs produced by the crisis and the will to address the challenges posed by it (Ozarow et al 2014).

To address a rupture that reached its most clear visibility in 2001 but has its roots in the neoliberal policies of the 1990s, or indeed as far back as the military-civilian regime of 1976-1983, claims to legitimacy required proposals that constituted the government as radically different from those of the past. At the same time, traditions inherited from the past, particularly from the golden era of Peronism in the 1940s, provided discursive frameworks for the articulation of proposals in respect of the challenges of the present, notably, the recovery of the dignity of the people and the need to confront the people's enemy (Barbieri 2007). Weaving the old and new to demarcate a boundary with preceding governments, Kirchner's inaugural speech in the Plaza de Mayo positioned him as the president of the Argentine people, summoning the heterogeneous, though at that particular moment in time largely solidary, crowds in the Plaza and across the country (Biglieri 2007).

On the presidential podium were the Mothers and Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo.<sup>5</sup> Their presence in this privileged space, from where the future was being enunciated, was striking. It followed decades of persecution, disregard and neglect by a series of governments since the early days of their struggle against the military regime. Recognition of the Mothers and Grandmothers was crucial in terms of enabling a shift in their place and role in the country, a shift that was also reflected in the organizations. I was surprised at the change in what had been a profoundly antagonistic relationship with the state that one group of Mothers in particular sustained since the dictatorship when, in conversation with a representative of the Association of Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, I was told about an ambitious project to develop skills and build 'dignified' homes with government support. The Mother explained that they had verified that they 'could work with this man'. In 2006 the Association called an end to their Resistance Marches, which had been a focal point in the calendar for a wide range of citizens, activists, organizations since 1981. The decision, I was told by the same Mother, had to do with the Mothers' age and increasing fragility, which made it difficult for them to sustain the 24-hour vigil. Furthermore, the advances in the trials and the

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<sup>5</sup> During the military-civilian dictatorship that dominated the country from 1976 until 1983, an estimated 30,000 persons disappeared. A group of women who were unsuccessfully attempting to track down and gain information about their disappeared children started to meet in the central Plaza de Mayo, in defiance of the strict military law imposed at the time. Their numbers grew and their weekly circling of the pyramid at the centre of the Plaza de Mayo became a key act and symbol of resistance. They continue to meet to this day. In 1986 the Mothers split into the Association of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, which embarked on a wide-ranging political project and came to forge a strong relationship with Kirchner and Fernández de Kirchner, and the Founders' Line, which remained more focused on the pursuit of justice, working closely with a number of other human rights organizations. The Abuelas or Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo were formed in 1977 and work to find children who were abducted with their parents during the regime, or who were born in captivity. The mothers were murdered after giving birth and the children were given for adoption to families who were (generally) sympathetic to the regime.

recognition of human rights issues meant that the March was redundant, as the enemy was no longer in Government House (Canoni 2007; Christie 2016)<sup>6</sup>.

While the shift signaled at the inaugural ceremony resulted in a radically altered landscape of Human Rights, it gave substance to Kirchner's claims of rupture and renewal and supported his efforts to shift the relationship between people and the state or specifically, between his government and the people. Indeed, it has been suggested that Kirchner's interventions in the field of Human Rights and the politics of memory was fundamental to the construction of 'kirchnerism' and the articulation of a 'kirchnerite people' (Canoni 2007)<sup>7</sup>. Research carried out by an interdisciplinary team (Biglieri and Perelló 2007) provides many insights into the experiences associated with the shifts promoted under Kirchner. Echoing the Peronist concepts of 'dignity' and 'the enemy', one interviewee reflected on how Kirchner took on board the demands of the people and confronted powerful economic actors, thus breaking with the 'apparatus of the old politics' and enabling the emergence of a new inclusive political project (Barbieri 2007: 128). In what Barbieri describes as a recognition of the importance of passion for collective identities and struggle, she quotes another research participant's reflections on her changing experience as new opportunities arose along with a new sense of purpose and participation: 'today we can go out on the street knowing that we can do something' (in Barbieri 2007: 129).

When Kirchner's term came to an end, he did not bid for a second term. Instead, his wife, a provincial and then national senator and political figure in her own right, was put forward as the Peronist presidential candidate under the Front for Victory coalition. Despite her long career in politics, much was made of her marriage to the outgoing president. She was variously described as a mere mouthpiece for her husband and as a stop-gap until he returned as a presidential candidate. With Kirchner's death in 2010, attention shifted to her status as a widow, with speculation that this granted her some sympathy and support. In turn, Fernández forged her own oratory and performative style, as well as a distinctive political intervention. Her presidential campaign has been subjected to a detailed and rigorous study by Jane Christie (2016) who argues that the campaign proposed a new claim, promising to deepen and extend Kirchner's reforms, through 'strategically reappropriated gendered role-based images in order to promote the idea of 'newness'...' (Christie 2016: 110). While the 'golden age' of Peronism provided the enduring example and symbolic repertoire associated with Eva Perón, this bid for election to the highest position in the country and the proposition of constituting this space of power as a feminine space, was indeed understood as another radical departure from business as usual.

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<sup>6</sup> In 2015, the Association of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo called for a renewal of the March, in the context of a new government under Mauricio Macri – the 'enemy' had returned to the Casa Rosada (Government House). Other groups of Mothers (Founders' Line) and Grandmothers did not cancel the Resistance Marches during the Kirchner and Fernández governments; a sign of their greater distance from, and more cautious engagement with these governments.

<sup>7</sup> Advances in the law and trials relating to human rights abuses under the military-civilian regime is one of the areas of the kirchnerite governments that gains most approval and is recognized by critics of these governments as well as their supporters (see Anguita 2014).

## Gender and passionate politics

Christie argues that Fernández, like her Chilean counterpart Bachelet, deployed gender codes that suggested that, as women leaders, they could improve on the achievements of their male predecessors and build on legacies of economic growth and poverty reduction (by Lagos in Chile, Kirchner in Argentina) through a new, feminized ethic of care and community. Both Bachelet and Fernández were successful: Fernández won the 2007 elections with a comfortable majority; in her second bid for the presidency in 2011 she gained 54.11% of the vote. She is a divisive figure – hated and loved in equal measure. One of the criticisms directed at her (and sometimes at Laclau) is that her antagonistic discourse has produced deep rifts in the society at large, while accusations of corruption and mismanagement of public funds accumulate against her. Her supporters argue that she is the target of campaigns to discredit her and neutralize the achievements of the Kirchner-Fernández governments. She points to the enemies pitted against her while stressing the difficulties she has faced as a woman in politics (Christie 2016).

On the 13<sup>th</sup> April 2016, with the new government of ‘Cambiamos’ in place, Fernández attended the Courts of Comodoro Py in the capital, summoned on charges of currency mismanagement (the ‘*Dólar Futuro*’). In the words of reporters for the Spanish newspaper *El País*: ‘She turned it around completely. What seemed to be her most difficult day, as the accused declaring before the judge, turned into the triumphant return of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner to the frontline of Argentine politics.’ (Cué and Rivas Molina 2016). She was met by a vast and heterogeneous crowd, which enthusiastically engaged in a sustained chorus of supportive songs and slogans: ‘*te quiero mucho Cristina!*’ ‘I love you lots Cristina’ was heard and seen on posters and banners. She thanked the crowd for their welcome and for their love; defiant and strong, she linked the accusations against her to the country’s history of repression and complicity with the powers that be. She waited for the crowds’ enthusiasm to subside, smiling, waving, nodding. When she spoke, her statements were carefully timed, yet flowed easily, interrupting to enquire as someone in the crowd was taken ill, responding to comments shouted from the crowd, carefully and slowly drawing her hair back from her face, underlining her statements with her hands, she conveyed a sense of intimacy and connection which seemed to address every person standing in the crowd. Interspersed with personal anecdotes, her speech abounded in historical references, effortlessly conjuring up facts and statistics, demonstrating her calibre as a leader.

The crowds filled the vast space in front of the courts, spread around the parked cars to the adjacent streets and the nearby railway stations, around the stalls that provided supporters with sustenance on a damp and chilly day; for most it was impossible to see her, such was the distance between much of the crowd and the podium; small groups gathered around those who managed to pick up the speech on their phones. Patient, good natured, the crowd expressed their disappointment at losing the elections and anger over the new government’s austerity/*ajuste* policies through songs and refrains: ‘*Oh... vamos a volver...*’ ‘We will be back’. The speech drew the shape of the boundaries that defined the enemy: the current government, the courts, the press, all pitted against her in an attempt to erase the achievements of 12 and a half years of government. And she reminded the crowd: hers was not the first project to be thwarted by the combined efforts of the country’s dominant interests.

While maintaining a sense of immediate contact with the crowd, she conjured up a broader community, the Argentine people: 'I don't want Argentines to be afraid; they were never afraid during my administration'. She was addressing, she said, not only the 49 percent who voted for her coalition but the 51 percent who voted against it as well. She urged us to seek unity: 'Don't be angry [with those who voted for the current government]... ask them, how are things going: better than before or worse?'. The call for unity of the Argentines was based on the urgency of claiming and defending their rights - their 'lost rights or lost happiness'<sup>8</sup>. She invites us to seek a solidary connection with friends and neighbours, many of whom may be going through hard times and reminds us: '*la patria es el otro*'<sup>9</sup>, the motherland is the other. She calls for intelligence: 'a great deal of intelligence is needed...to be able to form a grand citizens' front (*'un gran frente ciudadano'*); the invitation to join this front should be encompassing, extended to the trade union leaders who led strikes against her government. They too should be asked to think: 'how were you before the 10<sup>th</sup> December, how did you live the last 12 years, what did you obtain and achieve...'

On June 20<sup>th</sup>, 2017, before a crowd estimated at 60,000 people in the Arsenal football stadium, Fernández launched the citizen's front she had proposed in her Comodoro Py speech. The Unidad Ciudadana was proposed in order to provide a new front that would compete in the legislative elections in October 2017. This initiative indicates a further point of rupture, this time with the traditional core of the Peronist party, envisaging a wider, more heterogeneous 'people', the people as citizens who, as Fernández claimed in her Comodoro Py speech, must claim their rights before Congress. While Fernández called for unity, she delineated a terrain of alliances that was based on antagonism between 'us' and 'them'; the enemy was clearly demarcated and identified, and the outcome of such demarcations was, inevitably, the discursive production of exclusions within the very heart of the proposed unity.

### **Leaders, followers and the problem of populist politics**

The impressive display of support for Fernández is mirrored in the hostile response expressed in the press and social media, where the ambivalences of populism are also played out. One of the (ongoing) discussions relates to the accuracy of reports about the size of the crowd at Comodoro Py. On his/her site, El Revelador (2016) (the Revealer) developed a methodology to measure the crowds. The site points out the disparities in the reporting: the Federal Police calculated a total of 12,000 and the Metropolitan Police estimated the crowd at 15,000; the newspaper Clarín put the number at a mere 10,000. Her supporters estimated a crowd of 200-300,000 people. The Revealer's own calculations

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<sup>8</sup> This may be an allusion to the victorious Cambiemos' slogan of 'a happiness revolution' (*'revolución de la alegría'*)

<sup>9</sup> The notion that '*la patria es el otro*' or 'the motherland is the other' was allegedly introduced by Cristina Fernández de Kirchner in a speech she made on the occasion of the 31<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the Malvinas-Falkland war in April 2013. The philosopher Pablo Feinman, analyzed the concept in terms of Levinas' philosophy of alterity, arguing that alterity is essential for the construction of democracy. Nevertheless, this alterity encompasses contradictions such that not all others constitute the motherland (Feinman 2013).

produced an estimated figure of 110.506. This diligent approach was met with disdain from several online commentators, some concluding that if the figures are correct, they merely confirm how many 'brainless' people are willing to be led. The slippage between critique and pathologization are not new in the world of politics and less so in the context of the ambivalence inherent in the performance and experience of populist discourse.

Given the susceptibility of gender identities and spheres to reductionism and naturalization, it is important to consider the gendered aspect of populist politics. Zabaleta's (1997) warning about the distortions produced by inadequate analytical tools is relevant. Her own analysis focuses on Perón's first government (1943-1955), to provide a radical reading of populism and its gendered dimensions. She points to three misconceptions in analyses of women and politics in Latin America: the belief that Latin American women are more conservative than Latin American men, less feminist than European or North American women and as having a greater propensity to support certain kinds of populist governments because of their 'traditional conservatism'. Rather, she argues that women's support for Peronism should be understood in relation to their 'class perception of the vital problems confronting them in everyday life' (1997: 75). Many of the social, political and economic measures introduced by the Peronist government helped working class women satisfy needs that they identified as the most pressing, relating to housing, work, education, and health. Women also gained rights as citizens, such as the right to vote in 1947. Furthermore, largely through the interventions of Evita, they were interpellated as women, and called to action through a 'specifically feminine discourse [that] was directed at them' (75).

While Eva Perón's role as mediator between the leader and the people was undeniably important, Zabaleta suggests that she also left a radical legacy and promoted a new model of femininity that was markedly different from those that prevailed in the country at the time. However, Peronism promoted a consciousness amongst women supporters that led to the satisfaction of immediate and medium-term gender interests but it did not provide the means to develop awareness 'that they themselves were potentially capable of radically changing that situation, and taking action to effect such change' (ibid. 76). While supporting women through social transformations which redefined gender relations to women's advantage, Peronism did not question the dominant gender models or conventional divisions of labour. She concludes that ultimately, the class and masculine-gendered characteristics of Peronist ideology, enacted through the glorification of motherhood, and reinforced through institutions such as the family, the party and indeed the Peronist Feminine party, contributed to the reproduction of women's social subordination.

Eva Perón never attained an official government position, despite widespread popular support. In contrast, although Fernández's profile was enhanced by her marriage, she had a long political career behind her and developed her own style of leadership from a position of power. Like Kirchner, Fernández drew on the Mothers' support and their symbolic capital in a new, gendered strategy that underscored her own claims and projects. The proposed new progressive and feminized direction, through an ethics of care (Christie 2016), unfolded over her two governments; however, at the end of her second term the country was still afflicted by unacceptable levels of poverty while large corporations' interests remained largely unchallenged. Christie (2016) highlights some of the contradictions in Fernández's discourse, and the importance of policies that nevertheless reinforce existing gender



relations<sup>10</sup>. There are continuities here with early Peronism's embrace of 'feminine' politics that was supportive of women in their roles as mothers, wives and workers –in themselves radical and empowering - but that failed to propose significant changes to the *status quo*. Fernández privileged class over gender when focusing on the undoubtedly urgent needs of women, yet she appealed to gender solidarity in a bid to overcome the class and ethnic differences that distance her from working-class women. Circumscribing her identifications with women to narratives of shared suffering and a focus on the family, she refrained from recognizing women's rights over their bodies, and failed to create spaces and opportunities for radical change (Christie 2016).<sup>11</sup>

## Conclusion

Worsley sums up his influential essay with the reflection that '... populist movements, normally, have failed.' Nevertheless, he also highlights the importance of populism as a 'constantly-recurring style of politics – the eternal attempt of people to claim politics as something of theirs ...' (Worsley 1969: 248). We have seen how on the one hand populism in the context of Argentina has offered moments of change and opportunity that have been highly gendered, both in the performance of leadership and participation and in the policies carried out by Peronism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and Kirchnerism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These interventions have addressed many demands and needs, what Molyneux (1998) refers to as

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<sup>10</sup> The vast majority of unemployed and underemployed Argentines receiving subsidies from the state were single mothers (*jefas de hogar*); in 2006, 72% of the largest state subsidy programme, the 'Unemployed Female and Male Heads of Households Plan', went to women (ibid. 170). In her discussion of Argentina and Chile Christie suggests that while unemployment figures showed a marked improvement on the 2007 Gender Gap Index, the 2009 report recorded further evidence of gender differentials with higher percentages of the female population registered as unemployed in both countries.' (Christie 2016: 134).

<sup>11</sup> One of the flagstone policies is the 2009 *Asignación Universal por Hijo* (universal child benefit). While the law makes no distinction in terms of the carer's gender, Fernández repackaged it towards a gender role-based framework. In 2011 she announced an extension of the program to women who carry their pregnancy beyond their first trimester. In her speech, Fernández clarified the requirement that mothers enroll in a national health care program (*Plan Nacer*) to receive the allowance, a World Bank sponsored program supporting the Millennium Development Goals aimed at reducing infant and mother mortality. A pro-life position has been expressed by Fernández and her close associates and is evident in the different treatment afforded the equal marriage bill and the efforts to decriminalize abortion (Christie 2016). But when Mauricio Macri's government proposed a debate on changes to the law prohibiting the deliberate interruption of pregnancy, Fernández' Front for Victory voted predominantly in favour of legalization. The proposed legalization of abortion divided all political parties; it was approved by the Lower House in a first round of discussions but was subsequently rejected by the Senate. Cristina Fernández, as Senator for the Province of Buenos Aires, voted in favour of legalization (See Martínez 2018).

'practical' gender needs, while failing to address 'strategic' needs that would transform gender relations and the balance of power in the home, at work and in the public sphere. While these issues illustrate the deeper contradictions of populism, it is worth recalling that, beyond leaders' specific ideologies or intentions, achievements in relation to practical needs such as those addressed by different incarnations of Peronism can have unintended consequences in bringing about change, empowering the powerless and redrawing the terms of citizenship, representation and participation. The dialectic unfolding across these tensions, opportunities and hesitations encapsulates the possibilities and limitations of populist discourse, experience and practice.

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