

From Hercules and the Hydra to SYRIZA vs. Global Capitalism: Diffusion and Disappointment of the World Left

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“Bon, il ne fallait pas exagérer: aucune de nos actions ne ressemblerait à un Évènement de ce genre [...] même si l’on parlait du moment où le Grand Soir arriverait, où l’Histoire se sacrifierait, sur l’autel qu’elle avait dressé pour ses Shoab, ses Holocaustes [...] partout où l’Homme était passé. Le Grand Soir ne viendrait pas, mais nos petites soirées, nos petites nuitées passées à jouer les grands prophètes où les petits sorciers l’appelaient de tous nos vœux, comme si une frasque après l’autre pouvait provoquer l’Action [...] comme une farce après une blague dans le recueil infini des kōan les plus insensés pouvait déclencher l’Illumination, l’Éblouissement.”¹

—Pierre Ouellet, *Dans le temps*

Iskra: “The Spark”

Every activist wants to make history, to participate and to belong in the teleological process. At every spark of their movement, they imagine that a gigantic fire will flare up.² In their projections, shared collectively by their ideological community, if David can beat Goliath in Greece or in Portugal, the situation will reproduce itself around the globe. After the knight slayed the monster, an army will rise. There is a mythological aspect to look at. My primary hypothesis is that the anticipation of leftist

¹ Pierre Ouellet, *Dans le Temps* (Montréal : Éditions Druide, 2016), 271; “Well, we should not assume that any of our actions looked like an Event like this... even if we spoke of the time when the *Grand Soir* will happen, where history would sacrifice on the altar that had prepared its Holocausts... everywhere where Man had happened. *Le Grand Soir* would not come, but our small parties, our little nights spent playing the great prophets or the little wizards, calling it with all our hearts, as if a prank after another could cause the *Action* ... as a farce after a joke in the infinite collection of the most foolish *kōan* could trigger the Enlightenment, the Brightness” (Translation by the author)

² “Из искры возгорится пламя” (“From a spark a fire will flare up”), a quote of Alexander Odoevsky that served as the motto of *Iskra* (“The Spark”), the journal of Lenin and the RSDLP from 1900 to 1905.

diffusion influences partisans and adversaries, to see *revolution* as a potentially globalizing institution through a *spill-over* logic.

In the 20th century, this anticipation towards the left was centered on revolution *per se*, with the different waves of socialist/communist uprisings. The first wave was mainly in Europe in the wake of the October Revolution in Russia (1917). The Bolsheviks seem to have inspired, among others, the militants in Germany, Hungary, Italy, and Finland. The subsequent waves of uprisings were in the context of the rise of Nazism and fascism, the formation of Popular Fronts, the Chinese Civil War, and the expansion of Soviet influence in Eastern Europe after the Second World War. Those waves inspired reactions from international actors, both on the domestic and the international level, such as episodes of “Red Scare” in the United States in the 1930s and again in the 1950s with McCarthyism. There is a large existing literature that examines the diffusion of revolution. Kurt Weyland treated the question of diffusion from multiple angles. He conceptualized the process of diffusion as follows: “Diffusion is usually defined in a straightforward way as the process by which influences from outside reasonably autonomous decision-making units significantly increase the likelihood that these polities will emulate an institutional or policy innovation developed elsewhere.”³ The diffusion of revolution follows an interesting process, as it is recognized by Colin Beck, “that revolutions come in waves, particularly those that are the most transformative.”⁴ This notion of waves is central to explaining how the anticipation will diffuse. This process of diffusion leads to the question of spillover (or *spill-over*). Spilling over, according to the Online Cambridge Dictionary, is “to reach or influence a larger area; [to] spread.”⁵ The ‘spillover effect’ has been defined by Leon Lindberg as “a situation in which a given action, related to a specific goal, creates a situation in which the original goal can be assured only by taking further actions, which in turn create a further condition and a need for more action and so forth.”⁶ When

³ Kurt Weyland, *Making Waves: Democratic Contention in Europe and Latin America since the Revolutions of 1848* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), 31.

⁴ Colin J. Beck, “The World-Cultural Origins of Revolutionary Waves: Five Centuries of European Contention”. *Social Science History* 35 (2011), no. 2, 391.

⁵ Online Cambridge Dictionary. Entry: Spillover <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/spill-over> (Accessed May 17th, 2016)

⁶ Leon Lindberg, *The Political Dynamics Of European Economic Integration* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 10.

studying regional integration in the development of the neofunctionalist theory, Ernst Haas used the expression 'spillover' in reference to regional bureaucrats' exploitation of the "inevitable 'unintended consequences' that occur when states agree to assign some degree of supranational responsibility for accomplishing a limited task and then discover that satisfying that function has external effects upon other of their interdependent activities."⁷ Therefore, if states are the actors setting the initial terms they do not have exclusivity on the "direction, extent and pace of change." The interactions between different actors pushes national governments to enter a process of learning and to change their original positions.⁸ In other words, starting with economic integration will gradually construct a sense of solidarity among the practitioners, a process that ultimately leads to more supranational institutionalization. As Philippe C. Schmitter says about Haas's theory of change:

[...] integration is an intrinsically sporadic and conflictual process, but one in which, under conditions of democracy and pluralistic representation, national governments will find themselves increasingly entangled in regional pressures and end up resolving their conflicts by conceding a wider scope and devolving more authority to the regional organizations they have created. Eventually, their citizens will begin shifting more and more of their expectations to the region and satisfying them will increase the likelihood that economic-social integration will 'spill-over' into political integration.⁹

This explains the importance of two key aspects of diffusion discussed in this paper: the perspective of the practitioners and the role of organizational structures in the diffusion of ideas and practices.

If revolutions come in waves, are they following a spillover logic? The notion of revolutionary waves was explained by Colin J. Beck as cultural events of an entire international system: "as such, revolutionary waves

⁷ Philippe C. Schmitter. "Ernst B. Haas and the legacy of neofunctionalism". *Journal of European Public Policy*, 12:2 April 2005, 257.

⁸ Schmitter, "Ernst B. Haas and the legacy of neofunctionalism", 257.

⁹ Ibid.

correspond to the growth of world culture at a systemic level.”¹⁰ For his part, Henry E. Hale described the phenomenon as ‘cascades’ of regime changes, and states factors correlating with their emergence. According to his analysis, revolutionary cascades tend to occur when there is a “common frame of political reference,” “unpopular leaderships [...] becoming lame ducks,” a lack of “other focal points for coordinated defection” by the elites, and “structural conditions supporting a new regime type.”¹¹

Beck concludes that revolutionary waves are more likely to occur when there is a “relatively rapid expansion of world culture and hegemonic decline.”¹² Not only does revolutionary contention erupt in reaction to domestic issues, it is also related to a “delegitimation of an international order,” especially when the contours of an alternative political organization become clearer.¹³ Beck’s model might point to why, especially after the victory of Mao’s Communist Party in China and Fidel Castro’s Cuban Revolution, groups around the world embraced communism as an alternative. Moreover, theoretically, Marxist-Leninist and revolutionary guerrilla principles were not restricted to a specific country, ethnicity, or belief, and could be applied (diffused or translated) to any contentious situation. It is possible to describe the relationship examined by Beck as a *feedback* between domestic and international systems.

If the opponents of revolution anticipate the diffusion of leftist movements and ideas with anxiety, the partisans desire the spillover. Leftist discourse has built a mythology around the figure of the ‘underdog’, who faces enormous difficulty before reaching an undeniable victory. Hope grows not only from the modern political mythology, but also to the forms of beliefs and faith associated with spirituality and ancient myths.¹⁴ It is possible to draw a parallel with the story of Hercules (or Heracles in the Greek mythology) slaying the Hydra, a task that

¹⁰ Beck, “The World-Cultural Origins of Revolutionary Waves: Five Centuries of European Contention”, 193.

¹¹ Henry E. Hale. “Regime Change Cascades: What We Have Learned from the 1848 Revolutions to the 2011 Arab Uprisings”. *Annual Review of Political Science*. 16 (2013), 331.

¹² Beck, “The World-Cultural Origins of Revolutionary Waves: Five Centuries of European Contention”, 194.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Nikos Kalampalikis, “Mythes et Représentations Sociales”, *Pensée mythique et représentations sociales* (Paris, L’Harmattan, Denise Jodelet, Eugenia Paredes), p. 63-84

became the symbol of the force of reason when facing difficulty and hopelessness.¹⁵ Indeed, the multi-headed sea monster would regrow one or multiple heads for each that the hero chopped off. People grow up learning to sympathize and believe the moral of this victory. The paradox is that we are told to use a process of rationalization of beliefs, while resisting it at same time. Reason, resisting romanticism and seeking “cool-headed fairness in the representation of reasonable interests,” is seen as stronger by liberalism.¹⁶ Similarly, romanticism is seen belonging to old times: acts of resistance and revolution in the past (American Revolution, French Revolution, Second World War) are praised by popular history, but contemporary liberal society discourages political, social and economic disruption.

Similar to Hercules and the Hydra, the rhetoric of David and Goliath is now commonly used as a metaphor in a modernized form for social justice in mainstream media such as a single citizen fighting big corporations.¹⁷ However some history scholars, such as Marcus Rediker and Peter Linebaugh, see the metaphor of Hercules and the Hydra in the opposite direction. Rediker and Linebaugh apply the metaphor to the class conflict of the 15th to the 17th centuries when Hercules represented the ruling classes, Hydra the proletariat, in the process of colonization.¹⁸ Analogously, Francis Bacon used the Hercules and Hydra myth to imply that the masters of the global market were performing their “labor of Hercules” against the “enemies of civilisation”: indigenous, pirates, in summary, the “undesirables.”¹⁹

Political engagement needs more elaboration than a face to face duel with a monster. Dimensions of plurality and community are involved. In an argument parallel to the one made by Haas, Beck examines the process of institutionalization in revolutionary waves. He argues that waves, in addition to being an expression of changing practices, are also events that

¹⁵Robert Edward Francillon, *Gods and Heroes, Or, The Kingdom of Jupiter*, (London:Ginn, 1894), p. 221

¹⁶ Sharon R. Krause, “The Liberalism of Love”, *The University of Chicago D’Angelo Law Library*, 2014, p.833

¹⁷ Carla Rivera, “David-and-Goliath Saga Brings Cable to Skid Row”, *Los Angeles Times*, November 21, 2001, accessed May 17th, 2016,

<http://articles.latimes.com/2001/nov/21/news/mn-6603>

¹⁸ Peter Way, “Hercules, the Hydra and Historians”. *Sozial.Geschichte Online* 3 (2010), S. <http://www.stiftung-sozialgeschichte.de>, p56–64

¹⁹Mark Lewis Taylor, *The Theological and the Political: On the Weight of the World*, (Minneapolis : Fortress Press, 2011), p63.

contribute to the “institutionalization of new models of governance.”²⁰ This is in line with my claim that revolutions help us understand the phenomenon of diffusion. However, the process can be understood as the anticipation of something bigger to come that brings new alternatives together. In communist internationalism this anticipated moment has two versions, which are sometimes complementary. Both versions defined the diffusion of the ideology through revolution, but one follows the model of the ‘*Grand Soir*’ (the event of the overthrow of capitalism) while the other privileges a more procedural diffusion, similar to the “domino effect.” However, both models were abandoned gradually by most communist organizations and the USSR after the Second World War.

If a foreign event can “spark” the waves of contentious events, the process does not follow the “conventional” rationalist model. The spark does not necessarily lead to the fire. The critical masses overestimate the significance of this external precedent, and conclude that it is possible to replicate it in their own context.²¹ This overestimation enhances the significance, in a way that was not predicted by its own actors. Kurt Weyland claims that this understanding agrees with cascade theories invoking cognitive heuristics. In cases of the revolutionary cascades, this explanation captures more elements than the traditional rationalist model does. In the dynamics of those revolutionary events, actors (including “common” people) are subject to distortion in their judgements, and face a lot of uncertainty.²² In summary, a ‘spark’ can disseminate distortions and uncertainties in other countries.

La Vie en Rouge: Organizational Concerns

The primary hypothesis of this paper is that the anticipation of leftist diffusion influences partisans and adversaries to see revolution as a potentially globalizing institution through a spill-over logic. However, this anticipation is not devoid of rationality. Weyland concluded that the wave of 1917-1919, which was triggered by the Russian Revolution, diffused differently compared to the wave of 1848 (the “Spring of Nations”). Indeed, the wave of 1917-1919 advanced more slowly than

²⁰ Beck, “The World-Cultural Origins of Revolutionary Waves: Five Centuries of European Contention”, 194.

²¹ Weyland, *Making Waves: Democratic Contention in Europe and Latin America since the Revolutions of 1848*, 14.

²² *Ibid.*, 15.

the one before. To explain this delay, Weyland proposed that recently-emerged large-scale organizations (unions, political parties, international movements) had reshaped the processing of political information, broadening the limits of rationality.²³ The leaders of the 1917-1919 movements were less hasty and more prepared than the inchoate masses of 1848. With the rise of these organizations, “a new level of decision-making about emulative regime contention” was introduced.²⁴ This allowed ordinary citizens to follow organized groups, parties and unions, as opposed to 1848 when citizens needed to individually decide on their response to an external triggering event. The leaders of those 1917-1919 groups became the true decision-makers, and also reacted to external impulses for regime contention, however, in a deliberate manner that was in conjunction with the domestic power constellation and political context.²⁵ The expansion was therefore slower, but more successful than the events of the last century. In other words, in 1848, *grandiose* foreign events unleashed rapid contagion and lead the masses to rush their movement without any preoccupations for the “prevailing power constellation.” This lead to the ultimate failure of most of these movements. In comparison to these rushed and thus failed movements, the leadership of organizations like the social-democratic movement of Germany made better decisions because they had access to information and the chance to debate with other members of the group.²⁶ Instead of abruptly imitating other revolution, the organization provided a framework to study the opportunity structure of their domestic context and to launch their movement at the moment they perceived to be the most favourable.²⁷ Even if the people of Europe shared transnational problematics, the most effective response could differ internally from one country to another.

The phenomenon of diffusion in accordance to local particularities has been described as translation. Johanna Bockman and Gil Eyal use Bruno Latour’s concepts of the actor-network and translation to demonstrate that the best analysis of the adoption of neoliberalism in Eastern Europe is not “an institutional form diffused along the nodes of a network, but [is] itself an actor-network based on a particular

²³ Ibid., 127.

²⁴ Ibid., 128.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 153.

²⁷ Ibid.

translation strategy that construes socialism as a laboratory of economic knowledge.”²⁸ For Latour, ideas and innovations are not simply diffused, but rather are part of a transformation of a network of relations. Similarly, what we might see as “imitative of given institutional forms” should be understood, for Latour, as translation.²⁹ This process is defined as the capacity of network builders to conceive an interpretation that matches their interests with the newcomers to the network, whose support and resources are essential for the network’s continuance.³⁰ The importance of the concept goes beyond semantic concerns: transnational influence has an element of feedback. To use the vocabulary of Bockman and Eyal, it is not possible to divide the dialogue into an active author of the ideas and policies, and a passive recipient. In the example of the waves of revolution, the networks that made the diffusion/translation possible were the organizations described by Weyland. In the 20th century, politics had become more complex. In addition to what Weyland refers as micro-foundations, there were now macro-structures, and interactions between these two elements.³¹ In terms of anticipation, it affected both adversaries and partisans. World leaders opposed to socialist ideas perceived the emergence of organized political movements as a threat, while socialist partisans found these political structures to be a vehicle for revolution. Activists from all of Europe meeting through the First International, which formed after the events of 1848, and then also through the Second International and the Comintern. Almost every country also saw the creation of socialist, social-democratic or communist parties to organize the movement. The party of Lenin, with sustained of the revolution in Russia, became the guiding light and the embodiment of success, which was ready to assist others in joining the union.

Other examples can be found to support Weyland’s theory that the presence of organizational frameworks leads to better success in the diffusion of political movement. Indeed, a certain branch of revolutionaries did not believe that organizations were reflecting the true

²⁸ Johanna Bockman and Gil Eyal, “Eastern Europe as a Laboratory for Economic Knowledge: The Transnational Roots of Neoliberalism”. *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 108, No. 2 (September 2002), 310.

²⁹ Bockman and Eyal, “Eastern Europe as a Laboratory for Economic Knowledge: The Transnational Roots of Neoliberalism”, 314.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Weyland, *Making Waves: Democratic Contention in Europe and Latin America since the Revolutions of 1848*, 153.

potential of the popular masses and tried a more 'organic' form of uprisings. This branch formulated a rejection of the 'analysis process' and the concept of *structurality*; however, as was the case in 1848, those who adopted spontaneity, from the Spartacist uprising of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg to the Taksim Gezi Park protests in Turkey, faced failure most of the time.

The historical analysis by Weyland shows that organization seems to be necessary for the overall success of a movement. However, fear that the social movement will be coopted and distorted by a certain power leads to mistrust for the organizational approach. As a movement becomes organized it gains members, but it loses its initial identity of subversive radicalism and being avant-garde. Movements must find an equilibrium between organization and cooptation, although some theorists and practitioners (from Rosa Luxemburg to Michel Foucault) felt that spontaneity was a better approach *normatively*. For example, there is a debate about Foucault's praise of the Iranian Revolution. His trust in spontaneous movement is present in his analytical account of the situation. Rejecting established theoretical labels, such as 'pure' Marxism or Maoism, Foucault felt that people were not hijacked in Iran. In contrast with movements in China, Cuba or Vietnam, the Iranian movement was "a tidal wave without a military leadership, without a vanguard, without a party."³² The revolution needed to rely on the masses in order to avoid becoming a single-party dictatorship or another form of distorted regime. The personal sovereignty attached to the rulers of the *Ancien Régime* was weaker than nowadays. For Foucault the events of Iran were a sign of the end of the 'organizational' way of overthrowing regimes, the method that had emerged with modernity in the 20th century.³³ After the rationalization of the modern polity, emotions and the power of the crowd regained their effect on the state structures this affection for the Iranian movement a reproduction of what Jean-Claude Milner describe as being characteristic of the *Gauche Prolétarienne* (an attractive group for counter-culture intellectuals because of its mistrust of established intellectuals)? Janet Afary and Kevin B. Anderson trace the multiple uses of the expression *irreducible* to describe the uprising. They conclude that, "at least in part," the movement was so "elemental" that it was not possible to reduce it to smaller constituent elements, such as

³² Michel Foucault, *Dits et Écrits, II, 1976-1988*, (Paris : Gallimard, 2001), 94

³³ *Ibid.*, 701.

parties, tendencies, and factions, and that is why Foucault was so seduced by it³⁴ As opposed to the bureaucratic boredom and flip-flopping attitude of the French leftist politics, the spontaneity of the Iranian movement was just a collective rejection of the structures, including the revolutionary model itself.

A Sense of Community

How can the particularity of each community, protected and symbolized by the monstrous Leviathan, accept the diffusion of ideas, practices and institutions coming from elsewhere? Internationalism and nationalism are both products of modernity, and appeared in Europe at around the same time. However, diffusion seems to be a true global issue, encompassing all nations into one community. Diffusion therefore operates transnationally. The relationship between revolution and leftism, and concepts of nation and nationalism is interesting, as their history is intertwined and followed patterns of diffusion in the 19th and 20th century

In his 1983 book, *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson offered what has become the widely accepted definition of nation and the associated sentiment of nationalism. A nation “is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in minds of each lives the image of their communion.”³⁵ This definition of nation may seem to contradict Marxist principles of *species-being* inspiring revolutionaries, especially given the other label given by Anderson: “the nation is imagined as limited because even the largest of them [...] has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations. No nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind. The most messianic nationalists do not dream of a day when all the members of the human race will join their nation.”³⁶

Is it indeed contradictory that national movements expressed themselves through revolutionary communism? Furthermore, is it only for practical strategic reasons that Lenin advocated the right of self-

³⁴ Janet Afary and Kevin B. Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution. Gender and the Seductions of Islamism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 130.

³⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), 6.

³⁶ Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, 7.

determination of oppressed nations? On one hand, Lenin connected the class struggle to the international system, in which the internationalism of the 'great' nations take the form of oppression and inequality. "Anybody who does not understand this has not grasped the real proletarian attitude to the national question, he is still essentially petty bourgeois in his point of view and is, therefore, sure to descend to the bourgeois point of view."³⁷ On the other, he argued that it should be "assured that the non-Russians place the greatest possible trust in the proletarian class struggle," because, in order to gain their support, the new Russian-based government needs to compensate "for the lack of trust, for the suspicion and the insults to which the government of the "dominant" nation subjected them in the past."³⁸ Therefore, it seems that, beyond the tendency of socialist movements to take the side of the oppressed, the connection between modern revolutionary and nationalist ideals is the product of political calculation by the builders of Soviet union.³⁹

The modern meaning of "nation" is said to have appeared at the Battle of Valmy in 1792, provoking the end of the monarchy during the French Revolution, during which the Commander of the Revolution, General Kellermann, exclaimed "Long live the Nation."⁴⁰ In this context, partisans were defending the land against the reactionary forces backed by the other European countries. Despite the differences between these two eras, one similarity is that, like the leaders before the Second World War, European monarchs feared the expansion of the French Revolution outside in Europe, which would threaten the established "social order" in which their interests are favoured. However, at the time of the interwar period (1919-1938), the diffusion of revolutionary ideas did not appear in the way it did in France at the end of the 18th century. Indeed, a number of historians now argue that those revolutionary ideas and their institutional expressions were diffused a few years later through

³⁷ Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov "Lenin", "The Question of Nationalities or 'Autonomisation' " in "Last Testament' Letters to the Congress", from *Lenin Collected Works* (1963), Volume 36, 593-611. Available online at:

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1906/may/20c.htm> (Accessed May 17th, 2016)

³⁸ "Lenin", "The Question of Nationalities or 'Autonomisation' " in "Last Testament' Letters to the Congress".

³⁹ "Ibid.

⁴⁰ Maurice Agulhon, *Les mots de la République*, (Toulouse : Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 2007), 81.

Napoleon's conquests in Europe.⁴¹ This raises the question of the relationship between wars and revolution and the potential expansion of revolution through war: the 'War-Revolution Nexus'.⁴²

If the motivations of actors can be understood through the lens of the classical realist notions of survival and struggle for interests, the interconnection between strategic concerns and ideational conceptions becomes clear, as ideology and beliefs (and even mythology) influenced the decisional process of the actors. Historically, it is necessary to remember that the period studied is marked by two pancontinental events (the rise of Fascism and the Russian Revolution) and an almost unseen transnational context, a characteristic of modernity.⁴³ Even with the distinct boundaries separating each countries, and the narrative dictated by the nation-state to their community, societies and movements shared a common experience, and sometimes even common aspirations.⁴⁴ This new proximity, the feeling of a certain "imagined" community made possible the spillover of revolution. The actors who wanted to learn from past experience tried to anticipate the results, which influenced the diffusion of the practice of revolution.

What Is to Be Done?

With capitalism widely accepted as the "appropriate" system, Left politics tried for decades to ride the monster, with initiatives such as the Third Way or New Labour. However, social-democracy, forced to accept the neoliberal dogma, was only weakened by such efforts. It is within this context that a new radicalism emerged which proposed to slay the monster by processes of creation and destruction. Today, the framework of diffusion can still be applied to broader political manifestations. For example, the term 'political revolution' has recently entered in the rhetoric of the Western left. United States Democratic Party presidential candidate Bernie Sanders uses it as his main leitmotiv

⁴¹ Marvin Perry, Myrna Chase, James Jacob, Margaret Jacob and Theodore H. Von Laue, *Western Civilization: Ideas, Politics, and Society*, (Scarborough: Nelson Education, 2012), 478.

⁴² Michael Jabara Carley, *1939: The Alliance That Never Was and the Coming of World War II* (Chicago: Ivan R Dee, 1999), xv.

⁴³ Gerd-Rainer Horn and Padraic Kenney (Ed.), *Transnational Moments of Change: Europe 1945, 1968, 1989*. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), xi.

⁴⁴ Horn and Kenney (Ed.), *Transnational Moments of Change: Europe 1945, 1968, 1989*, xi.

for change.⁴⁵ The expression ‘political revolution’ was also revived by Pierre Laurent, the head of the French Communist Party (PCF), as well as Daniel Cohn-Bendit, the former Green European MP and emblematic figure of the May 68 protests.⁴⁶ It is also used as a call for a new political class. The reappearance of the terminology of revolution is one expression of the renewal of the left, not only in dealing with the right-wing and the neoliberal dogma, but also with its own past and heritage.

What are the roots of this evolution? In Marxist literature, the idea of political revolution is associated with the Trotskyist theory. For Trotsky, this situation occurs when a government, or its “form,” is replaced or differed, “but so far as concerns property relations, the new power would not have to resort to revolutionary measures.”⁴⁷ Thus, it differs from social revolutions: “after the political revolution – that is, the deposing of the bureaucracy – the proletariat would have to introduce in the economy a series of very important reforms, but not another social revolution.”⁴⁸ The common sense of the term revived this opposition to the social, meaning a revolution into the political sphere, even, the orthodox political structure. This is why it has been associated with the reformist tradition of socialism (as opposed to the ‘true’ revolutionaries, such as Castro or Mao) and with the democratic socialism of Jean Jaurès (France), Salvador Allende (Chile) or Olof Palme (Sweden), which emphasize the electoral process.

The hope of the global left is concentrated on microsituations, with passive spectators who put all their hopes into those. The results can lead to the sentiment of failure, followed by the quick spread of disappointment amongst the former partisans that have now defected with disaffection.⁴⁹ This is what happened with SYRIZA in Greece. The tremendous success of the small party, with their major electoral victory in early 2015, drew global attention. The party opposed the

⁴⁵ Pierre Laurent. *99%*. (Paris: Cherche Midi, 2016), 85.

⁴⁶ Hervé Algalarrondo and Daniel Cohn-Bendit. *Et si on arrêtait les conneries : Plaidoyer pour une révolution politique*. (Paris : Fayard, 2016); Laurent. *99%*, 85.

⁴⁷ Leon Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed* (1936) Available online at: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1936/revbet/ch09.htm> (Accessed May 17th, 2016)

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Alex Andreou, “Alexis Tsipras: Hero, Traitor, Hero, Traitor, Hero”, *Byline*, July 13th, 2015, accessed May 17th, 2016, <https://www.byline.com/column/11/article/164>

austerity measures applied by memorandum by the European troika (the European Commission, European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund). SYRIZA defeated the social-democratic PASOK and the conservative New Democracy to form a government with right-wing ANEL, with which it shares Eurosceptic concerns. In June 2015, Tsipras announced that he would submit the bailout proposition to the population in the first referendum to be held since the 1970s. Tsipras and his party campaigned for the 'No', and won with 61.31% of the vote. The day after, to facilitate negotiations with the "troika", Yanis Varoufakis, the Minister of Finance and architect of the economic agenda of SYRIZA resigned. His resignation, however, was insufficient to change the plans of Greece's creditors. With the threat of ejection from the Eurozone, Tsipras's government was forced to maintain the neoliberal path and install an austerity program in Greece.⁵⁰ Not only did a fraction of SYRIZA resign and vote against him in parliament, but around the world the honeymoon of admiration for the party abruptly ended.

Pierre Rimbart in *Le Monde Diplomatique* was critical of the attitude of the media towards the Greek Crisis which called for Tsipras to resign six months after his election. Rimbart perceived Tsipras as only guilty of wanting to keep his promises, considered the coverage of the media as taking the side of the creditors.⁵¹ Considering the confrontation between Tsipras's colition and the creditors as ideological, Rimbart's summarized the vision of the creditors by the formula: "*Syriza deledna est* – Syriza must be destroyed".⁵² Indeed, for European liberal leaders, "it was out of question for the conservative Europe to leave the possibility of an alternative, be it soberly social-democratic as the Syriza program."⁵³ They felt they had to slay the monster as quickly as possible, and eliminate a potential precedent.

Jean-Luc Mélenchon, 2017 presidential candidate and major voice of the French left, judged Tsipras harshly, saying that his decision and

⁵⁰ "Crise grecque : Hollande et Merkel attendent « des propositions précises et crédibles », *Le Monde*. June 6th, 2015, accessed May 17th, 2016, http://www.lemonde.fr/europe/article/2015/07/06/demission-reunions-reactions-le-jour-d-apres-le-non-grec_4672239_3214.html

⁵¹ Pierre Rimbart, "« Syriza deledna est », *Le Monde diplomatique*, July 2015, accessed May 17th, 2016, <https://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2015/07/RIMBERT/53219>

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

negotiation tactics were weak.⁵⁴ Mélenchon's opinion, shared around the globe, found a response in a text by Alex Andreou. Covering the situation from a Greek perspective, Andreou wrote a piece that summarized the paradox of SYRIZA, addressing it to the leftists of the world who were disappointed and harshly criticizing Tsipras's decision: "We apologise to Marxists worldwide for Greece refusing to commit ritual suicide to further the cause. You have suffered from your sofas."⁵⁵ Not only has he highlighted how "easy it is to be ideologically pure when you are risking nothing," but he grasped the key element about the hope and the faith of diffusion towards the leftist ideal. Indeed, Andreou found the situation to be revealing of the political landscape in Europe and all-across the world, that partisans of socialism would put all their hopes and dreams on the leader of a small country. That means that those partisans are so in need for a model to follow, for a spark to light the fire, that "there seemed to be a fervent, irrational, almost evangelical belief that a tiny country, drowning in debt, gasping for liquidity, would somehow (and that somehow is never specified) defeat global capitalism, armed only with sticks and rocks."⁵⁶

The Greek experience is not a total failure. The diffusion element is alive, and contributed to what seems to be a growing momentum. It opens the door to other 'monsters' threatening the economic order, from Podemos to *Nuit Debout* in France, not only using ideological or political tactics, but also social, aesthetic, and ethical elements.⁵⁷ Not to say that SYRIZA is directly responsible for the other 'monsters', but it participates to a broader, transnational context fueling these social and political movements across the national borders.

Normatively, for the success of progressive movement, anticipation of diffusion is a double-edged sword. Thus, the burning question of Lenin is still unresolved: What is to be done? The answer for Franco "Bifo" Berardi is that resistance is (almost) futile.⁵⁸ Even if revolution is still necessary, in our world of disappointment the battle is over and capitalist

⁵⁴ Conference of Jean-Luc Mélenchon in Montreal, on April 23th, 2016:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bWN6zhj7UN0>

⁵⁵ Andreou, "Alexis Tsipras: Hero, Traitor, Hero, Traitor, Hero"

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Email exchange with the author

⁵⁸ Franco "Bifo" Berardi (Trad. : Paulin Dardel), *TUERIES : Forcenés et suicidaires à l'ère du capitalisme absolu*, (Montréal : Lux Éditeur, 2016), 197.

absolutism has won, and hope will do us more harm than good.⁵⁹ The only thing that is left for us is ironic autonomy.⁶⁰

However, what can we do if not keep hoping? Last year in the United States, the Bernie Sanders phenomenon took everyone from the public to political analysts by surprise. Even if he was not elected as the Democratic nominee, the Sanders phenomenon showed the force of the ideas of the left and their appeal to the new generations, even in the kingdom of capitalist absolutism. It is an occasion to send a clear message about the progressive cause itself, all around the world. For such we need to act and take position. We shall not wait. It is important to keep in mind that diffusion is active rather than a passive process.

⁵⁹ Berardi, *TUERIES : Forcés et suicidaires à l'ère du capitalisme absolu*, 215.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 214.

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