The Genesis and Evolution of Momentum During Jeremy Corbyn's Tenure as Leader of the Labour Party

By Bradley Ward

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Department of Political Science and International Studies,

School of Government,

College of Social Sciences,

The University of Birmingham,

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Abstract

This thesis provides a detailed empirical account of Momentum during Corbyn's tenure as leader of the Labour Party. The findings are based on data that was collected via the use of ethnographic methods between September 2018 and April 2020, which included twenty-six semi-structured interviews alongside participant observation and documentary analysis. Two new ways of conceptualising Momentum and Corbynism are introduced – 'pop-socialism' (Corbynism) and the 'hybrid left pressure group' (Momentum) – which establish a framework for the empirical study. This serves as a basis to unearth key aspects of Momentum's relationship to the Labour Party, more concisely define them within the existing literature on social movements and political parties, and enhance the scholarly understanding of Corbynism.

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Introduction

Momentum was launched in October 2015 by supporters of Jeremy Corbyn's successful leadership campaign in the preceding summer months. In the subsequent years their membership ballooned to over 40 000, they propelled the left to important victories in internal Labour elections, and perhaps most impressively, they made several innovations at Labour's 2017 general election campaign which gained widespread appraisal from across the political spectrum. Although their influence has arguably waned since Corbyn's resignation from the leadership in April 2020, they remain an important presence in the Labour Party.

Despite this mark, the literature is yet to provide a broad picture of their legacy and impact on British politics. Existing accounts have investigated their role during party campaigns (Dommett and Temple, 2018), the relationship between their movement and party wings (Muldoon and Rye, 2020), their social media content (Dennis, 2020), and aspects of their history (Kogan, 2019; Panitch and Leys, 2020; Jones, 2020). These commentators have applied a multitude of definitions depending on their area of concern: a faction, a social movement, a 'movement-faction' (Dennis, 2020), a 'party-driven movement' (Muldoon and Rye, 2020), a 'satellite' to the party (Dommett and Temple, 2018), and a 'party within a party' (Sabbagh et al, 2018). Additionally, the lack of research into the views of Corbyn's main supporters means that existing literature on Corbynism is limited: Unearthing the perspective of the Momentum membership should be an important part of any comprehensive interpretation of its emergence and decline.

In light of this, the main aim of this thesis will be to define and understand Momentum and Corbynism and investigate the relationship between the two. To do so, it will provide the first detailed empirical account of Momentum's genesis and evolution during Corbyn's tenure as leader of the Labour Party. Four research questions have been developed in the attempt to achieve this goal:

1) How should Momentum be defined in relation to the current scholarship on political parties and social movements?
2) How should Momentum's relationship to Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour Party be understood?
3) How do participants in Momentum understand Corbynism?
4) How can Momentum help to explain Corbynism's rise and fall?

The first research question has been chosen because existing commentary has illustrated that Momentum was formed by a combination of more recent extra-parliamentary protest movements alongside groups orbiting the Labour Party (see Klug, 2016; Dennis, 2020; Muldoon and Rye, 2020). This influenced Momentum's later efforts to fuse internal party organising methods typical of the Labour left with methods drawn from social movement traditions (see Muldoon and Rye, 2020). Therefore, if the thesis is to define and understand Momentum, it is necessary to delineate where they should be positioned in the relevant political science and social movement literature

The second research question, meanwhile, will guide the thesis' attempts to unpack the relationship between Momentum, Corbyn and the Labour Party. Indeed, it is impossible to fully comprehend the evolution of all three over the past few years without having at least some understanding of their interconnections. Current scholarship, however, is lacking the rich empirical detail to grasp their interplays during the period in question.

The third question derives from the need to develop a clearer picture of the relationship between Momentum and Corbynism. The most substantive accounts of Corbynism, as insightful as they have been, have rarely considered the views of its main protagonists in Momentum (see Perryman, 2017; Bolton and Pitts, 2018; Batrouni, 2020; Panitch and Leys, 2020). This thesis will plug this gap by exploring the perspectives, motivations and viewpoints of participants in Momentum.

Indeed, if the thesis is to paint a complete picture of either Momentum or Corbynism, then it will need to dig into the finer details of their rapid rise up until the 2017 general election and their decline after that peak. The fourth research question asks how Momentum can help to explain this rise and fall in the hope of eliciting some insight into the two.

Theory and Methods

The findings are based on research carried out between September 2018 and June 2020. It was decided that ethnographic methods would establish the optimal means of dissecting the dynamics of Momentum and Corbynism that remain invisible in Westminster-based political science literature (see Allen, 2019). Grounding the analysis in the views of participants would enable the thesis to reveal the 'hidden' aspects of Momentum and unearth how and why Corbynism gathered the support of participants from a broad range of traditions. The research included twenty-six semi-structured interviews of twenty-four participants, including activists, staff members, and the founders of Momentum, combined with participant observation at a diversity of locations: protests, rallies, conferences, meetings, festivals, and so forth (see appendix 1 for list of interviews). Interviews of leadership aides, pro-Corbyn MPs and staff members were also conducted, and key documents were collected to triangulate the data (see appendix 2).

The theory has been systematised through what is sometimes called an 'iterative' approach: a continuous dialogue between theory, data and method prompts refinements and improvements to existing theory as the research progresses (Srivastava and Hopwood, 2009). In that vein, the ideas of 'pop-socialism' and the 'hybrid left pressure group' (HLPG), which form the backbone of much of the analysis in the thesis, were initially established after engaging with the literature and then enhanced during the data collection and analysis stage.

The notion of 'pop-socialism' provides a means of conceptualising how Corbynism gathered the support of participants in Momentum. The main inspiration for the idea was the post-Gramscian work of Stuart Hall (1979, 1985, 1985a, 1986, 1988, 2010). His many insights

made it possible to identify three dimensions of Corbynism's support: (1) the emergence of a 'pop-star' leader forges a space for the convergence of a plurality of ideological traditions from movements and parties; (2) appeals to a 'people' unite these traditions together and provide a justification for the pursuit of popular-democratic reforms; and (3) the appeals form the basis of an attempt to renew a conventional vision of democratic socialism[1]. The inspiration for the notion of the HLPG, meanwhile, draws primarily from Wyn Grant's (1999, 2001, 2004) scholarship on pressure groups, and establishes a basis for investigating Momentum's relationship to Corbyn and the Labour Party and positioning them within the existing literature on social movements and political parties. It is defined as an organisation that utilises 'insider' and 'outsider' strategies drawn from party and movement traditions in an attempt to influence the direction of a left party.

Contributions

The main contribution of the thesis will be to provide the first detailed empirical account of Momentum up to this point. They have had a substantial and sometimes controversial impact in several different ways and yet remain poorly understood. By chronicling their evolution, the thesis will seek to understand their legacy up to date and clarify where they are positioned in relation to the Labour Party and the broader map of British politics.

The thesis will also make some important theoretical contributions that establish a way of conceptualising Momentum and Corbynism and analysing the intersection between the two. 'Pop-socialism' is important for a number of reasons. First, it provides a distinct way of considering how Corbynism combined conventional forms of socialist politics orbiting left parties with unconventional forms of left politics emanating from the anti-austerity movement. This constitutes an alternative interpretation to the overstretched populist literature that considers how a 'class' discourse can be combined with a discourse of the 'people' (Mouffe,

[1] Some of the findings in relation to the concept of pop-socialism have previously been published in a peer reviewed academic journal (see Ward and Guglielmo, 2021). The definition established in the thesis is an updated version.

2018; Katsambekis and Kioupkiolis, 2019; Smith, 2019; Damiani, 2020). Secondly, it provides a way of framing Corbyn's relationship to his supporters by explaining how his leadership forged the space for a distinct form of politics to evolve. Thirdly, it can help to explain why Corbynism appealed to a plurality of groups across the broad left in its initial emergence.

The HLPG, meanwhile, defines where Momentum should be positioned in relation to the literature on social movements and political parties. It can help to explain how Momentum sought to influence the direction of the Labour Party by utilising conventional 'insider' strategies – including negotiation, compromise and the leveraging of key decision-makers in the party – with experimental 'outsider' strategies such as direct action, election campaigning and political education. This can help to analyse Momentum's lineage with past Labour left groups whilst also exploring ways in which they went beyond the boundaries of previous groups.

Overall, both of these conceptualisations can elicit some insight into the particularities of the two phenomena at hand. But they could also be applicable to other comparative cases outside of British politics. The Bernie Sanders' supporting 'Our Revolution', for example, was launched by a coalition of groups from the conventional left and the extra-parliamentary left and they have utilised both party-based and social movement-based forms of organising in an attempt to shift the direction of the Democratic Party (Muldoon and Rye, 2020). Furthermore, leaders such as Pablo Iglesias, Alexis Tsipras, Nichi Vendola, and Jean-Luc Mélenchon have mobilised their 'fans' in a similar style to Jeremy Corbyn (see Dean, 2017). Finally, 'pop-socialism' can contribute to analysis of the reconfiguration of class and populist politics that some commentators claim has taken place since the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) (Ramiro and Gomez, 2017; Katsambekis and Kioupkiolis, 2019; Kioupkiolis, 2016; Damiani, 2020).

A final contribution is methodological – ethnographic methods constitute an alternative to the Westminster-based methods that dominate political science. They provide a foundation for researching a largely extra-parliamentary phenomenon, revealing the views of Corbyn's main

supporters, and analysing the aspects of Momentum that remain 'hidden' from existing accounts. This approach enables the thesis to paint a more grounded conceptual and theoretical interpretation of Corbynism's unexpected rise between the 2015 leadership campaign and the 2017 general election, and analyse its rapid decline in the aftermath of the 2019 election defeat.

Thesis outline

The thesis is divided into seven chapters. Chapter One provides an overview of the literature. It highlights how the failure to consider the views of Corbyn's main supporters has contributed to the absence of any clear definition of Momentum and contradictory interpretations of Corbynism, which has been described as populist and Marxist; internationalist and nationalist; reformist and transformative; socialist and social democratic; anti-modernising but also utopian; and plural but authoritarian (see Ward and Kerr, 2021). Evidently, further research is required to delineate Momentum and Corbynism more precisely.

Chapter Two develops 'pop-socialism' and the HLPG as a way of conceptualizing the intersection between Corbynism ('pop-socialism') and Momentum (the HLPG). The historical circumstances of their emergence – on the intersection of protest and party – are discussed before they are introduced in detail. The research design and methodology is then outlined in Chapter Three. Ethnographic methods constitute the optimal means to investigate the internal dynamics of Momentum by providing a basis to build theory that is grounded in the experience of participants. This constitutes an alternative to the externalist accounts in the current literature.

Chapter Four will tackle the main research aim – to provide an empirical account of Momentum during the period of Corbyn's leadership – by providing an overview of their genealogy from Corbyn's 2015 leadership campaign up until a new constitution was ratified in early 2017 following a protracted internal struggle. This period was key to answering the first research question. Many of the leading 'movementist' volunteers that joined Momentum in the aftermath

of the 2015 leadership campaign intended to build a 'social movement', but when the new constitution was imposed they were integrated into institutionalist objectives inside the Labour Party.

Chapter Five will deploy use the notion of the HLPG as a framework to answer the second research question – how should Momentum's relationship to Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour Party be understood? By mapping out Momentum's use of 'insider' and 'outsider' strategies the chapter is able to bracket Momentum's external relations into three main dimensions: (1) internal party organising *in and against* the party; (2) extra-parliamentary organising *outside* the party; and (3) campaigning as an *appendage* to the party. This establishes a basis to more clearly determine where Momentum are positioned in relation to social movements and political parties.

Chapter Six will tackle the third and fourth research question. By investigating how participants viewed Corbynism the chapter is able to elicit some insights into why it made such unexpected headway between the 2015 leadership contest and the 2017 general election. 'Pop-socialism' establishes a means to understand this rise by exploring how it gathered the support of left-wing groups orbiting the Labour Party alongside activists from the anti-austerity movement less accustomed to party politics.

Chapter Seven uses the findings on Momentum to answer the fourth research question by delving into the decline of Corbynism in the aftermath of the 2019 election defeat. This includes an analysis of Momentum's 2019 election campaign, but the main contribution is to explore the failure of 'Corbynism without Corbyn' in the aftermath of the defeat (see Pike, 2020). The findings indicate that the decline can be traced back to the unstable foundations of Corbyn's leadership. The Labour left's institutional weakness led to an overreliance on Corbyn's personal victories which contributed to three main dilemmas for Corbyn and his supporters: (1) the need for internal party control vs. the demand for internal party democracy; (2) strains between party-based objectives and movement-based objectives; and (3) the constraints of

representative democracy vs. the appeals of direct democracy. These dilemmas contributed to a series of clashes which ultimately meant that Momentum and the left more generally were not able to introduce the reforms that might have established a more stable foundation for 'Corbynism beyond Corbyn'.

The conclusion restates the main contributions and identifies further avenues for research before considering the implications of the research for the future of Momentum. Most of the thesis emphasises that their evolution has been fundamentally connected to the ebbs and flows of Corbyn's leadership. His resignation inevitably instigated a period of renewal but the extent to which this will influence their direction will depend on their ability to continue influencing the direction of the Labour Party. The early indications are, however, that his resignation has reduced their influence inside the Labour Party and increased the incentive to focus on more 'movementist' aims outside the party.

1. Defying definition: The Ambiguity of Momentum and Corbynism

Introduction

The first part of this chapter examines how Corbyn's unexpected victory in the 2015 leadership election opened a window of opportunity for plural left traditions to converge, which reawakened largely unresolved questions around how the left should organise vis-a-vis the Labour Party. The existing literature is yet to chronicle this period or explore how these formative months influenced the subsequent evolution of Momentum's organisation and practice. This failure stems, in part, from methodological shortcomings and a normative bias that pervades much political science scholarship, as will be discussed at further length in Chapter Three.

The second section explores the scholarly literature on Momentum. The section will show that this literature is yet to land an agreed definition in relation to the literature on social movements and political parties, unpack their impact on the landscape of British politics, or delineate their relationship to the Corbyn leadership and the Labour Party. They have been labelled in a multitude of sometimes contradictory ways: a 'party within a party' (Sabbagh et al, 2018); a faction; a movement; a 'movement-faction' (Dennis, 2020); a 'satellite' (Dommett and Temple, 2018); and a 'party-facing movement' (Muldoon and Rye, 2020).

The third section describes the similarly ambivalent definitions of Corbynism. It has been labelled as reformist but transformative; plural but also authoritarian; and utopian but also backwards looking. By exploring the views of participants in Momentum, the later empirical chapters will be in a position to explore how Corbynism was understood by its main supporters and therefore come to a more consistent understanding of its support.

The final section examines the existing literature on populism and class politics in relation to Corbynism and the contemporary left. Corbynism has been described as both a restoration of

traditional socialist politics and as a left populist rupture with conventional socialist politics, and as populist in a multitude of positive and negative appraisals. The concept of 'pop-socialism', outlined in Chapter Two, aims to overcome this ambivalence by providing a foundation for explaining how Corbynism used appeals to a 'people' to renew a conventional vision of democratic socialism oriented around the labour movement.

1.1. Chronicling the Evolution of Momentum

In the 1960s a series of writers began interrogating a question that has divided the left since the Labour Party's conception: could it ever be a suitable vehicle for socialist politics (see Saville, 1967; Miliband, 1972; Nairn, 1964, 1964a; Coates, 1975, 1996; Saville, 1967; Heffer, 1973; Wainwright, 1987)? On the one hand, some argued that the Labour Party could never be more than reformist party dominated by an ameliorative trade union and parliamentary leadership, and that even if the leadership were to come from the left, the party's entrenchment in British capitalism would mean it could never be a platform for radical politics (Coates, 1975, 1996). On the other hand, some assert, such as a later Hilary Wainwright (1987: 1), that Labour remained the only party capable of launching a sustained challenge against capital despite all its flaws. Wainwright would later become a leading figure in what she termed Labour's hidden 'transformative' tradition, going on to work as an economic adviser in Ken Livingstone's Greater London Council.

Even the seminal analysis of the Labour Party from a 'new left' perspective, Ralph Miliband's *Parliamentary Socialism* (1972), was inconsistent on this question. Miliband (1972: 13) famously argued that the party was defined above all else by the consistent rejection of 'any kind of political action (such as industrial action for political purposes) which fell, or appeared to them to fall, outside the framework and conventions of the parliamentary system'. When in parliament, 'labourism' was an ideology of 'modest social reform in a capitalist system within whose confines it is ever more firmly and by now irrevocably rooted' (Miliband, 1972: 376). Whilst Miliband's critical view of parliamentarism and labourism are clear, the political

implications of his argument remain subject to debate. Miliband oscillated between supporting and opposing the Labour Party as a vehicle for socialist politics, and ‘while the author saw his book as a last-minute exhortation for the party’s transformation, others viewed it as a call to abandon Labour’ (Newman, 2002: 59). During the disappointing experience of the third Wilson Government, Miliband (1976: 128) went as far as claiming ‘that the belief in the effective transformation of the Labour Party into an instrument of socialist policies is the most crippling of all illusions to which socialists in Britain have been prone’.

Following Labour’s 2015 general election defeat Miliband’s latter assertion seemed more accurate than ever before. Indeed, John McDonnell (2015) had concluded shortly after the election that the democratic socialist tradition was facing its darkest hour ‘since the Attlee Government fell in 1951’. It was not only the scale of the defeat that led McDonnell to such a pessimistic view – ‘but the overwhelming incorporation of so much of the Labour Party into the political and economic system that the Labour Party was founded to transform’. For decades the party had been moving in a direction that was seen as antithetical to the socialist tradition (see Panitch and Leys, 2001, 2020).

However, the questions asked by the new left were brought back with a renewed vigour following left-winger Jeremy Corbyn’s unexpected victory in the 2015 Labour leadership contest. Several left strands had converged on the campaign in order to propel Corbyn to victory. The ‘largest ran through the party itself, where the members had turned sharply against New Labour’; the ‘second flowed in from the trade unions and was the culmination of a 15-year shift to the left’; and the third was the generation of anti-austerity activists who made the turn from protest to party now that there was a leadership candidate with a concerted anti-austerity message (Nuuns, 2018: 8). In the first Labour leadership election that used One Member One Vote (OMOV), Corbyn won 59.5% of the popular vote including an overwhelming 83.8% among registered supporters.

After being locked out by party mainstream for several decades, the left were thrust into action. The scale of the task awaiting them was made abundantly clear by the widely reported fact that the Socialist Campaign Group (SCG) – the home of left-wing Labour MPs – could not even collect the requisite number of nominations for Corbyn to stand, relying on the nominations of colleagues to their right who were happy to broaden the debate thinking that Corbyn had no chance of winning (see Nuuns, 2018). Corbyn had gathered the support of six of the 14 affiliated trade unions and three non-affiliated unions, but the unions were a shadow of their former selves after seeing their internal party leverage gradually reduced over the previous decades. Corbyn could also rely on the support of the now vast grassroots membership, but as Pogrund and Maguire (2020) have recently revealed, they had no idea how to use this to their advantage in a party dominated by its parliamentary elites.

Momentum was launched four weeks after the leadership contest in an attempt to resolve these teething problems. Recognising where Corbyn's strengths and weaknesses lie, they aimed to assemble the strands that had coalesced around the leadership campaign, with the goal of using their support to build a 'mass movement' and transform the Labour Party (see Klug et al, 2016). Momentum's founders identify four main strands – from across the labour movement and social movements – involved in their formation:

> '1. Extra-parliamentary, social movement activism – particularly post-financial crisis movements along the lines of UK Uncut and Occupy.
>
> 2. More traditional left-wing protest coalitions, such as the People's Assembly and Stop the War Coalition.
>
> 3. The existing Labour left – its remaining MPs, its organisations such as the Labour Representation Committee, and others who 'kept the flame alive' in the party.

> 4. The left of the trade union movement, including both unions that have been affiliated to Labour all along, and those such as the Fire Brigades Union that are now re-affiliating' (Klug et al, 2016: 37).

Whilst the latter three tendencies are described as relatively 'intelligible', activists from the first tendency were 'more diffuse, horizontal, and decentralised' (37). Momentum was trying to give this type of activism 'a home in the labour movement and the Labour Party, while connecting the Labour Party and labour movement to new forms of activism and political cultures' (37). In doing so, they hoped to 'increase participatory democracy, solidarity, and grassroots power and to help Labour become the transformative governing party of the twenty-first century' (Klug et al, 2016: 36).

One of Momentum's founders, James Schneider (2016), described how their approach transcended traditional boundaries: 'we're not a political party or a trade union, we're not just a social movement, so there isn't a model for how we should be structured'. They were defined by their internal plurality as much as anything else. As one commentator described it:

> 'Most of us who have been active in Momentum at some point, either locally or nationally, will be aware that it is a broad church within a broad church...membership ranges from revolutionary socialists, *Morning Star* devotees, middle of the road European-style social democrats, social liberals, old-school trade unionists and ex-anarchists turned radical reformists drawn to a left populist agenda. The one thing that united this coalition was its belief that Corbyn was the best bet to achieve a turn in British politics to put us on the road to socialism and a better world' (Huck, 2020).

Because of this plurality one aspect that remained unclear from the outside was the extent of their lineage with previous left-wing groups. Their stated purpose bares more than a passing resemblance to Stuart Hall's (2010) description of The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) in the formative years of the new left during the late 1950s and 1960s. As part of CND

Hall had engaged in a strategy he described as 'parallelism' – having 'one foot in' and 'one foot out' of the Labour Party – which involved the 'maintenance of journals, clubs, a network of contacts and forms of demonstration…which were not subject to the routines of the Labour HQ at Transport House but were nevertheless designed to break back into and have an effect on the internal politics of the Labour Party and the labour movement' (Hall, 2010: 193). Corbyn's leadership seemingly opened the space to experiment with combining such movement-like forms of politics with conventional party-based politics in a modern-day context.

However, they were also influenced by more traditional Labour left groups, who were identified by Momentum's founders as one of the four key strands involved in their launch. The Campaign for Labour Party Democracy (CLPD) had been the main protagonist of the last major (and fairly successful) push for party democracy in the late 1970s and early 1980s and one of their key figures, Jon Lansman, was at the centre of Jeremy Corbyn's leadership campaign and Momentum (see Kogan, 2019). Would Momentum therefore model themselves on CLPD or other previous umbrella left groups such as the Rank and File Mobilising Committee (RFMC), or would they be more ambitious and 'movement-like' in their scope like the CND?

This question proved fertile ground for the renewal of longstanding debates around how the left should organise itself vis-a-vis the Labour Party. Maiguashca and Dean (2019) observe that, like Podemos, Momentum have been characterised by an opposition between supporters of more 'vertical' structures and supporters of more 'horizontal' structures. The traditional Marxists and left of the labour movement support a greater role for the trade unions, building institutional power in the party, and delegated lines of accountability. Activists with a movement-oriented history, however, support more horizontal structures, valorise digital media, and eschew formal communication channels. Similar debates have raged in several parties across the anti-anti-austerity left in recent times: Syriza, Podemos, the Bernie Sanders campaign, La France Insoumise, and the Portuguese Left Bloc have all been characterised

by clashes between 'horizontalist' and 'institutionalist' traditions (della Porta et al, 2017; Gerbaudo, 2017). This is symptomatic of the transition from movement to party during the anti-austerity age, which has sometimes forced leaders to choose between their commitment to participative and direct democracy, and their pursuit of institutional power within parliamentary systems.

Beyond this one contribution, little systematic attempt has been made to unpack the formative dynamics of Momentum or its relationship to the Corbyn project. Chapter Three will illustrate that this 'gap' exists in large part because of a fundamental problem with how political science scholarship conceives and studies left politics, particularly extra-parliamentary left politics, which means that currents outside of Westminster based politics remain 'invisible'. The lack of clarity about Momentum's internal evolution, how they reconciled their different traditions, how they sought to deploy different strategies drawn from movements and parties, and their integration into the Labour Party, stems in large part from this methodological limitation. The ethnographic methods utilised in this thesis deploy a more grounded and inductive approach to research and theory-building that establishes a more basis for researching phenomena that lay in large part outside of the formal political arena. The next section will explore the political science literature that has attempted to position and define Momentum in relation to social movements and party politics.

1.2. Positioning Momentum: a party within a party, a movement, or a faction?

The inconsistency in the academic commentary stems in large part from the absence of any research that looks at the 'inside' of Momentum. Current scholarship has described their 'movementist' image, particularly on social media, and they have occasionally supported social movements, whether in the form of direct action or campaigning for movement demands inside the party (see Dennis, 2020). However, alongside this, the literature has also highlighted their conventional internal party organising, which includes training programmes for prospective councillors, factionalism in internal selections and elections, general election

campaigning, and the pursuit of internal party democracy (see Dommett and Temple, 2018; Rhodes, 2019). This mixture of features has led to a raft of sometimes incompatible definitions, as described in the introduction, with scholars labelling them as a faction, a social movement, a party within a party, and anything in between.

Recognition of Momentum's different dimensions leads Dennis (2020) to describe them as a 'movement-faction'. He claims that they maintain some degree of movement-like activity at the local level, but at the national level their main goal is to make factional gains in the Labour Party, at least in their online activity. Muldoon and Rye (2020), meanwhile, in a comparative analysis of Momentum and Bernie Sanders' Our Revolution, assert that both represent a new type of organisation that emerges from '*within* parties, while maintaining a distinctiveness *from* them' (Muldoon and Rye, 2020: 5). The authors define this as a 'party-driven movement': Momentum co-opt movement actors into the party which stimulates Labour to embrace certain features of movement-organising whilst maintaining their conventional party structures.

Muldoon and Rye (2020) make several important observations about the conditions of Momentum's emergence: their coalition relied on pre-existing anti-austerity and anti-war social movement networks; a party-driven movement is more likely to emerge in a majoritarian two-party system; and Corbyn's leadership opened a 'window of opportunity' for Momentum's launch. The authors also describe Momentum's ambivalent 'insider/outsider' relationship with the mainstream of the Labour Party, which stems from their 'more politically radical' (11) views around such issues as party reform and transformative social change. Finally, the authors assert that the 'party-driven movement' has the potential to reconnect estranged political parties to civil society by linking them to an eco-system of social movement demands and reversing the tide of political apathy that has swept over contemporary politics.

These articles have furthered the academic understanding of Momentum, but some gaps remain. First, none have looked closely at the relationship between Momentum and Corbynism. Conventionally left-wing ideas such as public ownership and redistribution are

noted by Muldoon and Rye, but there is little analysis of the extent to which these ideas are consistent with other left-wing strands of thought. Applying the label Corbyn-ism implies that there is something unique about it as a phenomenon, and so further research is required to determine what distinguishes it from other left-wing intellectual strands. Unearthing the views of Momentum members could strengthen the scholarly understanding of Corbynism's support and enable the current literature to identify what, if anything, instilled it with a unique dynamic.

Secondly, Dennis' (2020) definition of a 'movement-faction' is more pertinent to Momentum's social media profile. In the offline world Momentum members are active in a variety of different settings, including trade unions, protest coalitions, community-based groups, and the Labour Party. Moreover, they have often gone beyond conventional party factionalism inside the party, for example by launching a councillors' network to organise and train Labour Party candidates, pursuing internal party reform, and campaigning with great effect at the 2017 and 2019 general election (see Dommett and Temple, 2018; Rhodes, 2019). All of this goes beyond the boundaries of a typical faction.

Thirdly, the literature would be enhanced by adding some empirical detail on how Momentum combined their conventional institutional goals inside the Labour Party with their so-called 'social movement' building. Both Muldoon and Rye and Dennis note the integration of strategies inside and outside the party, but they do not map out how this played out in practice, or what effect it had on ebbs and flows of the Labour Party and the Corbyn leadership. The concept of the HLPG, outlined in the next chapter, establishes a more precise definition to explain how Momentum combined 'insider' and 'outsider' strategies to achieve their goals within the Labour Party.

One of the most salient pieces of research which captures Momentum's 'insider/outsider' relationship to the Labour Party comes from Dommett and Temple (2018). They describe Momentum as part of a significant shift in British politics which took place at the 2017 election – the emergence of 'satellite' campaigns that undertake 'vote-seeking activism...without the

control of a party' (Dommett and Temple, 2018: 196). 'Satellites' remain independent of the party but discharge traditional party tasks such as mobilising 'new activists and campaigners' and organising citizens to deliver 'leaflets, canvass voters, and organise on- and offline' (194/195). According to the authors a distinguishing feature of Momentum – compared to other party auxiliaries such as trade unions or businesses – is the use of online platforms such as the 'MyNearestMarginal' app that draw 'on the energies of citizens who may not feel sufficiently enthused to join a party, but who may nevertheless share party values' (197). Their formal independence enables them to present themselves as 'outsiders' on social media despite their proximity to the party, which feeds into the idea that they are a social movement and helps them mobilise party members in support of left-wing candidates in internal selections (Dennis, 2020).

Describing Momentum as a 'satellite' encapsulates that they orbit the party but remain independent of it, and that they are not a movement in and of themselves. It also helps to explain the integration between Momentum and the Labour Party during campaign times. However, despite these merits, the idea of a 'satellite' does not comprehensively explain all aspects of Momentum. The definition only considers general election campaigns, but not occasions when they have taken direct action *against* elements of the party, such as protests outside parliament in opposition to the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) following a motion of no confidence against Corbyn in June 2016 (Asthana et al, 2016). Momentum have also organised protests *outside* the party, such as a counter-protest against Tommy Robinson and the far right in December 2018 (Quinn, 2018). In addition, framing them as a 'satellite' does not account for their factional role inside the party or their attempts to reform the party outside of campaign time.

The thesis has suggested that some of these gaps derive from methodological shortcomings and normative biases that permeate political science, which leaves much scholarship unable to grasp the experiences and perspectives of the coalition of supporters that assembled around Momentum. This, in turn, makes it difficult to understand how and for what purpose

Momentum organised supporters hailing from a diverse ecology of traditions. That is not to dispute that the above literature has made some valuable contributions – it is simply to state that a more grounded investigation can help to shed light on certain aspects of Momentum that remain hidden in the current literature. By using ethnographic methods, the thesis will be in a firmer position to shed light on internal relations inside Momentum, and in doing so define them more precisely within the broader literature on social movements and political parties.

1.3. The ambiguities of Corbynism

The broad church of traditions that converged on Momentum corresponds to the broad church of traditions that moulded Corbynism – the same ambiguities that mark the former also therefore mark the latter. It has been described, among other things, as: left populist (JA Smith, 2019), national-populist or just simply as populist (Flinders, 2018; Watts and Bale, 2019); as nativistic (Bolton and Pitts, 2018) but also internationalist; as 'Socialism for the 21st century' (Gilbert, 2020), as 'class-struggle social democracy' (Sunkara, 2019), as 'Social Democracy in a New Left Garb' (Bassett, 2019), or as 'democratic socialist' (Panitch and Leys, 2020); as a radical brand of 'reformism' (Cant, 2019) but also as 'transformative'; as 'anti-modernising' (Kerr et al, 2019) by some but as a 'concrete utopia' (Byrne, 2019) by others; and finally as authoritarian (Bolton and Pitts, 2018) but also plural and grassroots (Smith, 2019).

These definitions are not all compatible. Bolton and Pitts (2018) acknowledge this plurality in their critical account of Corbynism before drawing attention to what they regard as its two leading tendencies. First, the 'trad left', which includes John McDonnell and Corbyn's closest advisers (the so-called 4 M's), combine '"Bennite" economic nationalism' with '"personalised" forms of anti-capitalism [and] Leninist central planning' (Bolton and Pitts, 2018: 5). The second leading influence is the post-capitalist techno-utopian wing, embodied by journalists such as Paul Mason (2015) and Aaron Bastani (2019). This tendency views technology and automation as a new horizon to open the space for radically anti-capitalist and post-capitalist possibilities. Beneath these two primary strands, however, are a range of different traditions:

autonomists; libertarian leftists; different strands of Trotskyism; more Gramscian strands of socialism; and soft leftism (7-9).

How radical was Corbynism?

One of the main points of contention revolves around whether Corbynism is or could be radical. On the one hand, some have stressed that it was more radical than anything offered by the mainstream traditions of the Labour Party in the past. Batrouni (2020) considers it an attempt to sneak through 'Quiet Bennism' and highlights clear lines of continuity between Corbyn's Alternative Models of Ownership (AMOO) and the Alternative Economic Strategy (AES): an orientation around public ownership, workers democracy and what is described as economic nationalism (see Labour Party, 2017). Furthermore, Byrne (2019: 256/260) claims that Corbynism consistently drew on the 'language of socialism' to imagine a 'concrete utopia', which represented a substantially different vision to the market-based offering of the last few decades by imagining 'a new economy based upon long-term planning and government action'. Corbyn's Head of Communications, meanwhile, has described the 'third category' of a potential Corbyn Government as one based on 'non-reformist reforms, those which push at the boundaries of the possible and therefore open up new horizons' (quoted in Panitch and Leys, 2020: 217). Some anonymously interviewed MPs, in addition, described Corbynism as a '"fundamental transformation in our economy, our country, our society"' (quoted in Batrouni, 2020: 138). Finally, some of the existing empirical evidence has demonstrated that 'left-wing ideology and (albeit less significantly) anti-capitalist values played key roles in explaining support for Jeremy Corbyn' among the Labour membership (Whiteley et al, 2019: 94).

Butler (2021) has traced the origins of Corbynism to what she labels the 'new urban left', which has its roots in the 1980s London left. This generation of activists, including Jeremy Corbyn, were motivated by a radical 'critique of labourism…and sought to develop new networks and political coalitions for a renewed late twentieth-century socialism' (150). They turned towards 'community action and local politics' (151), which they hoped would modernise the Labour

Party by forging new political solidarities with liberatory social movements that were often overlooked by the party mainstream. This, they believed, could provide an alternative to the anachronistic labourist traditions in large sections of the labour movement.

On the other hand, Seymour (2016) has rejected the claim that Corbynism constitutes a break with labourism. In his early account of Corbynism, he argued that it did represent a potential break with neoliberalism which justified the support from the broader left, but it was a traditional labourist challenge, not socialist. He lamented those on the left who risked becoming 'transfixed by an idea of Labour that has never been close to reality' and, mirroring Miliband, concluded that 'nothing is so utopian as to expect the party to be about radical transformation' (Seymour, 2016: 90; 98). Bassett (2019) made the similar argument that ideology gets in the way of reality when commentators label Corbynism as 'hard left', describing it instead as 'social democracy in a New Left Garb'. In Bassett's view 'serious commentary has failed to highlight, and explain, many of the continuities within Labour, and to point out the current areas of divergence' (Bassett, 2019: 782). He contends that even the more radical policies fit within a system of 'democratic capitalism...where the model is based more on Sweden, not Cuba' (780). Batrouni (2020: 134) also points out that Corbyn's '21st Century Socialism' aimed to commit the party to a mixed economy with 'a greater role for the state, an entrepreneurial one, but one that would not suffocate the market. This was the language of revisionism, of moderation, not full-scale Marxism'.

Bolton and Pitts (2018) also reject the claim that Corbynism could establish a radical break with capitalism. Despite its radical ideological tendencies, its democratic socialism was not capable of achieving its ambition because it posed contradictions in capitalism as something external rather than running through capitalism. In a later article, Bolton (2020) again dismisses the claim that democratic socialism can transcend the relations between capital and labour. Even if Corbynism were able to bring large swathes of private capital into public ownership, it would not be able to 'escape the necessity to keep up with the socially determined rate of production' on the global market (Bolton, 2020: 341). Scepticism about the

grand ambitions of some Corbynites leads Pitts and Dinerstein (2017) to lend their support to horizontalist strands in Momentum which, instead of trying to 'naively reinvent the wheel', concentrate on extending 'grassroots initiatives rooted in local communities, with a programme of Syriza inspired "solidarity networks"' in provincial towns across the United Kingdom' (424).

Certainly, in the short and medium-term Labour's programme was more akin to 'social democracy in a new left garb' than socialism (Bassett, 2019). The 2017 manifesto (Labour Party, 2017a) contained the hallmarks of a 'hardly revolutionary' social democratic programme: there would be end to austerity and to privatisation of the NHS; a network of national and regional investment banks to kickstart an industrial strategy which would include representatives from unions, businesses and local government; university tuition fees were to be abolished; and rail, mail, water and electricity would be brought back into public ownership (Panitch and Leys, 2020: 12; Manwaring and Smith, 2020). There were a few areas where Labour could have been more radical, including in environmental and defence policy, but most importantly over 'democratising the state', where they shied away from wide sweeping reform of the anachronistic Westminster System (Panitch and Leys, 2020: 214). In addition, the manifesto followed a period in which John McDonnell had attempted to woo business interests that were sceptical of Labour's economic credibility: in early 2016 Labour committed to a Fiscal Credibility Rule (FCR) which promised that any future Labour government would only borrow to invest, deliver a balanced budget, and reduce government debt as a percentage of GDP (see Labour Party, 2016). After the election McDonell then embarked on what was nicknamed the 'tea offensive'– referring to the shadow Chancellor's propensity to hold meetings with the City over tea and biscuits – with the aim of presenting Labour as the party of business to kickstart Britain's economy.

This thesis considers how Corbynism can simultaneously be conceived as a moderate form of politics which shares a lineage with labourism *and* a radical form of politics whose origins lay in traditions steadfastly critical of labourism. Much of the ambivalence stems from the fact that some scholars focus on the ideas and normative positions of Corbyn and his followers

(what Andrew Gamble calls the 'politics of support'), whereas others fix their analysis on the empirical and institutional constraints facing a political project which aims to take state power through a parliamentarist and centre-left Labour Party (what Gamble calls the 'politics of power'). The ambiguity, again, is reinforced by the propensity to analyse Corbynism through externalist accounts that focus primarily on the public statements of leading figures, rather than exploring the diverse views of supporters that these leaders are representing (see Dean and Maiguashca, 2020). Ethnographic methods, in contrast, will enable the thesis to clarify how participants viewed Corbynism, which establishes a means of eliciting some key insights into its 'politics of support' (see Gamble, 1994). Chapter Six illustrates that many participants understood that a Corbyn-led Labour government would aim to instil a social democratic package in the short and medium term but believed that it opened the pathways for more radical transformation in the long-term.

How democratic was Corbynism?

Another conflicting interpretation of Corbynism is between supporters that praise its plural, movementist and democratic credentials, and detractors that condemn its authoritarianism and cult of personality. Nowhere is this more transparent than in the analysis of Labour's Alternative Models of Ownership (AMOO) report, often seen by commentators as the main statement of a Corbyn government's likely economic programme (see Labour Party, 2017). Supporters have lauded the report as a concerted attempt to distinguish 'Corbynomics' from the more top-down and bureaucratic state intervention of yesteryear. Guinan and O'Neill (2018) describe it as an 'institutional turn' that seeks to open the state to 'the possibility of real democracy and participation, and providing the long-run institutional and policy support for a new politics dedicated to achieving genuine social change' (Guinan and O'Neill, 2018: 6). This was evidenced by the forwarding of municipal socialism and workers cooperatives as alternative models of ownership, and in the subsequent development of Labour's 'inclusive ownership fund' which proposed transferring 10% of shares to workers in large companies.

Critics, however, have condemned the report in precisely the opposite terms (Bolton and Pitts, 2018: 133-135/145-146). They denounce it as a reformulation of the Bennite AES, describing it as a top-down, statist and deeply nativistic economic programme. It misleadingly describes Britain's economic malaise as a 'technical problem' to be solved by a strong top-down state, and problematically asserts that if 'the sovereignty of the nation-state' was reimposed a Labour government could reverse decades of class exploitation by ensuring 'wealth stays within borders' (145).

James Meadway has helpfully found a way of reconciling conflicting accounts through the turn of phrase 'in and against the state' – an expression regularly deployed by John McDonnell. Meadway applies the phrase to differentiate between what is considered Corbynism's two foremost intellectual influences. First, Corbynism 'in the state' was a 'decidedly social democratic and state-centred view of the economy: of reversing the great privatisations of the 1980s and expanding centralised provision'. This, evidently, is the residue of its labourist inheritance. Secondly, Corbynism 'against the state' was 'the tradition of the decentraliser: of worker and community ownership, of devolution of powers and local organisation...it was the tradition of self-organisation and common ownership outside of the state...whether through a worker-owned firm or a community-owned solar scheme'. Meadway claims that by the time the 2019 election came around Labour had come to downplay decentralisation in favour of the view that socialism could be achieved through existing state machinery, without proposing the widespread overhaul of the state's infrastructure (also see Panitch and Leys, 2020). In Meadway's terms, "socialism from above" had taken over "socialism from below"'.

The role of the leader

It is generally accepted that Corbynism was in large part a personality-drive project (one justification for the label Corbyn-ism). Pike and Diamond (2021), for example, have recently identified four prevailing 'myths' which sustained Corbyn's support: that he would break the mould and lead the Labour Party down a more transformative path; that he heralded the return

of class politics; that he was part of a global left wave which includes Syriza and Sanders; and that he represented the rejection of the Iraq War.

Bolton and Pitts (2018) have expanded on this idea of 'myth' to make the claim that Corbyn's moral mythology enabled him to tie incompatible strands on the left together into one common project. The mythology presented socialism as 'natural' and 'obvious', for example, and described Corbyn as a virtuous leader 'on the right side of history'. This populist discourse was fused with classical Marxism to result in what they termed:

> 'a naturalised understanding of capitalist society, which feeds into a singular, unidirectional, and essentially Manichean version of history in which innately "good" forces – whether the "working class", the "forces of production", "anti-imperialist" nation-states, "postcapitalist" potentialities of "the people" – are somehow constrained by "bad", with change regarded as a question of removing those barriers' (Bolton and Pitts, 2018: 9).

However, this critique is partly a product of the top-down and externalist approach to studying Corbynism that this thesis has challenged. Supporters are bemoaned for having an excessively moralised and personalised relationship to Corbyn, but there is no substantive attempt to unpack this relationship from the perspective of supporters. Externalist accounts inevitably conflate instances of rhetoric with fully-fledged populism because they cannot account for the richness or plurality of views among grassroots activists. The rare research that has sought to explore the views of pro-Corbyn activists has demonstrated that they make a multitude of demands: egalitarian, green, and class-based demands are combined with feminist, anti-racist and other emancipatory strands of thought (Maiguashca and Dean, 2019). Moreover, Bolton and Pitts make little attempt to utilise other research that has explored the relationship between contemporary leaders and their supporters (see Dean, 2017; Gerbaudo, 2018; Ward and Guglielmo, 2021). Bernie Sanders, Pablo Iglesias, and Alexis Tsipras have all been described in similar terms and so it is pertinent to consider where Corbyn sits in

relation to these comparative examples (see Gerbaudo, 2018; Dean, 2017). By revealing the views of participants in Momentum, this thesis will provide a more grounded interpretation that seeks to understand how supporters related to Corbyn in their own words.

1.4. Class, Populism, and Corbynism

Corbynism was part of a revival of the left in the aftermath of the GFC, with other notable examples including Syriza, La France Insoumise, Podemos, the Portuguese Left Bloc, and Bernie Sanders' presidential campaigns (see Panitch and Gindin, 2018; della Porta et al, 2017; Gerbaudo, 2017). This has been interpreted in some quarters as the return of the conventional class demands of socialism (Panitch and Gindin, 2018), but by others as a decisive shift *away* from 'the traditional left conception of the capital/labour cleavage' and *towards* a populist discourse (Damiani, 2020: 167). Indeed, like these other cases, Corbynism has been described as a restoration of conventional socialist politics, but it has also been labelled as populist, in a variety of supportive and critical appraisals. Further research into the views and perspectives of Corbyn supporters is required to determine how appeals to the 'people' were combined with class politics among the grassroots.

Socialism and populism are, according to some scholars, not mutually exclusive. March (2007) noted before the GFC that populism had always lived 'in the shadow of socialism', and remained a component of radical left ideologies 'through various permutations and in various contexts', owing to the shared focus on 'anti-elitism, democracy, and the representation of the excluded' (March, 2007: 74; see Laclau, 1977). In recent decades the two have become more intertwined as classical Marxism has declined and social democracy has gone through a process of liberalisation. These developments have prompted a range of peripheral left parties to downplay ideological purity in favour of combining democratic socialism with a 'strong populist discourse' (March, 2007). Elsewhere, March and Mudde (2005: 34-37) have highlighted the rise of 'social-populist' parties that are less concerned with 'doctrinal principle and the correct class politics'. Leaders of these parties no longer claim to be the vanguard of

the proletariat but instead profess to be leaders of the *vox populi*: they are less theoretical and more willing to present themselves as inclusive parties of the ‘people’ challenging the ‘establishment’.

A series of scholars have claimed that the fallout from the GFC led to the further displacement of conventional class ideologies in favour of a left populist articulation of the ‘people’ vs the ‘elite’ (Ramiro and Gomez, 2017; Katsambekis and Kioupkiolis, 2019; Kioupkiolis, 2016; Damiani, 2020). These scholars see themselves as students of the ‘discursive’ school of populism, popularised by Laclau (2005) and Mouffe (2018), rather than the mainstream ‘ideational’ school (Mudde, 2004; Stanley, 2008). According to this tradition, a ‘people’ vs an ‘elite’ discourse is the very fabric of the ‘political’ and is inherent in any political ideology – it establishes an anchor through which to confer a popular movement that can transform existing social relations (Mouffe, 2018).

Several examples are highlighted to support their case. From 2011 onwards Syriza ceased referencing the ‘movement’ and started talking about the ‘people’, creating an opposition between an ‘elite’ who were to blame for the crisis and a Greek ‘people’ who were the victims (della Porta et al, 2017: 107/108). At the core of Podemos’ discourse, meanwhile, ‘lies the antagonistic divide which characterises populism from a formal-structural perspective: the antagonism between the social majority and the privileged minority’ (Kioupkiolis, 2016: 103). Podemos’ leadership, many of whom studied political science at the University of Madrid, have stated that they reflexively adopted the theories of Laclau to inform their strategy (Kioupkiolis, 2016: 103). Gerbaudo (2017) has also explored the interaction between the neo-anarchism of the preceding alter-globalisation movement and the democratic populism of the latter part of the anti-austerity movement, which together led to the creation of what he defines as ‘citizenism’: A novel ideology which demands to reclaim the nation-state for the people rather than posing itself as a counter-power to the state. He cites Corbyn, alongside the likes of Podemos, Syriza and the Bernie Sanders campaign, as examples.

The populist zeitgeist has extended to Corbynism in both critical and supportive accounts. Critical views include Flinders (2018: 222/223), who claims that ‘it is difficult not to see Corbyn’s success as synonymous with anything other than a distinct brand of populism’ which represents a potentially ‘dangerous political virus’ (233) that threatens parliamentary democracy. Bolton and Pitts (2018), as outlined above, condemn Corbynism for presenting complex questions as a populist struggle between ‘good’ and ‘bad’. Kerr et al (2018), meanwhile, see Corbynism’s ‘populist appeals’ as part of an ‘anti-modernising’ agenda that aims to restore Labour’s past traditions and practices. Watts and Bale (2019), furthermore, have argued that populism has filtered into Corbyn’s management of the party. They argue that the membership were treated as the homogeneous, virtuous, and authentic ‘people’ of Labour’s heartlands, whereas the ‘establishment’ PLP were the ‘conspiring’ elite that represented the ‘subversive and corrupt pole against which the pure and homogeneous membership be contrasted and defined’ (Watts and Bale, 2019: 7). This paved the way for the removal of rebellious figures in the PLP following the failed coup in the 2016 leadership contest.

David Jeffery (2021), meanwhile, has claimed that Corbynism should be considered populist according to two other schools: the ‘political strategy’ and the ‘socio-cultural’ school. In the former, populism is seen as ‘a political strategy through which a personalistic leader seeks or exercises government power based on direct, unmediated, uninstitutionalised support from large numbers of mostly unorganised followers’ (Weyland, 2001: 14). The leader unifies the whole movement through their personal charisma, with the aim of propelling themselves into office. According to Jeffery, the ‘moral mythology’ (ibid) among Corbyn supporters provides resolute evidence of this strategy, because it indicates that personal appeal was the key mechanism through which Corbyn gathered support. In the ‘socio-cultural approach’, meanwhile, populists are defined as political actors that celebrate ‘low’ politics and challenge the customs and practices of ‘high’ politics (Ostiguy, 2017). According to Jeffery (2021: 65), Corbyn displayed a consistent tendency to denigrate ‘high’ politics, as seen through his

'personalistic, direct and mischievous methods of communication and behaviour rooted in the need to connect to, and represent, the people directly'. He did this by propagating anti-establishment views that opposed the mainstream in the party and media, by decrying the legacy of previous Labour governments, particularly New Labour, and even by selling his supposedly 'authentic' lifestyle, which was designed to demonstrate that he was 'just a normal person' (64).

More positive appraisals of have been forthcoming from scholars in the discursive tradition. Mouffe (2018a) described Corbynism, as well as Momentum, as a successful instance of left populism connecting Labour to a broad base of social movements that aimed to resist 'all forms of domination and discrimination, from economic relations to other domains like feminist, anti-racist, and LGBT struggles'. Mouffe also voiced her concern that Corbynism's left populism faced assimilation into the 'traditional conception of labourism', negating some of its radical potential. Extending these points, Smith (2019) describes how Corbynism mobilised a vast base on the left through the 'productively adversarial' construction of a people vs an elite. This enabled the construction of a fluid (rather than fixed or stable) people to make an 'an economic and democratic offer that would be simultaneously enabling to the demands of all...individual groups, even as it makes no claim to insist on their being reconciled' (143). Smith sees this as an essential foundation of the contemporary radical left and the basis of Corbynism's grassroots insurgency.

However, there are alternative accounts of the anti-austerity left and of Corbynism which emphasise its conventional socialist credentials rather than its supposedly populist rebranding. Indeed, some critics have denounced the proclivity in populist studies to disregard the *content* of different populisms, meaning that the populist label is sometimes applied at the expense of other important categories (see Dean and Maiguashca, 2020). In a critique of those who describe Sanders, Syriza, and Corbyn as left populist, Panitch and Gindin (2018: 1/2) argue that:

> ‘To dismiss those who advance today’s socialist discourse as an equivalent left populism is a mistake in theory and misleading in practice. These socialist leaders are drawing fresh political attention to the dynamics, structures, inequalities, and contradictions of capitalism as the systemic core of neo-liberal globalisation and ruling class privilege and power...their affiliation with parties of the centre-left is not only directly concerned with mobilising support for these socialist leaders...but also using this support as a springboard for advancing class struggles in the workplace, community, and the state’ (Panitch and Gindin, 2018: 1/2).

Elsewhere, Panitch and Leys (2020) have described Corbynism as the latest and most significant iteration of Labour’s democratic socialist new left tradition. A distinctive feature of the new left – whose roots lay in the crisis of social democracy in the 1970s – was the importance it placed on democratising the party as the first step towards the socialist ‘democratisation of society, economy and the state’ (Panitch and Leys, 2020: 14).

Moreover, Dean (2020), as part of a broader critique of the left populist literature, argues that Corbynism did not construct a systematic notion of the ‘people’, but instead awakened left-wing values and ideas which could be populistic but were not populist per se. Corbyn has vowed to take on the ‘establishment elite’ and transform the ‘rigged system’ to stop ‘vested interests holding people back’ (Corbyn, 2019), but this does not necessarily mean that Corbynism was an instance of fully-fledged populism. Describing it as such risks ignoring its other important lineages: left-Keynesianism, Bennism, a commitment to democratic public ownership, redistribution, and anti-imperialism (Maiguashca and Dean, 2019a).

This leads Dean to coin the term ‘popular leftism’ – borrowed from Stuart Hall’s (2016) famous analysis of popular culture – as an alternative to the overstretched populist label. Popular leftism, among other things, involved a turn to the institutions of the Labour Party at the expense of the small scale ‘folk politics’ of participatory assemblies and direct democracy that characterised the anti-austerity movement (see Srnicek and Williams, 2016). This movement-

to-party transition has heightened the visibility of the left by facilitating their ‘tactics, strategies, and ideas’ (10) to enter into mainstream discourse. New left-wing intellectual strands have also achieved more prominence in the age of popular leftism including ’post-colonial and de-colonial theory, environmentalism and radical green theory, and new strands of feminist thinking’ (Dean, 2020: 11).

The conflicting interpretations of Corbynism’s class and populist influences raise some potential avenues for further research. In particular, how could Corbynism be considered a restoration of conventional class politics at the same time as which it is seen as a novel form of populism? Bolton and Pitts (2018) describe Corbynism as a combination of classical Marxism and populism; however, their top-down and deductive analysis means that they conflate instances of rhetoric with fully developed populism and do not pay due consideration to the active role that supporters played in constructing Corbynism (Dean, 2017). The concept of pop-socialism, outlined in the next chapter, provides a basis to consider how Corbynism combined conventional socialist politics with appeals to the ‘people’. This will enable the thesis to provide a more complete picture of Corbynism by establishing a foundation to explore how it appealed to conventional left-wing groups orbiting the labour movement alongside unconventional left-wing groups that germinated during the anti-austerity movement.

Conclusion

The first section of this chapter outlined the context of Momentum’s evolution and drew attention to the lack of scholarship into key episodes in their history. It noted that many of the gaps in political science scholarship of this period derive from methodological shortcomings, which means that influences that originate outside of Westminster-based political science remain invisible in much of the literature. Political Science should consider reorientating how it views and researches left politics, and extra-parliamentary left politics in particular, to address these gaps. This thesis aims to do this by using ethnographic methods to provide the first detailed empirical account of Momentum.

The second section explored how these limitations have contributed to the challenges in positioning Momentum in the literature on movements and parties. A new definition is required to explain how Momentum combined strategies inside and outside the party in their overall organisation and practice. By exploring the perspectives of participants, this thesis aims to clarify precisely how Momentum assembled its diverse coalition of supporters.

The third and fourth sections, meanwhile, shed light on the contradictory ways in which Corbynism has been described, in terms of its radicalism, its relationship to the Labour Party, the role of the leader, and its combination of class and populist politics. The thesis will provide a more bottom-up picture of Corbynism than some of the top-down and externalist accounts that will resolve some of these ambiguities by unearthing the perspective of participants. In doing so, it will establish how it assembled the support of a plurality of left-wing traditions in its initial rise between the 2015 leadership contest and the 2017 election.

2. From Movement to Party: Defining Pop-Socialism and the Hybrid Left Pressure Group

Introduction

This chapter will attempt to outline a theoretical framework for the purpose of addressing the gaps outlined in the previous chapter. The first section explores the foundations of Corbynism and Momentum in more detail. As the anti-austerity movement was looking towards political parties to provide representation in formal political institutions, conventional socialist groups across the labour movement were looking to harness the anti-austerity movement towards strengthening the organised left. The intersection between these two wings was destined to remain outside of mainstream politics, however, until the left-wing Corbyn entered the 2015 leadership contest and forged a shared institutional space for them to coalesce inside the Labour Party. These origins are key to understanding the later development of Momentum and Corbynism and yet remain poorly understood in the literature.

The second section draws from the pressure group literature, in particular the work of Wyn Grant (1999, 2001, 2004), to introduce the 'hybrid left pressure group' as a way of conceptualising how Momentum assembled these different groups. The HLPG is defined as an organisation that utilises 'insider' and 'outsider' strategies drawn from party and movement traditions to influence the direction of a left party. This conceptualisation of Momentum aims to position within the literature on social movements and political parties – the thesis' first research question. It also provides an anchor for understanding the relationship between Momentum, Corbyn and the Labour Party – the second research question.

Whilst the HLPG establishes a means to understand Momentum's organisation and practice, the notion of 'pop-socialism' described in the third section provides a basis to explore how Corbynism gathered the support of participants in Momentum. The inspiration for the idea comes predominantly from the post-Gramscian work of Stuart Hall (1979, 1985, 1985a, 1986, 1988, 2010), whose insights enabled the thesis to unpack how Corbynism's 'politics of support'

(Gamble, 1994) appealed to core supporters orbiting the labour movement together with more unconventional extra-parliamentary strands emanating from the anti-austerity movement. Three inter-related dimensions of 'pop-socialism' are identified: (1) the emergence of a 'pop-star' leader forges a space for the convergence of a plurality of ideological traditions from movements and parties; (2) appeals to a 'people' unite these traditions together and provide a justification for the pursuit of popular-democratic reforms; and (3) the appeals form the basis of an attempt to renew a conventional vision of democratic socialism. This will provide the foundations for the thesis' attempt in later chapters to answer the third research question – how do participants in Momentum understand Corbynism? It will also provide the basis to answer the fourth research question – how can Momentum help to explain Corbynism's rise and fall?

2.1. The foundations of Momentum and Corbynism: the intersection between protest and party

This section borrows from existing literature to delve into the historical circumstances behind the emergence of both 'pop-socialism' (Corbynism) and the HLPG (Momentum). The first factor was the proximity between social movement groups and the organised left during the anti-austerity movement. These two groups overlapped in their opposition to austerity and their support for more democratic forms of representation in both party and state but remained marginal to mainstream politics in the initial phase of the movement, as visualised in Figure 1 (page 40). The second factor was Corbyn's entrance into the Labour leadership contest in 2015, which established a space for these groups' irruption into mainstream politics.

<u>The protest turns to the party</u>

It has been well documented that the GFC triggered a surge in global protest activity from 2010 onwards which dissented against harsh austerity packages, an absence of democracy, and inequality (Gerbaudo, 2017). The cycle of protests began with the Arab Spring Uprising at the end of 2010, before sweeping through South America, Europe, and the USA (see

Gerbaudo, 2017: 32-41 for timeline). The movements had disparate origins but they also shared common features – particularly a culture of mass assemblies and protest camps – which meant they came to be known through the sobriquet 'movement of the squares'. They shared mutual solidarity with each other and saw themselves as part of a global struggle. Above all else, they demanded a more authentic form of participatory democracy to challenge what they considered to be the political and economic oligarchy, which was illustrated by the Greek slogan 'real democracy' and the Spanish 15-M's almost identical 'real democracy now!' (Katsambekis, 2016).

In the UK the anti-austerity movement was not as headline-grabbing as elsewhere. However, Bailey (2014) has demonstrated that there was a definite 'cycle of contention' that began with UK Uncut in October 2010; escalated with the student movement and the occupation of Millbank Tower in November 2010, the closure of the Occupy Camp at St Paul's Cathedral in February 2011, and the 'March for the Alternative' demonstration the month after; continued with the riots that followed the police shooting of Mark Duggan in August of the same year and the Public Sector Pension Dispute in November 2011; and concluded with the protests and rallies organised by the People's Assembly Against Austerity from 2013 onwards (see Bailey, 2014; Bailey et al, 2018).

Gerbaudo has authoritatively identified the two foremost intellectual influences in the global anti-austerity movement, briefly touched upon in the previous chapter: 'neo-anarchism' and 'democratic populism'. The initial phase was dominated by the neo-anarchist inheritance of the alter-globalisation movement, which valued spontaneity and individualism above institutionalisation and representative politics, and promoted itself as an anti-statist ideology which demanded more direct and horizontal forms of participation (ibid). As Gerbaudo (2017) demonstrates, the claims of 'autonomy' and 'leaderlessness' derive from this influence, as does the organisational design of the protest camps and mass assemblies. Srnicek and Williams (2016) make a similar observation but are more explicitly dismissive of the small-

scale 'folk politics' of mass assemblies and protest, which for them represent an ineffective vehicle for an enduring challenge to capitalist state power.

According to Gerbaudo, the neo-anarchist influence was gradually usurped by the second tendency, the 'democratic populist revival', which aimed to re-embed popular sovereignty in the state rather than pose itself as a counter-power to the state. The movement was increasingly seen as a manifestation of 'people's power' aiming to break down the mediation between the citizenry and representative political structures. Gerbaudo (2017:3) concludes that a new politics of 'citizenism' crystallised from these two traditions, which he defines as an 'ideology of the indignant citizen, that pits the self-organised citizenry against economic and political oligarchies, and pursues the reclamation and expansion of citizenship, seen as the necessary foundation of a true democracy'.

In the movement's initial phase, political parties were seen as part of the problem rather than the solution (Gerbaudo, 2017: 52). However, once democratic populism took the ascendancy the movement gradually turned towards representative politics. It became increasingly clear that informal organisational structures were not up to the task of democratising the state and so activists 'started to develop more structured campaigns, organisations, and even new political parties, a turn completely out of character with radical politics before 2011' (Gerbaudo, 2017: 208). This drove the resurgence of some left parties around 2015/2016. In some cases, new left populist parties were launched, such as Podemos in January 2014, which aimed to address the impotence of the anti-austerity movement by initiating a transition into representative politics amidst a crisis of the two-party system (see Flesher Fominaya, 2014; Kioupkiolis, 2016). In other cases, existing radical parties, such as Syriza, made electoral inroads by assembling a coalition of young activists involved in the anti-austerity movement and disillusioned former members of the communist KKE or the social democratic PASOK (della Porta et al, 2017). Meanwhile, in majoritarian two-party systems different types of organisations emerged, such as Our Revolution in the USA and Momentum, which provided the vehicle for the movement's turn towards existing left parties (see Muldoon and Rye, 2020).

The Labour left turns to the movement

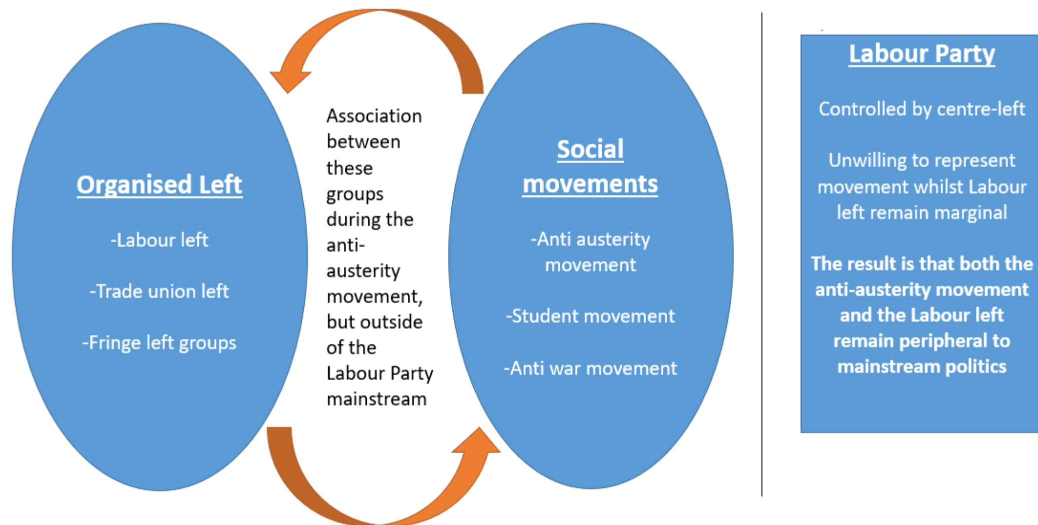

Figure 1: The circulation of movement-party interactions before 2015 leadership contest

In the case of Britain, as the anti-austerity movement was looking *inwards* for formal representation in a mainstream political party, socialist groups across the labour movement were looking *outwards* in an attempt to harness the movement towards the renewal of the democratic socialist project after decades of decline and crisis. The significant overlap and shared strategic horizon between these two groups would later be key to the genesis of Corbynism and Momentum (see Nuuns, 2018). Before Corbyn secured his name on the ballot, however, the informal and loose interactions between these two wings remained peripheral to mainstream politics, as illustrated in Figure 1.

It was certainly *not* the case that the movement's initial impulse was driven by the conventional institutions of class politics: 'while it places issues of social inequality and global economic power front and centre, it neither emerges from the organic institutions of the class-in-itself nor advances the socialist perspective of the class-for-itself' (Murray, A. 2016). The Labour Party were reluctant to challenge the Conservative government's austerity measures, instead proposing an 'austerity lite' package which aimed to mitigate the harsher effects of austerity

without reversing it (see Bailey and Bates, 2012). They persisted with this approach up until Corbyn was elected. Interim leader Harriet Harman controversially whipped Labour MPs to abstain on a welfare reform bill – which would have lowered the household benefits cap – whilst the contest was in full flow. In this context, many of the newer and less experienced activists in the anti-austerity movement were deeply sceptical of the Labour Party's efficacy after it failed to challenge austerity (see Myers, 2017). The modus operandi of the movement – mass assemblies, occupations, and protest camps – was designed to be an organisational challenge to the disenfranchising basis of political parties (see Srnicek and Williams, 2016).

In contrast to Labour's parliamentary leadership, some left groups orbiting the party did attempt to channel the anti-austerity movement into the renewal of the labour movement and the politics of democratic socialism. There are several examples to illustrate this point. In 2011, the TUC organised 'March for the Alternative' put the trade unions at the centre of the movement: the march was the largest demonstration since the Stop the War march in 2003 and the biggest labour movement march since the Second World War (Panitch and Leys, 2020: 185). Left union leaders were, moreover, behind the creation of People's Assembly Against Austerity in 2013; and Unite, under the stewardship of the left-wing Len McCluskey, encouraged anti-austerity activists to join the Labour Party to vote in parliamentary selections from around 2012 onwards (Panitch and Leys, 2020: 187-188). Finally, the social media project Red Labour was founded in 2011 with the aim of connecting the horizontalist energy of the protests towards the new left's project of party democratisation (Panitch and Leys, 2017: 186). All these attempted, in one way or another, to reconnect the protest movements with democratic socialist cultures in the Labour Party and broader labour movement: the assembly of groups which later established the HLPG (Momentum) and pop-socialism (Corbynism).

Indeed, there was considerable common ground between the claims of the movement and the Labour new left tradition. Both tendencies wanted to see Labour adopt an anti-austerity position and a left-wing policy platform. Furthermore, there was overlap between democratic populism's emphasis on reclaiming people's power within representative institutions, and the

Labour new left's vision of party democracy, which it sees as the first step towards the 'reorganisation of the relationship between state and party, and between party and people' (Panitch and Leys, 2020: 8). It would be misleading to equivocate socialism with populism – Freeden (2016) has rejected the claim that populism bears any resemblance to much thicker and richer ideological traditions – but there was a palpable overlap between appeals made by anti-austerity activists for the 'people' to reclaim a broken political system, and the new left's demands for the radical democratisation of the party as a means of strengthening the democratic linkages between state and people. At this stage, however, the two wings were destined to remain on the fringes of British politics, that is, until the emergence of a 'pop-star' leader.

The Corbyn leadership provides an electoral home

As outlined in the literature review, Corbyn's entrance into the leadership contest in the summer of 2015 forged a space for the convergence of these traditions inside the Labour Party. He enthused older Labour supporters with a heritage in the labour movement, a tradition from which Corbyn hailed, alongside activists from the student movement and Occupy that rejected hierarchical structures in favour of more horizontalist politics (see Gerbaudo, 2017: 228). A core part of his appeal to these diverse traditions was the idea that Labour could become both a social movement and a political party (see Perryman, 2017: 21-25).

Corbyn resonated with these strands far more than the other candidates in the leadership contest. He earned the trust of activists across the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary left because of his long association with an 'urban left' tradition that had been calling for social movement causes to get more of a hearing in the Labour Party since the 1980s (Butler, 2021). He was widely praised by supporters as an 'authentic' politician with a long history of campaigning for left wing causes – most notably opposing austerity and chairing the Stop the War coalition – to the extent that he had famously (or infamously) defied the Labour whip a record number of times (see Waugh, 2016). Because of this he was hailed as a politician that had proven himself to be 'on the right side of history' time and time again. His personal

biography persuaded supporters previously critical of the Labour Party to not only become members of the party but also to join Momentum after they were launched.

In summary, Corbyn became the axis around which movement and party strands rotated. He rose to prominence just as the anti-austerity movement was looking to the party for representation, and the Labour left – after a prolonged period of relative dormancy – was seeking to channel the movement into the party. The concept of the 'hybrid left pressure group', outlined in the next section, provides a framework for investigating how Momentum organised this assemblage of traditions in an attempt to make the Labour Party more responsive to left-wing demands.

2.2. How Should Momentum be positioned?

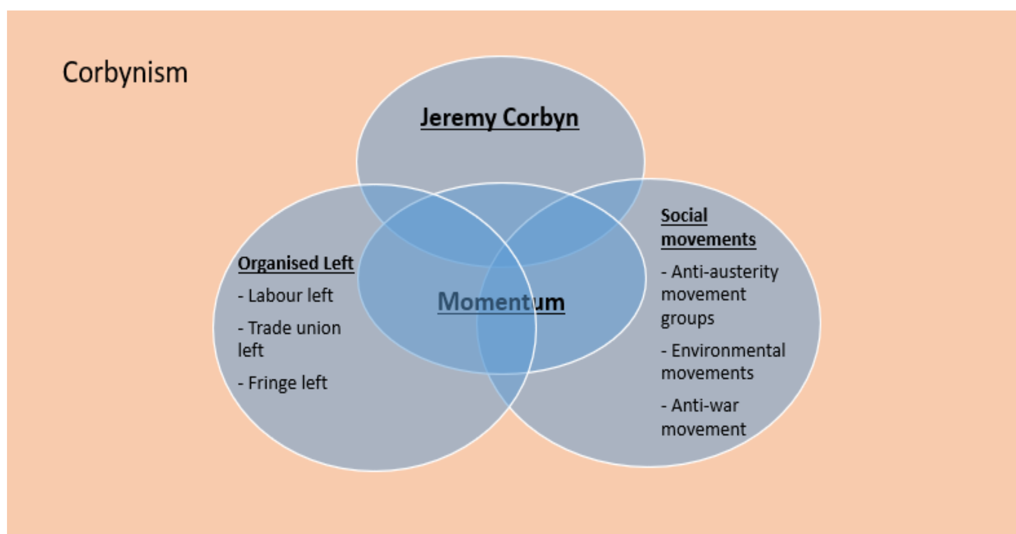

Figure 2: the convergence of movement and party strands during the Corbyn era

As described in the literature review, Momentum was launched by the above amalgamation of left groups that supported Corbyn's 2015 leadership campaign (Klug et al, 2016). Figure 2 visualises their location in relation to these groups. In the former camp were horizontalist activists from the anti-austerity movement and preceding protest coalitions, and in the latter camp were the existing trade union left and Labour left (see Klug et al, 2016). The interactions between these disparate groups was outside of mainstream politics before the 2015

leadership contest, as illustrated by Figure 1, but after Corbyn rose to prominence there was a degree of convergence around Corbyn and Momentum, as illustrated by Figure 2.

The literature review highlighted that Momentum have defied an easy definition because current scholarship has not been able to clearly delineate their relationship to this network of groups. Scholarship has described how they sought to introduce movement like forms of organisation into the political party, been at the frontline of conventional party factionalism, and been an appendage to Labour's election campaigns. This has led to them being labelled as anything ranging from a faction, a party within a party, to a social movement. The following section will attempt to flesh out a more precise definition of Momentum that pays due consideration to its organisation and practice in relation to the network of pro-Corbyn groups and the Labour Party.

A 'hybrid left pressure group'?

This section proposes that Momentum should be defined as a 'hybrid left pressure group': they are a composite of left-wing movement and party traditions that utilises insider and outsider political strategies to influence the direction of the Labour Party. Conceiving them in this way can help position them in relation to the network of movement and party strands that converged around the Corbyn leadership, and therefore establish a definition within the literature on social movements and political parties, the thesis' first research question. The HLPG can also provide a foundation for understanding the relationship between Momentum, Corbyn and the Labour Party, the thesis' second research question.

A working definition of a pressure group is provided by Wyn Grant (1999: 9):

> 'A pressure group is an organisation which seeks as one of its functions to influence the formulation and implementation of public policy, said public policy representing a set of authoritative decisions taken by the executive, the legislature and the judiciary, and by local government and the European Union.'

At first glance this may seem an unusual place to start, considering Momentum's orientation around an opposition party. However, as Grant (1999: 84) has pointed out, some pressure groups exist solely within political parties with the intention of influencing the direction of party policy and therefore public policy if that party were to enter government, and it should be noted that even in opposition Labour MPs still implement authoritative decisions in the legislature and Labour local councillors do so in local government. Examples of party-based pressure groups include the socialist societies affiliated to Labour, such as the Labour Housing Group or Scientists for Labour. They pressure the Labour Party to endorse their preferred resolutions at the party conference in the hope that these resolutions will filter into party and public policy.

Pressure groups as a bridge between political parties and social movements

Defining Momentum as a pressure group aims to establish an alternative to social movement and party-based definitions, whilst also clarifying how they bridged social movement and party-based causes. One of Grant's (1999: 5- 8) intentions when developing the concept was to propose pressure groups as a conduit between social movements and political parties. A social movement takes place outside of the institutional political arena, but if the movement decides to take organised political action inside the institutional arena then pressure group activity becomes necessary. In that respect, a pressure group is the transmission belt for a social movement to influence the political arena, and party-based pressure groups can also turn towards social movements to mobilise support for their demands. In distinction from political parties, a pressure group does not expect to influence all aspects of government policy and does not seek election but does provide the 'principal channels through which the mass of the citizenry brings influence to bear on the decision-makers whom they have elected' (McKenzie, 1958: 99).

A pressure group's capacity to organise particular interests inside and/or outside the party and influence policy makes them an effective vehicle for extra-parliamentary demands, potentially even providing a corrective for perceived failings in the electoral system (McKenzie, 1958).

One of the purposes of the trade unions, for example, is to leverage the Labour Party, and sometimes government directly, to influence the direction of public policy in favour of the labour movement. Political science scholarship initially reacted to such developments in a mostly negative light because pressure groups were seen to have a 'narrow outlook', in comparison to political parties, which should be capable of representing all mass constituencies in an ideal world (Schattschneider, 1948). However, within an electoral system in which voters can only exercise a meaningful vote every few years, pressure groups can play an important role in leveraging political decision-makers to respond to widely held group demands (see McKenzie, 1958).

This HLPG provides a useful way of framing Momentum's position within the family of movement and party traditions that converged around Corbyn's leadership, and their political orientation around the Labour Party, which they hoped to make more responsive to their broadly left-wing demands. In multiparty systems a 'movement-party' emerged to represent this family of traditions within the formal political system (della Porta et al, 2017). In Britain, on the other hand, Momentum took on this responsibility, in large part because of the persistence of Britain's two-party system (Muldoon and Rye, 2020). They sought to capitalise on the opportunity presented by Corbyn's leadership to influence the direction of the Labour Party through a range of different tactics.

A 'hybrid' of insider and outsider strategies

This definition also incorporates Momentum's ***hybrid*** strategy. One of the key distinctions in the pressure group literature is between 'insider' and 'outsider' groups. In the initial typology insider groups are described as having three core characteristics: First, they are 'recognised by government[2] as legitimate spokespersons for particular interests or causes'; second, 'having gained recognition, they are allowed to engage in a dialogue on issues of concern to

[2] There is a clear need for a broader definition that includes pressure groups that focus on opposition parties as well as those that are oriented around government.

them'; and third, 'they implicitly agree to abide by certain rules of the game' (Grant, 2004: 408). Insiders might benefit from access to key decision-makers who in turn show a greater willingness to bargain and negotiate, but they risk assimilation in the process. Outsider groups, in contrast, are not subject to the same rules of the game and are therefore more heterogeneous. Some are outsider groups by choice – perhaps for reasons of strategy or ideology – whether others lack the necessary resources or skills to intervene in the formal political arena (Grant, 2004). They often resort to unorthodox tactics, such as direct action and/or raising awareness on social media platforms. Outsiders may have more freedom to avoid compromise, but they do not have the access that insiders have, leaving them with less capacity to influence decision-making processes in formal political arenas.

Maloney et al (1994) have identified a third category, the 'thresholder' group, which defines those organisations that are 'characterised by a strategic ambiguity and oscillation between insider and outsider strategies' (May and Nugent, 1982: 7). These groups vacillate between having a close relationship with core decision-makers and trying to influence them from a distance using direct action tactics. The trade unions are identified as one example: they oscillate between strike activity and negotiation in the Labour Party and sometimes with government, and can transition between either strategy depending on the context at hand.

Momentum fit the definition of a 'thresholder' pressure group. They are not formally affiliated to the Labour Party, but all of their membership are Labour members, and they have a clear orientation around the party. They have used 'insider' tactics, such as lobbying delegates at the party conference to vote for certain resolutions, or negotiating with other left-wing groups to nominate candidates for the National Executive Committee (NEC). On other occasions, they have pursued 'outsider' strategies, such as protesting outside parliament following a motion of no confidence against Corbyn in June 2016, mentioned in Chapter One (Asthana et al, 2016). The way in which Momentum have combined these strategies – which stems in part from their attempt to combine movement and party traditions – is the raison d'etre for describing them as a ***hybrid*** left pressure group: they use a multitude of insider and outsider tactics in different

settings. During the Corbyn period, their tactics were dependent on the ebbs and flows of the leadership, as the thesis will explore, but this definition also establishes a more consistent basis to understand their continued role after Corbyn's resignation.

The pursuit of left-wing demands

The final part of the definition is that Momentum have used their hybrid strategy to pressure the Labour Party into pursuing more ***left-wing*** policy objectives. This is hardly a controversial claim in relation to Momentum. Much of the literature has highlighted that Corbyn supporters were motivated by a disenchantment with the domination of the Labour Party by the centre left, preferring a leader that would pursue a more radical anti-austerity and sometimes anti-capitalist platform (Whiteley et al, 2019). Momentum (2017: 1) have been a figurehead for these views, aiming to instill 'support for a transformative, socialist programme'.

This claim is, however, more atypical in relation to the pressure group literature. As stated above, political scientists have frequently criticised pressure groups for possessing a 'narrow outlook' – they tend to represent sectional interests or single-issue causes (see Schattschneider, 1948). Momentum, however, have advocated for a multitude of left-wing claims under the umbrella of 'Corbynism'. This leaves us with the need to consider whether it is consistent to envisage Momentum as a pressure group if they make a plurality of political demands.

McKenzie (1958) has asserted that 'pressure groups, taken together, are a far more important channel of communication than parties for the transmission of political ideas from the mass of the citizenry to their rulers' (99/100). Political parties have to represent diverse constituencies and sometimes dilute their ideological beliefs for electoral gains, but pressure groups have no such obligation. Extending this point to the case at hand, then it could be contended that Momentum's explicit orientation around Corbyn renders them the most direct 'channel of communication' for the ideas of Corbynism. Unlike most pressure groups, this leads them to make a broad range of left-wing demands rather than focus on individual causes or interests.

They were the main outlet for the left-wing anti-austerity groups that landed on Corbyn's leadership, with little choice other than to orientate around the Labour Party in the hope that they could influence its direction (Muldoon and Rye, 2020). Most of the pressure group literature focuses on the relationship between pressure groups and government, without considering cases where pressure groups intervene in an opposition party for such ideological reasons.

This is broadly consistent with the definition of a 'cause' pressure group (Grant, 1999: 13-15). In distinction from sectional groups which represent the 'common interests of a section', cause groups 'seek to represent some belief or principle…they seek to act in the interests of that cause' (Stewart, 1958: 25). Sectional groups advance limited goals such as the protection of a particular industry, whereas cause groups tend to advocate for broader principles or beliefs – although still typically single-issues. Momentum, however, advocate for an expansive range of ***left-wing*** causes under the umbrella of Corbynism.

The 'hybrid left pressure group', to summarise, provides a way of framing how Momentum utilised a range of insider and outsider strategies drawn from party and movement traditions to pressure the Labour Party into becoming more responsive to left-wing causes, broadly under the banner of 'Corbynism'. This provides a framework for analysing Momentum's internal organisation and their external practice vis-à-vis the Labour Party. In addition, it provides a definition that can help to position Momentum in relation to social movements and political parties. The next section can now turn to developing the notion of 'pop-socialism' as a way of framing how Corbynism gathered the support of diverse constituencies across the left.

2.3. How should Corbynism be understood?

Andrew Gamble's (1994) famous account of Thatcherism is structured around two key concepts drawn from his earlier work – the 'politics of power' and the 'politics of support'. The former refers to the fact that political leaders need to secure government office and then

govern effectively whilst 'managing the state machine and coping with the pressures placed upon policy by structural constraints of the domestic polity and the world political economy' (Gamble, 1994: 8). The latter refers to the task of winning 'support from voters, organised interests and their own party members, mobilising a coalition that can win elections and establish a claim to political, moral and intellectual leadership' (8). Analysing the dynamic interactions between these two dimensions provided an effective framework for exploring how Thatcherism appealed to Conservative Party members and the public, its statecraft when in government, and its attempts to exercise a decisive hegemony over British society (see Killick and Mabbett, 2021).

Because the Labour Party never entered government whilst Corbyn was leader, it is the latter concept – the politics of support – that constitutes the primary, but not the exclusive, concern of the analysis that follows. The struggle to gather support is the main concern of a party in opposition, with the requirements of government taking on a different shape. Gamble (1994: 221) describes Thatcherism's politics of support when in opposition as follows:

> 'the party had to be united behind its new leader in the drive to win ascendancy in parliament and in ideological argument, to win back voters and recruit new ones, and to regain the confidence of all the interests that looked naturally to the Conservative Party.'

The HLPG establishes a basis to conceptualise how Momentum carved out an organisational space so that the strands that had converged around Corbyn could collectively influence the direction of the Labour Party. Pop-socialism, however, provides a conceptualisation of how Corbynism assembled the support of these groups. It aims to explain how support was gathered from traditional currents inside the party alongside new movements that originated outside the party, and how it attempted to use the impetus from this to mobilise a broad electoral coalition in 2017 and 2019, with the eventual aim of securing a resolute 'political, economic and moral leadership' (ibid) that could assure long lasting transformational change.

By focusing on Momentum, the thesis will unearth the grassroots dynamics of this support, with a particular focus on the basis of its support among diverse left-wing constituencies. Interviewing key decision-makers will also elicit insight into how leading figures planned to gather a more general level of support across society.

What is pop-socialism?

> *'Now my own view is that, although organising around existing left forces and the organised labour movement is an absolute prerequisite for an effective fightback, it is not enough to displace the new Right. The Left must also be able, on its own programme, with its own project, to engage society as a whole, to become representative of society as a whole, to generalise itself through society, to bring over strategic popular majorities on the key issues, to win converts, first of all among those sectors of its own class and those who can come into alliance with it, but who have in recent years not supported it. But secondly, to make converts to its cause, to carry the case to a widening set of constituencies, to polarise the society in new ways towards the left, to connect with new experiences in society, to engage with its increasing complexity and in that way make socialism grow in relevance to the emerging experiences as well as the traditional experiences of our time.*
>
> *There may be historical scenarios when socialism can and has to be built without becoming the politics of the popular majorities of society, but the precedents for it are not good, and in any case Britain at the moment is not in a place where such a scenario has the slightest credibility. But that means coming out of our own, self-imposed ghetto, whether that ghetto is the labour movement or the trade union movement, or the Labour Party: coming out and engaging with society as a whole. It doesn't only mean engaging with the new sectors, new issues and new movements on the Left. It also means engaging with the many positions and aspects of class experience which are not currently touched by or reflected in the ways in which socialism is defined.'* (Stuart Hall, 1985a: 17/18)

Stuart Hall's influence for the theorisation that follows derives primarily from his emphasis on analysing the 'conjuncture': the 'convergent and divergent tendencies shaping the totality of power relations within a given social field during a particular period of time' (Gilbert, 2019: 6). Analysing the 'conjuncture' requires research 'gets the analysis right' by mapping out the 'specificity of the present' within historical context (Gilbert, 2019: 5). Understanding the Corbyn conjuncture, therefore, requires a deeper examination of how his leadership synthesised the support of conventional traditions orbiting the Labour Party with a younger constituency of left-wing activists oriented around the anti-austerity movement. To understand its support within

these groups, the thesis should consider how political ideology, in terms of individually held belief-systems and their organisation collectively, was rolled out into broader society in an attempt to win the 'ideological argument' (ibid) and gather mass support. It is also important to remember, moreover, that political ideology does not exist in a vacuum, and so the thesis should consider its interplays with other particularities during the Corbyn era: His idiosyncratic leadership style, the personalised relationship he had with his 'fans', and the deployment of a 'people' vs 'elite' discourse, among other things.

At its most general level, 'pop-socialism' was a means of gathering the support of these groups in the manner that Stuart Hall envisaged in the above passage. It engaged with 'new sectors, new issues and new movements' (ibid) by appealing to the fledgling 'generation left' whose formative experiences of political activism were in the anti-austerity movement and whose economic experiences were precarious and tenuous (see Milburn, 2019; Burton-Cartledge, 2017). And yet it also sought to organise them around existing left traditions in the labour movement in an attempt to renew not only the Labour Party but also its dormant socialist tradition. In doing so, it connected the 'new impulses and social forces [of the New Social Movements] with the more traditional class politics of the left; and…through this articulation [transformed] the project of the left' (Hall, 2010: 191).

More specifically, 'pop-socialism' aims to explain three particular dimensions of Corbynism's support: (1) the emergence of a 'pop-star' leader forges a space for the convergence of a plurality of ideological traditions from movements and parties; (2) appeals to a 'people' unite these traditions together and provide a justification for the pursuit of 'popular-democratic' reforms; and (3) this forms the basis of an attempt to renew a conventional vision of democratic socialism (Ward and Guglielmo, 2021). Preliminary analysis would suggest that Corbynism comprised features typical of 'pop-socialism'. As the literature review illustrated, Corbyn has been described as a 'celebrity' leader (Dean, 2017); a socialist leader in the Labour left

tradition (Panitch and Leys, 2020); and he and his followers have regularly been labelled as populist (Smith, 2019; Watts and Bale, 2019).

By interviewing and observing Momentum's membership the thesis can gain some insight into Corbynism's support among its main protagonists, both in terms of how it gathered the support of these groups, and how they attempted to appeal to a broader audience once this coalition was established. This will enable the thesis to answer the third research question: how do participants in Momentum view Corbynism? This section will now turn to exploring the three main dimensions of pop-socialism.

The pop-star leader

Its first dimension is what the thesis calls the 'pop-star' leader. Existing literature has explored the key role that personalisation around leadership figures – such as Pablo Iglesias, Alexis Tsipras, or Jean-Luc Mélenchon – has played in gathering supporters for radical movement-parties in the anti-austerity age (della Porta et al, 2017). However, where hegemonic left parties persisted, they remained relatively unscathed by the movement until a leadership figure emerged internally to the party. One example is Bernie Sanders, who assembled the support of former Occupy activists, members of the left-wing Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), and 'Our Revolution', a new movement-like organisation of the leader's supporters (Muldoon and Rye, 2020). The case at hand is another example: Jeremy Corbyn instigated an unparalleled rise for the left between 2015 and 2017 by assembling a coalition of left-wing trade unionists, Labour Party members, and an assortment of activists from extra-parliamentary protests movements. As demonstrated in the previous section, interactions between these strands preceded Corbyn, but they only had the space to gain influence within a mainstream party once his name was secured on the ballot.

Dean's (2017) work on 'politicising fandom' was a key reason for coining the prefix 'pop' to describe Corbyn's personal role in amassing this diverse coalition. Dean (2017: 409) developed the concept after observing that 'supporters relate to Corbyn in a similar vein to

how fans of pop or film stars relate to their chosen fan object'. In Dean's view, celebrity politicians and supporters are capable of co-constituting the sense of a collective 'movement' through four key interrelated processes. First, celebrity leaders and their fans actively co-produce and co-consume the properties of a collective community such as 'Corbyn-ism' in a 'dynamic relationship between the individual fan, other fans and the fan object' (Dean, 2017: 412). Second, 'affective orientations' – 'the palpable sense of warmth, excitement and anticipation' (418) at leaders' rallies – provides the bedrock for the development of mutual bonds between these individuals and groups. This, in turn, establishes a 'sense of *community*' (413) between activists that identify with the causes of the leader and each other. The final dimension, *contestation*, recognises the distinctly political aspect of these communities: the shared association with a political leader prompts supporters to identify what and who they stand for and against.

Dean draws on several examples from the period of 'Corbynmania' to illustrate his point, citing the various pop culture figures that have spoken at Corbyn rallies, Corbyn memes and mugs, and the publication of websites such as 'kittens 4 Corbyn'. Corbynmania arguably peaked after Dean's paper was published, with movements such as #Grime4Corbyn and Corbyn's 'Glastonbury Reception' emerging shortly after the 2017 election. Corbyn's personalised appeal was seemingly key to gathering the support of diverse left-wing constituencies, providing a moment of unity rarely seen on the left.

In a later article, Dean and Maiguashca (2020) argue that the synonymy between leaders and led in an instance of populism occurs because of the existence of shared claims and grievances, in what they see as a critique of the 'deductive' tendencies of populism studies. This contrasts with the passive relationship populism is frequently portrayed to be:

> 'subjects identify with a specific political leader and, in so doing, affirm their sense of communion with a broader political community who feel the same way. Seen in this way, populism becomes, among other things, a series of performative acts in which the distinction between the identity of the "leader" and that of the "people"

becomes blurred as they fuse, for a time, into one' (Dean and Maiguashca, 2020: 21).

Seen in this light, it is reasonable to claim that the pop-leader was able to mobilise previously unrepresented but widely held anti-austerity views around a common purpose, uniting a disaffected 'people' in a challenge against the establishment. Activists were not passive acolytes, but actively shared Corbyn's grievances and views, and lent him their support on that basis.

A technological shift which contributed to the emergence of the 'pop-leader' is the ubiquity of digital tools, in particular social media. Gerbaudo (2018) argues that digital tools have facilitated the movement of power upwards towards what he terms a 'hyperleader': contemporary leaders can immediately connect to millions of followers on social media, and this vertical relationship is reinforced by digital democracy platforms which are easily controlled by the most well-known and influential leaders. At the same time, the disintermediated nature of digital tools has reduced the need for regional structures, leading to a new stratum of elite activists described as 'supervolunteers', who are unencumbered by traditional territorial structures and sit directly underneath the leadership (Gerbaudo, 2018). Supervolunteers can be rapidly mobilised by hyperleaders in a short space of time, cementing a level of synchrony not observed in the past. This made it much easier for the pop-leader to procure the support of diverse constituencies – whether from movements or parties – in a short space of time.

As the thesis will explore in later empirical chapters, the concept of pop-leader raises a few dilemmas. First, digital media has the potential to facilitate both a movement of power upwards and downwards – a contradiction which is captured by Gerbaudo's (2018) juxtaposition between the 'hyperleader' and 'supervolunteer'. On the one hand, platform technologies facilitate direct democracy – whether in a plebiscitary or a participatory mould – which stimulates organisational experimentation and the introduction of movement-like forms of

participation into parliamentary politics (Chadwick and Stromer-Galley, 2016). On the other hand, internal party democracy in digital parties is highly centralised – processes are controlled by elites, without much space for deliberation. Users are only called to 'rubber-stamp decisions already taken at the top and crowd source policy ideas, but with no binding mandate' (Gerbaudo, 2019:10). In the later empirical chapters, it will be important to interrogate the extent to which digital platforms and social media were used by Momentum to encourage participation and democracy, or whether they were used to reinforce the control of their leadership and/or the Corbyn leadership.

There is a second tension between the demands for a more democratic and participative party, and the need to defend the factional gains of the pop-leader. This is particularly a problem where the different faces of the party – the 'party on the ground', the 'party in central office', and the 'party in public office' (see Katz and Mair, 1993) – are dominated by factional opponents such as in the Democratic Party or the Labour Party: this strongly disincentives the leadership from pursuing party democracy because of the risk that factional opponents could be empowered. Chapter Seven will explore how this tension played out in Momentum and how it contributed to the failure of 'Corbynism beyond Corbyn'.

Authoritarian populist or popular-democratic?

As outlined in the literature review, much of the radical left during the anti-austerity age, including Corbynism, have been described as populist at one point or another. The chapter made several critiques of this literature. In particular, many radical left leaders combine appeals to a 'people' with conventional socialist demands, rather than aiming to replace socialist demands, as some scholars of left populism have called for. Another critique is that the 'people' can be mobilised in different directions in relation to democratic politics – they can be cast as a 'threat' or a 'corrective' to democracy (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2012). For this reason, the persistent use of the overstretched 'populist' label undermines the analytical merit of populism and obfuscates, rather than clarifies, differences between political movements

(Dean and Maiguashca, 2020). A more precise definition which seeks to determine how Corbynism combined appeals to the 'people' with other important dimensions – such as their socialist politics – is required.

This critique has led the thesis to the second key dimension of 'pop-socialism', the concept of 'popular-democracy', which aims to distinguish between occasions when a discourse of the 'people' is deployed to justify a bottom-up ('popular') mobilisation and occasions when appeals to a 'people' are deployed to reinforce an elite ('populist') common sense[3]. This distinction has again been based on some of the work of Stuart Hall (1979, 1985, 1986, 1988, 2016). In a typically insightful analysis of Thatcherism, Hall (1985, 1988) established a distinction between 'popular-democratic' and 'authoritarian populism'. Authoritarian populism refers to movements which are:

> 'pioneered by, harnessed to, and to some extent legitimated by a populist groundswell from below … [This] often took the shape of a sequence of "moral panics"…these served to win for the authoritarian closure the gloss of populist consent' (Hall 1985: 116).

Authoritarian populists only partially represent 'common sense'. They appeal, for example, to discourses of 'law and order' and the 'enemy within' (which in the case of Thatcherism was the trade unions and the social democratic consensus) in order to present their particularistic worldview as the general interest of the 'people'. In so doing, the 'people' are constructed as *passive* agents that are easily absorbed into dominant ideologies, which closes off the prospect of democratic challenge from below. Elsewhere, Hall (2017: 203) elaborates further:

[3] The beginning of this chapter utilised Gerbaudo's work on 'democratic populism' to explain developments on the left during the anti-austerity era. Whilst the thesis agrees with Gerbaudo's central thesis, it has chosen to adopt the term popular-democratic because it enables a way of distinguishing between 'populist' and 'popular' mobilisations, as this section attempts to show. The ideology that Gerbaudo describes would be considered an example of a popular democratic mobilisation.

> 'By populism I mean…the project, central to the politics of Thatcherism, to ground neoliberal policies directly in an appeal to 'the people'; to root them in the essentialist categories of common-sense experience and practical moralism – and thus to construct, not simply awaken, classes, groups and interests into a particular definition of "the people"'.

Popular democracy, on the other hand, is 'inextricably linked with the deepening of democratic life, and the widening of popular-democratic struggle' (Hall, 1988: 124/125). Where authoritarian populists appeal to the 'people' according to their own interests, popular-democratic appeals *activate* (hence the phrase 'activist') its 'people' as a radically democratic force that aims to challenge the prevailing common sense of the elite. Elsewhere, Hall (2018: 239) has juxtaposed the 'populist' with the 'popular':

> 'We can be certain that *other* forces also have a stake in defining the "people" into something else: the "people" who need to be disciplined more, ruled better, more effectively policed, whose way of life needs to be protected from "alien cultures" and so on...sometimes we can be constituted as a force against the power bloc: that is the historical opening on which it is possible to construct a culture that is genuinely popular. But, in our society, if we are not constituted like that, we will be constituted into its opposite: an effective 'populist' force, saying "Yes" to power'.

This distinction is pertinent to the thesis for four main reasons. First, it provides an alternative to the overstretched label of populism which can more precisely differentiate between the various ways in which political actors combine appeals to the 'people' with a particular conception of 'democracy'. This, in turn, can provide the backbone for a more thorough investigation of who precisely Corbynism's 'people' were, how they were mobilised, and the extent to which this was combined with a concerted attempt to introduce democratic initiatives that opened the space for popular participation.

A second reason the notion of popular democracy is useful is because, for Hall, it was fundamental to his support for socialist politics. He concluded his famous analysis of the 'popular' by describing it as 'one of the places where socialism might be constituted. That is why "popular culture" matters. Otherwise, to tell you the truth, I don't give a damn about it' (Hall, 2018: 239). In that regard, the concept can be of particular use for investigating how Corbynism attempted to scaffold the popular-democratic appeals emerging from the anti-austerity movement into the renewal of the conventional left. How did Corbynism, in other words, attach new forms of activism to the democratic socialist aim of drawing attention to divisions 'along the line of the exploited and the exploiters, which, in turn, alone might provide conditions for a more sustained socialist advance'? (Hall, 1988: 125).

A third reason for utilising the term is the importance that it places on the pedagogical role that has become a hallmark of the left in recent years. There is a rich tradition on the left which has claimed that all people, including those who do not see themselves as educators or intellects, are part of an intellectual formation and promote a particular conception of the world (Gramsci, 1989: 118-126; Friere, 1996; Giroux, 1988). This is an essentially 'popular' rather than populist conception of education: every moment of hegemony is observed as a moment of education, and the responsibility of progressive cultural workers is to expand the idea of education to a wide terrain by creating a broad network of institutions capable of *activating* citizens to challenge dominant ideologies (see Mayo, 2014). Gramsci (1989: 130-131) imagined this in the broadest possible sense – he envisioned 'unitary' schools as 'a twenty-four hour collective life, free from present day forms of hypocritical and mechanical discipline. Studies should be conducted collectively with help from the masters and the best pupils, even in the hours of so-called private study'. This provides a particularly interesting lens for exploring the Momentum branded festival The World Transformed (TWT) (n.d.), which has the self-proclaimed aim of 'developing and delivering political education across the UK in order to build a movement capable of radically transforming society'. The thesis will explore the extent to which TWT institutionalised a popular-democratic form of education to encourage the active

participation of supporters, or whether it was simply a 'populist' forum to distribute Corbynite propaganda.

The fourth and final reason for adopting the term popular-democratic is because of the specific meaning that Hall attaches to the term 'popular'. His interpretation is based on the observation that 'the structuring principle' between the 'popular' and the 'non-popular' is the 'tensions and oppositions between what belongs to the central domain of elite or dominant culture' and what is considered to be the 'culture of the "periphery"' (2018: 234). The 'popular' therefore consists of the 'force and relations which sustain the distinction, the difference: roughly between, what, at any time, counts as an elite cultural activity or form, and what does not'. It is, in that regard, a permanent process of 'struggle', in which 'relations of domination and subordination are articulated' (235). This includes class politics but is not limited to class politics: it is in a perpetual state of contradiction, tension and motion between popular and non-popular traditions and practices, particular classes, and dominant and dominated traditions.

The role of the progressive, based on this understanding of the 'popular', is to open rather than close the space for a popular-democratic representation of the 'people'. Whereas a populist attempts to absorb experiences of the 'people' into dominant traditions, a popular-democratic mobilisation aims to represent subordinated, dominated, or 'peripheral' groups, classes and 'people' in the field of the 'popular'. Dean (2020) has touched up on this with the concept of 'popular leftism', as outlined in Chapter One, which refers to the heightened visibility of left-wing intellectual strands within the sphere of popular culture during the Corbyn era, demonstrated by the eminence of alternative media outlets such as Novara media and Chapo Trap House and by the mainstream presence of left-wing journalists and celebrities like Owen Jones and Russell Brand. Popular leftism has also been marked by an intellectual reorientation which has challenged 'orthodox strands of socialist thinking', enabling previously marginal tendencies such as radical feminism, postcolonial and decolonial thinking to 'move out of the margins and into the mainstream of political and cultural life' (Dean, 2020: 11).

The concept of the popular, seen in this light, is particularly pertinent if investigating how and why Corbynism gathered the support of activists in Momentum. By deploying the concept, the thesis can determine the extent to which a conventional brand of socialism was combined with strands of thought from outside the traditional left, including liberatory and environmentalist tendencies.

The renewal of democratic socialism

One ambiguity highlighted in the literature review surrounded how Corbynism could be seen both as part of the shifting landscape of left politics following the GFC, but also as an iteration of traditional democratic socialism, in particular, the new left tradition. However, the idea of 'pop-socialism' indicates that, taken as a whole, Corbynism renewed democratic socialism by appealing to left strands that had expanded during the anti-austerity movement. Dean (2020: 3) recognises that popular leftism is only part of Corbynism's equation, pointing out the Labour left must 'figure in any serious attempt at capturing the specifics of the Corbyn era in British politics'. Pop-socialism aims to do precisely that by capturing the synergy between democratic socialism and novel left cultures emanating from the anti-austerity movement.

So-called movement-parties that emerged during the anti-austerity era benefited from a similar unity between conventional socialist traditions and novel ideological tendencies. Syriza's official unification in 2013, for example, combined 'movementists' with socialists and communists, resulting in a Founding Charter which called for 'ownership and management of means of production' and the 'overthrow of the domination of the forces of neoliberalism' (quoted in della Porta et al, 2017: 108). Traditional left discourses were merged with a populist discourse from around 2011 which emphasised Syriza's role in representing the 'people' in the state (Stavrakakis and Katsambekis, 2014; della Porta et al, 2017). Podemos, meanwhile, were a more explicitly populist party which framed themselves as a radically democratic challenge to the oligarchy of representative democracy, aiming to launch a new party predicated on the direct democratic principles of the movement (della Porta et al, 2017). Even

so, this was still combined with a progressive agenda involving traditional class-based policies including support for a national health service, public education, and redistribution (della Porta et al, 2017). This represents the rearticulation of socialist politics in the mould called for by Martin Jacques and Stuart Hall in the pages of *Marxism Today*: Traditional class-based values are combined with plural ideologies drawn from broader social movements to harvest a more popular appeal. In doing so, these parties gathered an unexpected level of support from across the institutionalist and movementist left to achieve a spectacular rise.

Although recent times have seen an increasing degree of overlap between social democracy and socialism, socialism has come to distinguish itself primarily by its commitment to democratic public ownership and control of the economy, whereas social democracy is more willing to leave management and control of firms in the hands of private ownership (Busky, 2000; Bolton, 2020). Socialism calls for intervention into the heart of production to abolish private property relations and thereby negate the exploitative relationship between capital and labour. Democratic socialists accept parliamentary democracy, but they combine their rejection of capitalism with a commitment to grassroots and extra-parliamentary democracy (March and Mudde, 2005: 34). Pop-socialism's rearticulation of class politics along '99% vs 1%' lines matches with these two essential features: it presents itself as a rejection of the unequal basis of capitalism and as an alternative to the oligarchic tendencies of party and parliament, during an age with record lows of trust in parliamentary democracy (see Hansard Society, 2016, 2017).

Nevertheless, the extent of Corbynism's radicalism is something which requires further investigation. As outlined in the literature review, some scholarship has pointed out that Corbynism was not particularly radical and was never likely to be so (see Seymour, 2016; Bassett, 2019). This is a critique which has been made of other parties located on the movement-party intersection. Syriza infamously 'capitulated' into the Troika's harsh austerity demands and were unable to follow through with a radical programme during their time in Government (Panitch and Gindin, 2018). Podemos, meanwhile, gradually became 'even more

absorbed in parliamentary politics to the detriment of street politics; it has been increasingly incorporated into established institutions; and it has converged with forces of the casta, such as the PSOE, in order to accede to power' (Kioupkiolos and Perez, 2019: 31). It is certainly true that many of the proposals in Labour's 2017 and 2019 manifesto could be interpreted as a standard social democratic package of reforms (Manwaring and Smith, 2020).

However, the 'politics of power' should not always be conflated with the 'politics of support' (Gamble, 1994). The ideological underpinnings of supporters are not analogous to the political practices and political economy of the parliamentary leadership (although, of course, the two are deeply intertwined). It may well be the case that Corbynism gathered the support of plural strands on the left because they aspired to radical change at some point in the future, despite the limits placed on Corbyn in the present. Freeden (2003) has demonstrated that within the socialist discourse there is always a separation between immediate priorities and the pursuit of a utopian future – the result being that some strands of socialism demand the immediate transcendence of existing social relations, whereas others aim for incremental change within the boundaries of liberal democracy. Indeed, James Schneider, one Momentum's co-founders, and later Corbyn's Strategic Head of Communications, was quoted by Panitch and Leys (2020: 217) as describing the 'third category' of a potential Corbyn Government as based on 'non-reformist reforms, those which push at the boundaries of the possible and therefore open up new horizons'.

Pop-socialism establishes a foundation to investigate the extent to which Corbynism was seen as a radical brand of socialist politics by participants in Momentum and unearth the motivating factors behind their support. Furthermore, the final chapter will identify some of the practical constraints that were placed on this brand of politics by exploring external restrictions in the Labour Party which led to a process of negotiation, mediation, and compromise. This will provide the basis to explore the failure of 'Corbynism beyond Corbyn' in the final empirical chapter and therefore answer the final research question – how can Momentum help to explain Corbynism's rise and fall?

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced two new conceptualisations. The first, the ‘hybrid left pressure group’, aims to provide a means to map how Momentum combined insider and outsider strategies drawn from both parties and movements to influence the direction of the Labour Party. The HLPG is particularly important to the analysis Chapter Four, which provides an overview of Momentum’s evolution and internal organisation, and Chapter Five, which maps out the dimensions of their ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ strategies in relation to Corbyn and the Labour Party. The second main contribution was to utilise some of Stuart Hall’s many insights to develop the idea of ‘pop-socialism’, which establishes a basis for conceptualising how Corbynism gathered support from a broad range of left-wing traditions found in Momentum. Chapter six uses ‘pop-socialism’ as a foundation to explore the views of participants and elicit some insight into the rise of Corbynism between the 2015 leadership campaign and the 2017 general election.

Both of these conceptualisations could be vital additions to an emerging literature analysing the evolution of the left in the post-austerity era. Existing scholarship has noted the celebrification of contemporary left leaders, the reconfiguration of how discourses of ‘class’ and ‘people’ are combined, and discussed the shift away from protesting state power towards aiming to build state power (Gerbaudo, 2017; della Porta et al, 2019; Srnicek, 2016; Dean, 2017; Ramiro and Gomez, 2017; Katsambekis and Kioupkiolis, 2019). Commentators have also analysed how institutionalist left-wing organisations have responded by incorporating horizontalist methods of organising into their repertoires (Srnicek, 2016; Gerbaudo, 2019; della Porta et al, 2017; Gerbaudo, 2018; Muldoon and Rye, 2020). The HLPG and pop-socialism can establish a framework for organising these observations into a consistent framework to conceptualise the direction that the left is moving in today.

3. Research Design and Methodology

Introduction

The thesis aims to provide the first detailed empirical account of Momentum during Corbyn's tenure as leader of the Labour Party. In so doing, it aims to define and understand Momentum and Corbynism and investigate the relationship between the two. Four research questions have been identified:

1) How should Momentum be defined in relation to the current scholarship on political parties and social movements?
2) How should Momentum's relationship to Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour Party be understood?
3) How do participants in Momentum understand Corbynism?
4) How can Momentum help to explain Corbynism's rise and fall?

This chapter will describe the methodology and research design that was utilised to conduct the research. This involved the application of three ethnographic methods between September 2018 and June 2020: twenty-six semi-structured interviews, participant observation in various forms, and documentary analysis (see appendix 1 and appendix 2). An ethnography is broadly defined as an attempt to 'understand the social meanings and activities of people in a given field or setting, and its approach, which involves close association with, and often participation in, this setting' (Brewer, 2000: 11). The aim is typically to uncover 'latent' features of certain social practices 'inside' communities that are left concealed by 'outsider' accounts such as those that have investigated Momentum up to the present point (Melucci, 1996; Kanuha, 2020).

The first section of the chapter outlines the rationale for the use of ethnographic methods. It claims that the lack of empirical research into Corbynism and Momentum is a consequence of both methodological shortcomings and a normative bias that permeates political science. The

tendency to ignore currents outside of Westminster and the prevalence of an ‘ideologically constructed opposition’ to Corbynism mean that certain key features remain invisible to much scholarship (see Allen, 2019: 75). Political science should reconsider how it thinks and approaches extra-parliamentary left politics in particular, but also left politics in general, to account for these limitations. This thesis aims to take a first step in this direction by seeking out the perspective of participants ‘inside’ Momentum in an attempt to reveal their extra-parliamentary influences, the hidden dynamics of their organisation and practice, and the basis of Corbynism’s support among its main protagonists.

The second section will explore the role of theory in the research. An ‘iterative’ process was utilised throughout the period of data collection and data analysis – this involved the refinement of theory through a continuous dialogue with the empirical data during the research window and writing up stage (George and Bennett, 2005). This approach provided a basis for the constant improvement of theory based on how the data fitted with prior theoretical reflections.

The third section will outline the practical steps taken in the data collection and analysis stages. This includes a discussion of the challenges encountered when locating and gaining access to the field, collecting the data, and writing up the thesis. The role attached to the researcher during this process is of particular importance: Key considerations included the depth of participation, visibility vis-a-vis the participants, and the tension between telling the participant’s story whilst also retaining an external vantage point (see Spradley, 1980). The fourth and final section will examine the ethics of the research.

3.1. Why use ethnographic methods to study Momentum?

A body of scholars have lamented political science for a so-called ‘Corbyn problem’ that rendered the discipline incapable of anticipating Corbyn’s victory in the 2015 leadership contest, his continued support among the grassroots (including in Momentum), or the Labour Party’s positive result at the 2017 general election (Hayton, 2017; Allen, 2019; Maiguashca

and Dean, 2019a). Methodological shortcomings include a continued reliance on the traditional 'Westminster Model', leading to a disregard of extra-parliamentary forces, and a demand for a neutral 'political scientist as public expert', which encourages a preference for supposedly 'objective' quantitative data analysis at the expense of more detailed qualitative analysis (Allen, 2019: 83; Maiguashca and Dean, 2019a: 60-62). Such limitations meant that unquantifiable events originating outside of Westminster remain invisible to political science: changes in attitudes among the Labour Party membership, the internal dynamics of Momentum, and the diverse intellectual strands among Corbyn supporters, for example, are generally ignored in favour of simple answers (Maiguashca and Dean, 2019a).

Allied with political science's methodological shortcomings is an implicit (and sometimes explicit) normative opposition that further obscures the origins of any Corbyn-related phenomenon. Peter Allen (2019: 75) identifies several ways in which political science has bolstered the political punditry's 'relatively unified ideologically constructed opposition'. Most importantly, Corbyn was typecast as a 'hard left' fanatic that was 'so self-evidently misguided that it barely merited any scholarly attention or analysis' (Dean, 2016, quoted in Allen, 2019: 76). Lamenting his 'extreme' brand of politics went hand-in-hand with a propensity to question the 'intelligence' and 'credibility' of Corbyn and his supporters: their failure to abide by the 'rules of the game' exposes their apparent lack of knowledge about the 'fixed, non-ideological, and context-resistant' (79) basis of British politics. Furthermore, the 'political activities' of Corbyn and his youthful supporters – with mass rallies more akin to music festivals – is often dismissed as an immature form of politics more suited to student activism than the esteemed halls of Westminster (78).

The gaps identified in Chapter One are a direct consequence of the coupling of a limited methodological toolkit with a normative bias. The ethnographic methods utilised in the thesis are an attempt to reconsider how left politics and extra-parliamentary politics in general should be studied. There are four main reasons they are advantageous for the thesis.

The first is that an 'insider' account establishes a means of unearthing 'the actualities of the lives of some of those involved in the institutional process [Momentum] and focus on how those actualities were embedded within social relations' (Smith, 2005: 31). In simple terms, I will be embedded inside Momentum (an institution) in an attempt to explore how it shapes participants experiences and how participants have in turn shaped its evolution. By placing their experiences at the heart of the narrative the thesis will be in a robust position to shed light on the internal features of Momentum that are hidden from view in externalist political science interpretations (see Plows, 2008).

The second reason is that they provide a means to investigate the broader network of parliamentary and extra-parliamentary institutions and groups that Momentum have been situated in. My data collection involved participation and interviews spanning this network, which has helped Chapter Five map out how Momentum (the 'hybrid left pressure group') combined 'insider' and 'outsider' strategies and to what effect. Additionally, it should be noted that Momentum is not a strictly discrete organisation – Momentum members are Labour members, and some are party representatives, trade unionists and even party employees – and therefore participants can also provide an avenue into understanding the layers of Momentum's relationship to the Labour Party.

The third reason relates to unearthing how participants viewed Corbynism, the third research question. The capacity of the ethnography to tell rich, colourful stories establishes a grounding to look in detail at why participants supported Corbynism and joined Momentum (see Plows, 2008). This, in turn, can enable the thesis to explore why Corbynism gathered such support at the 2015 leadership election and motivated hundreds of thousands of members to join the party in the following years – this aim of the final research question.

The fourth reason is the capability of ethnographic methods to extend from the offline world and into the online world. Momentum is just as visible – if not more visible – in the virtual world. On social media they have mobilised a particular narrative about Corbynism, rapidly

assembled and then sustained a base of ‘fans’/’supervolunteers’, connected the ‘movement’ to a broader audience that typically lies beyond territorial political institutions, and directed activists towards key campaigns (see Dennis, 2020; Gerbaudo, 2019). For this reason, a ‘blended’ approach combining offline participant observation with a ‘virtual ethnography’ to study the online world was deemed most suitable (see Hine, 2017). Like with conventional ethnographic research, the virtual ethnography encompasses a variety of different methods to study online communities – rather than just one single method – and can be used either in distinction from or as a compliment to quantitative datasets and real-world research.

To summarise, ethnographic methods constitute an alternative to some of the methodologically limited and normatively biased political science interpretations of Momentum and Corbynism. The collection of qualitative data from ‘inside’ Momentum will help to uncover the dynamics that remain hidden from accounts which focus exclusively on Westminster and utilise only quantitative methods. This will provide the foundation for an investigation into Momentum’s relationship to a broad network of movement and party strands and establish a means of shedding light on how and why Corbynism gathered widespread support among Momentum members.

3.2. The role of theory in ethnographic research

The ethnography is typically associated with ‘grounded theory’ (GT) – a family of approaches broadly based on the mantra that ‘theory emerges from the data’ (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007). Concepts first reveal themselves in the data before the researcher assumes responsibility for developing them into more systematic theories without surrendering to the influence of prior theoretical prejudice. GT intended to address the criticism that qualitative data analysis was unreliable by establishing a more rigorous foundation for the development of theory – if theory grows organically from a dataset then hypotheses should be testable and findings repeatable (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

In practice, proponents of GT rarely advocate for a purely inductive approach. (Reichertz, 2007). Even classical GT accepted that theory was systematised in a 'circular' interaction between theoretical reflection, data collection, and interpretation (Reichertz, 2007). The complexity of some latent social phenomena necessitates a continuous dialogue between theory, method and data. Findings can reveal 'new and unanticipated arguments' which prompts the refinement of theory, which in turn leads to an adjustment of the analysis, which invokes a further reconstruction of theory, and so forth (Wilson and Chaddha, 2009: 551).

This interactive and ongoing dialogue between theory and data is sometimes described as an 'iterative' approach to theory-building (Srivastava and Hopwood, 2009). In the case of this thesis, a continuous exchange between the theoretical reflection and the data collection, analysis and interpretation sometimes took the theories in different directions and prompted changes in how findings are presented. For example, the idea of pop-socialism was originally coined to explain the political ideology of Corbynism, but when interrogating the data it became clear that there were multiple other dimensions that needed to be discussed. After revisiting the literature it was decided that the 'politics of support' was more suited to what I had observed: it provided a framework to explain the support gathered in Momentum, its general appeal to wider sections of society, and the 'ideological argument' being made by proponents (Gamble, 1994). Furthermore, data on Momentum's election campaigns prompted me to reconsider how they combined 'insider' and 'outsider' strategies because their campaigning methods did not fit neatly into either category. As will be outlined in Chapter Five, this encouraged me to expand the definition of a '*hybrid*' pressure group to accommodate overlapping forms of activism that transcended typical insider and outsider boundaries.

The iterative approach establishes a practical way of defining and understanding Momentum. Ethnographic methods constitute a basis for collecting data on their internal dynamics and my knowledge of the literature will enable me to position them more precisely. Furthermore, as the above section showed, the methodological shortcomings in existing analysis of Corbynism has left some important features hidden from view (Allen, 2019; Maiguashca and Dean,

2019a). Existing theory will be strengthened by revising it according to the latent characteristics that are revealed by an 'insider' account of Momentum.

The iterative process makes it difficult to follow predefined stages for research: the data has to be revisited, new questions emerge, and theories are refined as the understanding of the field deepens. The challenge of moving from 'how to why' with such an approach leads some commentators to admonish it for being unscientific, but there are certain steps that can be followed to generate new theories on a more methodical basis. I used two strategies to build my theory more systematically during and after I collected my findings.

The first was to conduct a thematic analysis, which included eight themes drawn from the research questions and literature review: (1) Momentum's origin; (2) the connection between Momentum and the Corbyn leadership; (3) the internal balance of power in Momentum; (4) the interaction between party-based and movement-based groups in and around Momentum; (5) the aim of Momentum's insider and outsider strategies; (6) the relationship between Labour and Momentum; (7) participants views on Corbynism and (8) the constraints Corbynism faced (see Braun and Clarke, 2006). Identifying these themes from the literature review cemented a degree of continuity from the initial design of the thesis through to the writing up stage, by establishing an anchor to organise the data, trace relevant patterns, and detect new pathways for further exploration and theory development.

The second strategy for systematically building theory out of the data was to identify a series of 'recurrent dilemmas' that Momentum faced and investigate how participants attempted to solve them (Haydu, 1998, 2013). Identifying recurring dilemmas establishes a means of tracing institutional and structural *continuity* through time, and the decisions actors take to resolve these dilemmas initiates a 'switch point' of historical *change* – Haydu (1998, 2013) calls this 'reiterated problem solving'. Whilst I was conducting the research, I remained vigilant to five recurrent dilemmas extracted from the research questions: (1) To what extent should Momentum remain integrated or autonomous from the Labour Party? (2) To what extent

should Momentum remain integrated or autonomous from the leadership? (3) What insider and outsider strategies should be prioritised and why? (4) How were the obstacles to Corbynism tackled? (5) How does Corbynism reconcile the plural views of its grassroots supporters?

Thematic analysis enabled the thesis to analyse some aspects of Corbynism's rise and identifying the dilemmas helped to explain its decline. Moreover, tracing the recurrent dilemmas helped to spot consistent patterns (such as trade union and PLP relations in the Labour Party) that effected the deployment of Momentum's insider and outsider strategies, which will be discussed in Chapter Five. Observing how participants sought to resolve dilemmas ('reiterated problem-solving') also helps to analyse moments where things might have gone differently, but why they did not (such as the attempt to reform the party analysed in Chapter Five). This provides a robust foundation for developing theory using an iterative process.

3.3. The data collection and analysis process

The primary methods of data collection were semi-structured interviews, participant observation and documentary analysis. The twenty-six interviewees of twenty-four participants included six current or former employees of Momentum (some other participants may have been employed at some point), three founders, two pro-Corbyn current or future MPs, six members of the NCG, two senior aides in LOTO (Leadership of the Opposition), a senior Labour staff member, four people who had been on the NEC at some point whilst Corbyn was leader, and several prominent grassroots members (appendix 1)[4]. I was a participant observer at TWT and the Labour Conference in both 2018 and 2019, during the 2019 Labour general election campaign, at several local meetings/socials, at Birmingham TWT, and at a number of demonstrations. Documentary analysis – emails, social media output, and documents sourced

[4] Some participants have held multiple positions whilst Corbyn has been leader so the number does not add up to twenty four.

online or from participants – were used as a subsidiary to the two above methods (see appendix 2 for list of Momentum documents sourced online).

This section will discuss the practical aspects of the research process from the preparation through to the writing up stage. The first part explains how the field was located and accessed: how the key fieldwork locations were identified, how participants were sampled, and how access to the participants was gained and maintained. The second part discusses how data was gathered in the three primary methods. The third part discusses how my data was analysed, interpreted, and represented within the writing up stage.

Locating and gaining access to the field

The focus on conducting an in-depth study of Momentum meant that it was never deemed necessary to conduct a multiple case study (see Baxter and Jack, 2008). However, Momentum's stratified internal governance structure and integration into a broader network of groups and institutions meant fieldwork would need to be conducted in multiple sites rather than in a single small field (Marcus, 2005). Momentum groups have a considerable degree of autonomy, and a variety of internal and external relations to parliamentary and extra-parliamentary strands (Dennis, 2020; Muldoon and Rye, 2020). Although the NCG was formally sovereign, where responsibility for decision-making ultimately landed was not clear, nor was the relationship between local and national groups, or the role of the staff on a day-to-day basis. In addition, the extent of Momentum's influence inside the Labour Party was ambiguous. I needed to unearth their relationship to the trade unions, the PLP and the leader's office, and investigate their impact on the NEC, at the party conference, and at the grassroots level. Moreover, to paint as broader picture as possible about how Corbynism was viewed ordinary members as well as elite participants would need to be recruited.

One of the main risks with researching multiple sites is that the findings could be lopsided if significant areas of interest are excluded based on accessibility or a misguided viewpoint about the relative importance of certain institutions (Nadai and Maeder, 2005). In this situation,

Fetterman (1998: 32) advises proceeding with a 'big net' approach in which the researcher contacts as many potential participants as possible before refining who is targeted as a better understanding of the community develops. Participants were therefore initially sampled regardless of their position, and they then referred me to other potential participants relevant to the more specific areas of interest ('snowball' sampling). As the research evolved, I was able to sample more selectively so that I could look in more detail at the parts of Momentum that were deemed more relevant to the research questions.

The transparent arrangements of local Momentum groups and the relative trust they seemed to have in my position as a researcher meant that gaining access to a local group was relatively straightforward. Local contacts were usually willing to put me in touch with other members who they felt were relevant and would be willing to participate. Proceeding with the 'big net' approach, I initially recruited as many people as possible before whittling down participants more selectively. I also independently contacted some individuals on the NCG, in the PLP, and in certain local groups directly via email or mobile phone. Whilst some participants were recruited in this way, they were generally less likely to respond if they were not already forewarned about my research. However, as the research progressed these two approaches sufficed for me to gain access to Momentum's different organs.

It was deemed essential that I interviewed as many people as possible that had been elected on to Momentum's NCG, its executive decision-making body (Momentum Constitution, n.d.). At the outset of the research, it had twenty-eight members.[5] Sixteen were democratically elected on an annual basis: twelve were elected from three regional divisions and another four public office holders were elected via OMOV by the entire membership (Momentum Constitution, n.d.). Six representatives of affiliated unions and another six from other affiliated organisations were also elected (Momentum Constitution, n.d). Throughout the course of the

[5] Momentum's constitution has changed on several occasions: This section is based on the constitution at the beginning of the research period in September 2018.

research, I was able to interview six members, which gave me a reasonable grounding in its internal dynamics. The minutes of NCG meetings are also published online which provided a useful appendage to the interviews.

Momentum's staffing structure is, by its nature, not as transparent as the NCG. Gaining access was more difficult but not as challenging as I expected beforehand – once I met one or two I gained further access through a snowball effect. Participants generally seemed willing to support me and I never got the sense that they were shielding too much (though it is inevitable that some things would have been kept from view during such a hyperfactional political period). I interviewed at least six people that were working or had previously worked for Momentum, including their National Coordinator (there may have been more that had been employed at some point, but I cannot be certain). They were a source of essential information about key events at the centre of Momentum as well as broader day to day dynamics.

Research has indicated that local Momentum groups have a considerable degree of autonomy but limited input into the national Momentum structure, and so I needed to explore a breadth of local groups across the country to determine their relations with local political structures as well as the National Momentum group (see Dennis, 2020). Momentum has a high concentration of activists around Britain's largest cities – London, Bristol, Manchester, Brighton, and Birmingham – and I aimed to gather data from these groups via interviews and participant observation at local festivals, meetings, and socials. My attendance at the meetings provided me with some important insights into why Corbynism gathered support and what role activists hoped to play in the broader Corbyn project, particularly in relation to the Labour Party. Moreover, keynote speakers with a big national profile were often booked in to speak at local meetings and events, meaning that my attendance was a gateway to more elite access.

Ethnographic immersion is effective at providing a snapshot of a particular point in time but interviews are needed to gather information on events that preceded the research window. It

seemed that there were two critical points that needed to be examined further: Momentum's launch shortly after Corbyn's 2015 leadership campaign, and the drawn-out struggle that preceded the imposition of new governance structures in early 2017. To examine these junctures further, I would need to interview members of the original Steering Committee, which was the executive before Momentum's new constitution was ratified in early 2017. Additionally, I would need to interview Momentum's founders, including Jon Lansman, who was widely reported as the key figure in their formative years. I was ultimately able to interview two participants that were members of the original Steering Committee and three of Momentum's founders.

My second research question required that I interview participants with key roles in the party. Sometimes gaining access to elite Labour figures was difficult because I had few contacts at the beginning of the research, and the research window was during the peak of hostilities, meaning that party elites did not always have the time or will to consent to an interview. However, many participants in Momentum use the group as a platform for activism in the Labour Party (see Muldoon and Rye, 2020). I was therefore able, through Momentum, to gain access to key actors in the party and trace the interconnections between Momentum and the Labour Party. I eventually interviewed four members of the NEC (three on the Momentum slate and one that was not), two LOTO aides, one recent senior employee at Southside, and two MPs. I also actively participated in the 2019 election campaign, dedicating many hours to delivering leaflets, canvassing and phonebanking for Momentum backed parliamentary candidates.

Finally, I needed to conduct fieldwork in an extra-parliamentary setting if I was to paint a full picture of Momentum's insider and outsider strategies. Momentum had been involved in an assortment of events that could fall into the social movement category, ranging from spontaneous direct-action protests to political festivals across the country. For the former, I remained alert to extra-parliamentary protests and actions that I could participate in, including protests held outside the 2018 Conservative Party conference, and a sequence of 'f*ck Boris'

protests which were organised after Boris Johnson was declared Prime Minister in July 2019. For the latter, the most important event to attend was 'The World Transformed', the Momentum branded political education festival that took place alongside the Labour conference. TWT was promoted as the cornerstone of the 'movementist' agenda to build grassroots power outside the party and 'push the Labour party on from where it has been for about the last hundred years' (Ramsay, 2018). It was a space for Momentum activists to participate, discuss and organise on a range of issues alongside other groups on the left. Gaining access posed no problems as the festivals were open to anybody willing to buy a ticket. By the end of the research, I had participated at TWT in both 2018 and 2019, Birmingham TWT in 2019[6], and had also interviewed two of its lead organisers and two activists that had been involved in its launch in 2016.

Gathering the data

Interviews

An ethnography is typically considered 'participant observation *plus* any appropriate methods' (Crang and Cook, 2007: 35). However, in my case the twenty-six interviews were the richest source of data, with participant observation and key documents used to triangulate the interview data. I had innumerable informal conversations with activists outside of an interview setting, but formal one-on-one interviews branded me with the opportunity to go into more depth about particular areas of concern. Interviewees provided key information on the internal dynamics of Momentum, the reasoning behind the use of insider and outsider strategies, and what they hoped to achieve during the Corbyn moment. They were also the primary source of information on past events, including Corbyn's leadership campaign, Momentum's launch, the internal conflict over governance structures, and so forth (see Forsey, 2010).

[6] The success of TWT encouraged some local activists to organise TWT's in their own cities

Once I had made initial contact it was fairly easy to persuade individuals to take part. The interviews were held in a location of the participant's choosing, usually a café or an office, but five were held on the phone, and two were on zoom after the onset of the pandemic. All of the locations afforded the privacy and comfort needed to discuss potentially sensitive political issues. At the beginning of the interview I furnished the participant with information on the research project, and proceeded. I used a recording device, with the participants consent, and then I transcribed the interview so that I could put it into my database at a later date. I also came equipped with a notepad to jot down any questions that came to mind as the interviewee was answering questions, as well as any thoughts that were worth recording for future reference. The interviews generally lasted between 45 minutes and one hour.

Although the interviews occasionally went in unexpected tangents if it was deemed productive, I generally followed Pierce's (2008: 111/112) five stages for semi-structured interviews. In the first stage more descriptive, open-ended and unobjectionable questions were asked. Often this would be about the participants political history, for instance: 'can you tell me a little bit about your political history and how you ended up getting involved in Momentum?' As the interview progressed, I asked more particular and intrusive questions up until stage five where the most challenging questions were asked. This included questions about potentially contested moments or confidential information: Momentum's internal power struggle, details on NEC meetings, the relationship between LOTO and Momentum, for example.

Generally speaking, the questions were oriented around the research questions: the relationship between movement and party strands in Momentum; the possibility of radical politics through the Labour Party; the relationship between populism and socialism; what Corbynism represented to the participants; Momentum's aims and objectives (and the barriers to them); and empirical and historical questions about the evolution of Momentum. In addition, the interviews were tailored towards the particular experiences of the participant, so if they were on the NEC or the NCG, for example, the questions would gravitate towards that subject

matter. I would also probe participants on past episodes they played a part in – I asked Momentum's founders about Corbyn's 2015 leadership campaign, for example.

Participant Observation

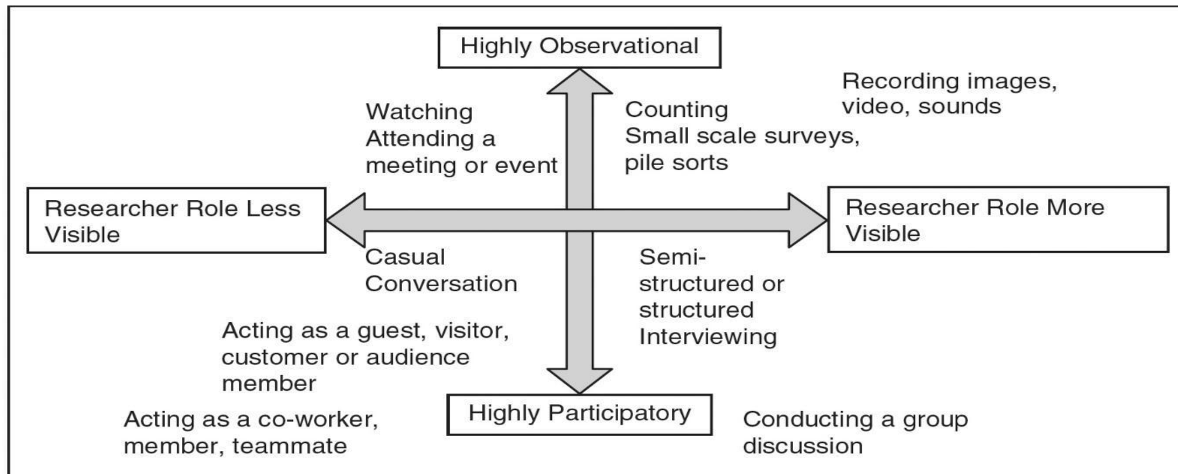

Figure 3: taken from Guest et al (2014: 89)

Participant observation is defined by Dewalt and Dewalt (2011: 1) as a 'method in which a researcher takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of a group of people as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their life routines and their culture'. It is one of the most used methods for collecting qualitative data because it is the 'purest' source of data in many respects, and can therefore be a key means of verifying interviewees recollection of key episodes or reports in the media.

Participant observation is not, however, a fixed method of data collection, as Figure 3 demonstrates. There are different types of observation ranging from highly observational to highly participatory, and from a low level of visibility to a high level of visibility. Clearly, I would not be immersing myself in the daily routines of participants in a small setting, as a classical ethnographer might, which would be highly participatory and visible. But I would be partaking in some of the routines of a Momentum activist. Moreover, due to the multi-sited nature of the study my position on the axis would change with the setting. At demonstrations I was inevitably a participant as well as an observer, but at smaller meetings I minimised my influence and

was more of an observer than a participant. In a participative workshop at TWT I was more visible, but as an audience member in a John McDonnell rally I was much less visible.

In addition, it is likely that a researcher's position on the axis will change through time. To illustrate this point Spradley (1980: 53/54) discusses his experience observing the norms and values of the US army – as he became immersed within the culture of the army he began to feel less like an observer and more like a participant. This was something I also experienced to a lesser degree in some settings – the more I participated the more I felt like part of the 'crowd'. This was particularly so during larger national events like TWT, where people in attendance generally did not know who I was, and so I was like any other audience member at the various panels, discussions, music sessions, or reading groups. At demonstrations I was fully in tune with those around me: 'they say cut back; we say fight back!'.

One potential problem with such acclimatisation is the risk of 'going native' and losing site of the broader picture whilst not living up to the standards of objectivity expected in social scientific research - Glaser and Strauss' (1967) introduction of GT was partly motivated by a longing to push back against these critiques. The predominance of a post-positivist epistemology within the social sciences pressures researchers to be 'objectively removed from even their own "gaze" on the research project' (Kanuha, 2000: 440).

However, several scholars have questioned the presumed separation between the researcher and research object, particularly in relation to cases where a researcher is studying a phenomenon with which they share a 'historical, social and ideological affiliation' (Kanuha, 2000: 441). Kanuha (2020: 441), for example, intentionally challenged the hegemony of the 'researcher-research object' distinction when choosing a project she felt personally and professionally attached to. Her attachment enabled her to understand the subjective, interior, immersed and informed viewpoint that can only come from being on the 'inside', and at the same time contribute to existing academic research into her field. She saw this as the most authentic means of gathering information on the life experiences and subjective viewpoints of

her chosen identity group, which in turn can enhance scholarly understanding of a particular community.

Although it would be misleading to equivalate my reasons for studying Momentum with Kanuha's personal motivations, my research was also positioned on the 'hyphen of the insider-outsider', as Kanuha (2020: 443) puts it. By positioning myself 'inside' Momentum it was possible to strengthen my understanding of their internal dynamics and 'see' Corbynism on the same terms as supporters (Altamirano-Jimenez, 2010). Indeed, I shared many of the same normative commitments as participants, and whilst this meant I was less removed from my research object, it sometimes cemented a sense of trust between myself and the participant, allowing me to obtain more detailed insights. This could, furthermore, work to the benefit of existing political science research that has looked at Corbynism from the 'outside'. Combining scholarly work from an external standpoint with scholarly work from the 'inside' could be a valuable means of developing a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomena at hand.

However, it was imperative to remain vigilant to a trade-off between understanding Momentum and Corbynism from the 'inside', and the retainment of an objective viewpoint by virtue of being removed from the research object. I therefore used some basic strategies to retain the standards expected of academic research (Altamirano-Jimenez, 2010). Most importantly, my participation was anchored in the research questions and literature review, which were developed in advance of carrying out the research (Altamirano-Jimenez, 2010:426). In particular, the eight themes and five recurrent dilemmas provided a consistent bedrock to guide my investigations. Other tactics included continual self-reflection about the field relations to ensure that I retained my point of view as a researcher and maintained a reasonable distance from the participant (Altamirano-Jimenez, 2010). Finally, it was vital to announce my presence wherever possible so that myself and the participants could come to a mutual understanding about our positionality vis-à-vis each other.

Key documents

The collection and analysis of key documents was a corollary to the interviews and participant observation. I analysed texts from multiple sources; the majority were available either online or sent to members via email or Whatsapp but some were given to me by participants (see appendix 2). Documents included the Momentum constitution; minutes of NCG minutes; consultations of the membership on Brexit, constitutional reform, and the Democracy Review; Momentum's election strategy and post-election review; policy motions for the party conference; political education and training tools; and campaign flyers (see appendix 2). Several internal Labour documents, as well as speeches and statements, are also cited in the bibliography.

The documents were useful for three main reasons. First, they could substantiate an interviewees recollection of events – documents produced at the time of an event can be a more reliable source of data than individual memory. Second, they provided a broader picture of Momentum's collective organisational structures and the collective views of their membership, compared to the narrower scope of participant observation (which is necessarily restricted to the specific field) and interviews (Smith, 2005: 228). Consultations with the membership, over the Democracy Review or Brexit policy for example, are a more a reliable bellwether for collective opinion than the judgements of a single interviewee or my own perspective as a participant observer. The NCG minutes, the constitution, election strategy and election reviews, meanwhile, describe Momentum's collective organisation: their governance structure, their collective decision-making, and their broader strategy and political aims. The third and related reason is that such documentation can counteract the risk of 'going native', because they constitute a source of data that the researcher has not co-produced, in distinction from participant observation and interviews which the researcher necessarily inputs into.

Representing the data

Many ethnographies begin writing ‘with the feeling that it is too early to start’ (Spradley, 1980: 160). Participation shows how rich, detailed, and complex a research field is, and yet an academic account is by its nature closed, partial and incomplete. A written account should be as honest to the ‘real’ experience as possible, a task which is necessarily impossible to achieve. A researcher cannot gather data on all aspects of a participant’s experience which can then simply be copy and pasted into a written account, and interviews are necessarily subjective and one-sided.

However, there are two methods that can be followed during the data collection stage to ensure the data is represented as accurately as possible in the writing up stage. The first is to use comprehensive and detailed field notes. For this, I followed the advice of Taylor et al (2016). Before taking note of my observations, I had to establish if doing so would change my position on Spradley’s (1980: 53/54) axis of participation and visibility by either influencing the behaviour of participants and/or exposing myself to extra attention (see figure 3). Once the effect of taking field notes was established and I was certain it was okay to proceed, I had to decide on the most suitable way to record them. Following Taylor et al’s (2016: 82) next step, I proceeded with a wide-angle view to capture as much information as possible, before moving to a narrow-angle focus on the most relevant observations depending on my theoretical criteria, research questions, and existing findings (Taylor et al, 2016: 82). Taking detailed notes at some major public events posed few problems: during panels at TWT it was easy to jot down the general aims, the contributions by the panellists and the audience members, and any notable visuals (see appendix 3). At events like demonstrations, however, taking notes was more difficult – sometimes I used my mobile phone before writing them up in more detail at home. For more local and intimate gatherings that were not in the public domain, meanwhile, I had to be more sensitive to the anonymity of participants and avoid taking notes if it risked drawing too much attention.

Transcriptions are the second way to ensure that a participant's account is recreated as accurately as possible. I transcribed all of the data myself on to a Word document or Nvivo database which allowed me to collect analytical nodes, develop themes, ask more questions, and begin to draw up my theoretical and empirical arguments. A single interview may not be enough to substantiate a particular episode, but it can help to identify a broader web of explanations and narratives drawn from other interviews and participant observation. In this way, I could check whether the findings were consistent with other explanations I had received and begin to write up completer and more accurate theoretical and empirical conclusions.

The writing up process is the final practical thing that a researcher needs to consider when thinking through how to represent the data as accurately as possible. The inherent complexities of writing according to an iterative process, in which theory building, writing and data collection takes place simultaneously, is muddied by the sheer volume of options available to the ethnographic writer. Traditional ethnographies presented their findings as 'inviolate' representations of a particular sociocultural group, whereas some more recent accounts simply aim to tell participants 'story' in their own words (Auger, 1995). There is also, meanwhile, a continuum between 'plain' ethnographies – which tell the account of a single case using a traditional social science approach that displays the 'facts' exactly as they were observed – and 'fictionalised' ethnographies, which enhance the narrative by drawing on 'novelist' techniques and the authors own personal experiences vis-a-vis the participant (Humphreys and Watson, 2009).

The thesis is a composite of some of these different approaches. Aspects of the 'insider' methodology lend themselves to a 'storytelling' approach: Chapter Four discusses the intersubjective dynamics between Momentum's constituent groups and Chapter Six places participants own thoughts about Corbynism at the heart of its narrative. However, the thesis has simultaneously followed a more conventional social scientific approach to framing and interpreting the data according to certain theoretical criteria. In some parts of the thesis this

prompted a more external writing style which aims to test and measure the validity of my theoretical conceptualisations.

3.4. Ethics

An ethnographer should always pay careful attention to what Walby (2007) has described as the 'social relations of research'. A political field is not just 'out there' to be discovered – researchers are in direct contact with participants and through those interactions produce knowledge about them. We therefore need to be self-conscious of our positionality in relation to the participants: We can uncover relationships of domination, render participants invisible, or raise the pedestal of certain groups who would prefer to remain undetected.

The 'social relations of research' raise a few ethical dilemmas. I was in close proximity to participants with whom I shared many of the same causes, but I was primarily there as an observer. This was a very different experience from researching something much more unpalatable, such as the far right, in which I would have been unambiguously opposed to their political standpoint. In the case of Momentum, I made every effort to step out of my political leanings (I supported Jeremy Corbyn) so that I could retain a critical vantage point. I had to remind myself of the eight themes and five dilemmas that I identified earlier in the chapter, which mitigated the risk of unconscious bias by establishing a pillar to measure the participants responses.

Additionally, the influence that my research could potentially have on the participants meant I had an ethical responsibility to carefully consider interactions with them and representations of them. I obtained clearance from the University of Birmingham's Ethical Review Committee to ensure that I followed the appropriate guidelines. When I shared a more personal space with participants I always informed them of my position as a researcher. I obtained written or oral consent for the interviews: if possible, I furnished participants with a participant information sheet but at the very least I verbally explained the aims, context and objectives of the research. I also made sure that interviewees were aware of their right to withdraw at any moment up

until the publication of the thesis, and checked that it was okay to record them. The participants also had the right to withdraw excerpts of the data they had passed on to me without removing themselves entirely from the process. For example, there were occasions where politically sensitive findings were passed on to me 'off the record' and it was my duty to respect such requests and not incorporate them into the findings. Doing so would have evidently breached my ethnical responsibility by potentially placing the participant at political, professional or personal risk.

Finally, I always guaranteed anonymity if the participant wanted it; however, there were a few occasions when I gained consent to publish the participants identity when pertinent to the thesis' narrative. For example, it was useful to know who was responsible for key decision-making during Momentum's launch and formative months to understand the internal dynamics between their constituent groups. For such a visible and public topic it is also inevitable that names will be mentioned for events that are already in the public record.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methodology and research design of the thesis. This has included an overview of the main reasons for the use of ethnographic methods, the role of theory in the research, the practicalities of the three main research methods, and the ethics of the research. The thesis is now in place to turn to the empirical chapters.

The four empirical chapters have been structured according to the research questions. Chapter Four provides an empirical overview of Momentum from the 2015 leadership contest to the imposition of the 2017 governance structure. Chapter Five applies the concept of the HLPG to position Momentum in relation to the literature on social movements and political parties. In particular, Momentum's external relations are bracketed into three main dimensions: *internal party organising; outside the party;* and an *appendage to the party.* Chapter Six explores how Corbynism 'gathered the support' of participants in Momentum: pop-socialism establishes a useful yardstick to understand how participants viewed Corbynism and

why it was able to make such a rise between the 2015 leadership contest and the 2017 election. Chapter Seven, the final empirical chapter, explores the failure of ‘Corbynism beyond Corbyn’ in the aftermath of the 2019 election defeat and Corbyn’s resignation as leader. By analysing the data on Momentum, the chapter identifies a sequence of dilemmas stemming from the overreliance on Corbyn’s personality-driven leadership.

4. The Genesis of Momentum: The Movement finds an Electoral Home

> *'In one initial organisational structure the idea would be to have unions, Labour Party groups, but also non-party movement groups which might have been Sisters Uncut, or Stop the War for example, which would also have some seats at the table. So obviously that has not really happened. Lots of that I think is to do with basically the need to have a party focused rear-guard action organisation to support the gains of Jeremy's victory in September 2015 and that was clearly necessary (...) the areas where it was most developed are in organising the core, some national elections within the party, comms and social media, and in political education through The World Transformed, then also its quite dramatically changed the way the party campaigns I think, not enough but rather a lot. Those are the areas where it has most succeeded, which basically means that it is an incubator for how a party should operate in the 21st Century but that's not the same as a Movement-Party. I don't think it's really been an agent for a Movement-Party; it has been an agent for modernisation and shifting the political line towards a more socialist political line in the party'* (19).

Introduction

This chapter will aim to understand the genesis and evolution of Momentum from the perspective of participants. By presenting a narrative that draws on the experiences of 'insiders' the chapter will address some of the gaps in the literature that has studied Momentum from the 'outside'. The chapter begins with the Labour leadership contest in 2015 and concludes with the imposition of the constitution in January 2017, which is the most important period for understanding how Momentum should be positioned in relation to the literature on social movements and political parties.

The first section describes how the Corbyn leadership campaign opened a window of opportunity for the convergence of different left-wing traditions drawn from parties and movements. Drawing from the interview data, the section begins to explore how and why Corbyn's popular appeal gathered the support of participants.

The second section investigates Momentum's launch in the aftermath of the leadership campaign. There was a vague consensus that they should be a platform for movement and party facing objectives; however, there was considerable disagreement over what this should

entail in practice. The ad-hoc evolution of many Momentum groups prompted a disagreement between more 'institutionalist' groups that prioritised occupying and reforming the Labour Party, and more 'movementist' groups that wanted to remain independent from the leadership and use Momentum to forge an extra-parliamentary space that could sustain meaningful linkages between left strands in movements and parties.

The third section explores how Momentum's dividing lines sharpened throughout the course of 2016. By the end of 2016 the main point of contention was between supporters of an online OMOV system for internal elections similar to the digital democracy structures implemented by the likes of Podemos, and those who opposed such a structure in favour of a more conventional delegate-based structure, in which a local group elected delegates to a regional group which then elected delegates to a national executive. Overlapping with this was a disagreement over who should be allowed to be a Momentum member. In early 2017, following a controversial and bitter internal struggle, an OMOV based governance structure was ratified and it was decided only Labour members could be members of Momentum.

The final section uses the notion of the HLPG outlined in Chapter Two to analyse the internal organisation and external practice that was agreed at the end of this sequence of events. The internal structure that was landed on is described as 'centralised pluralist': centralisation at the summit of Momentum was combined with relative autonomy for local groups at the base. This structure largely mitigated 'movementist' experimentation from the centre of Momentum, although did not drop it entirely, in favour of an 'insider' strategy that aimed to influence the direction of the party by pursuing party reform alongside conventional factional goals.

4.1. The 2015 leadership election: Corbyn the 'pop-leader' enters the contest

As Chapter Two illustrated, interactions between left groups in the Labour Party and the anti-austerity movement largely took place outside of mainstream politics before the 2015 leadership contest. However, Corbyn's entrance into the contest forged a space for the convergence of these traditions inside the Labour Party, as illustrated by figure 2. The basis

of Corbyn's appeals to these groups, however, has not been subject to much critical analysis. This section will attempt to address this gap by unpacking how and why Corbyn, defined as a 'pop-star' leader, gathered the support of participants during the leadership contest.

Before Corbyn was nominated as a candidate many participants – whether they were members beforehand or not – felt estranged by the other candidates on display. Labour had just lost an election by a landslide, and yet they seemed incapable or unwilling to take the party in a new direction. They had persisted with Miliband's 'austerity lite' agenda and abstained on the controversial welfare reform and work bill, despite widespread opposition from within the ranks of the Labour Party. Large sections of the party membership had an appetite for 'a new type of politics', as Corbyn later appropriately called it, which promised to challenge austerity and pursue a social democratic programme of redistribution (see Dorey and Denham, 2015). This yearning for an anti-austerity candidate was shared by members who would see themselves on the 'hard left' of the party alongside members of the 'soft left' (the party mainstream). As a LOTO aide pointed out in an interview:

> 'From within parliament and outside of it there was an anti-austerity movement that was building from 2010 to 2015. Labour had always been a party of democratic socialists and social democrats. What happened was the social democrats – the leadership candidates and parliament from the soft left and right of the party – they decided that the path to power was going more with the austerity agenda, doing more what the Tories had done, because they felt there was democratic consent for that and there was a majority in the country. However, this was at odds with the left of the party within parliament and crucially the soft left and the left membership outside of parliament (...) and you had one candidate against austerity and that was Jeremy Corbyn. And unapologetically against austerity, every single other candidate had supported it to some degree in that leadership contest. Andy Burnham and all the other candidates supported the welfare bill or abstained. And this was a big signal which meant that the soft left for the first time since the early 80s were happy to go with the left and back Corbyn because he was the only candidate who was going to save genuine social democracy. He was the only social democratic one by any reasonable definition (...) That's why he won by such a huge majority' (26).

Corbyn's popularity in the leadership contest was grounded in his appeal to both these traditions, despite the hyperbole by many commentators at the time that the swelling of Labour's ranks by the 'hard left' represented the 'triumph of idealism over practical politics'

(Dorey and Denham, 2015: 277). The left was much fewer in number than it appeared on the outside, which was only later exposed by the decline witnessed in the aftermath of the 2019 election defeat. As the same interviewee points out, had one of the other candidates '*opposed austerity and put together a genuinely social democratic platform, then I think Jeremy Corbyn certainly would not have won by the landslide that he did*' (26).

Although the soft left saw Labour as their natural home, before the leadership contest large sections of the hard left remained sceptical about the prospects of radical change coming through the Labour Party. Barring the few remaining active members of the Labour left – which one interviewee (10) told me was only '*about 60*' under the age of 30 – many did not see the party as a potential platform for socialism and may have been members of other left parties, participated in anti-austerity and anti-war protest movements but saw the Labour Party as more of an enemy than a friend, or quite often been inactive in politics.

Corbyn's rise to the leadership, however, instilled the hope among many these groups that the party might be transformed. His personal biography nurtured a sense of 'authenticity' among participants, leading them to trust both his moral principles and his left-wing credentials. Bolton and Pitts (2018) have described this as a 'moral mythology' that propagated what they described as a misleading narrative that he was 'on the right side of history'. Participants often talked about Corbyn's penchant for emblematic left-wing causes including party democracy, nuclear disarmament, migrant rights, anti-racism, and environmentalism, his active participation in the anti-war and anti-austerity movement, and his regular attendance at key dates on the labour movement calendar, including the Durham Miners Gala and the Tolpuddle Martyrs Festival[7]. The personal history of one participant provides an illustrative example:

> 'I never thought I would ever get involved with one of the political systems within Britain but it just so happened that Corbyn was talking in a way that resonated with me and people around me (...) it just goes to show that particularly in that period in 2015 he was such a big contrast with people around him – you had Burnham, Liz

[7] This was not entirely a 'myth'. Corbyn has a track record of advocating for these causes (see Butler, 2021)

> Kendall and Yvette Cooper and what an amazing billboard that was because the juxtaposition between what he was saying and what they were saying and his voting record, it was the first time in my life that you could pull a parliamentarians voting record and be like "wow"' (18).

Corbyn's personal biography can be seen as part of the process of 'politicising fandom' identified by Dean (2017). Corbyn was a 'star' in the eyes of many supporters – one reason for the 'pop-star' leader label – as could be seen when he addressed a People's Assembly rally during the leadership contest, leading comedian Mark Steel to announce that he 'wants to live in a world where Jeremy Corbyn walks on stage and is treated like he is a rock star' (quoted in Nuuns, 2018: 125) One senior staff member at Momentum described what they called the 'celebrification' of political leaders:

> 'Politicians are celebrities who present themselves as such on social media and share their personal lives in an authentic way, creating an emotional connection which transcends their politics or the party that they represent. Trump does that. AOC does that. Bernie does that, although not quite as well, I think. Salvini does that brilliantly, terrifyingly so. And Jeremy did that in his own way. It was less him, potentially with Jeremy it was more the fact that he didn't get a hearing in the press so social media in that sense was very important' (24).

Corbyn, seemingly unintentionally, had an emotional and personal appeal that other politicians did not:

> 'He has a depth to him, a bit like Bernie Sanders, that most politicians don't have. That you get with experience, and you get with passion and commitment over a long time and with a genuine interest in people and people's lives and their struggles. It wasn't just delivering a line he genuinely seemed to know about this stuff: he knows about trains, no one ever asked him in an interview because that's not how the media works but if you asked him his position on detailed foreign policy or on public transport, or on any kind of infrastructure, he would give a very good and coherent answer that wasn't scripted. He was different in that respect, and it is that kind of leadership that people want. I think the public wants it' (26).

This appeal was in part underpinned by the trust that participants had in Corbyn:

> 'In the Northwest there is quite a radical culture when it comes to trade unionism. And I have been active in Unite, as I said and some of my friends and comrades are from the Young Members committee, BAME committee, all of them supported Jeremy so that was a good thing and there were lots of people I knew from other organisations like Unite who were volunteering for the campaign. So not only was his policy platform the most appealing out of the 4 candidates who stood, but I had

> trusted friends who were behind him as well. And most progressive unions supported Corbyn in 2015' (9)

The support that Corbyn gathered led some critics to condemn what they described as 'cultish' worship (Cohen, 2017). However, the concept of politicising fandom considers supporters active agents who participate in the co-constitution of a political community in tandem with the leader. From this perspective, Corbyn resonated with supporters who *shared* Corbyn's normative commitments and recognised that his leadership would represent an opportunity to pursue these demands in the Labour Party. These shared values created a 'sense of community' (the third dimension of politicising fandom) by papering over the cracks between different groups on the left. Together they delineated what the political community stood for and against, which collectively enabled activists to turn outwards and identify what they felt needed to be changed in society (the fourth dimension of politicising fandom). By cultivating a shared political horizon Corbyn's personal biography cultivated a shared political horizon across the movement and party spectrum. As one senior staff member at Momentum commented:

> 'There was always a constituency of left-wing people, they just didn't have a thing or a person or a specific kind of objective that could unify them and bring them together in a way that was meaningful and Jeremy's leadership provided that in quite an instinctive way (...) because he was very-well known to people on the left and extremely trusted and respected. So, I think for an awful lot of people it was quite an obvious choice to make once he became leader of the party' (7).

Despite the unity, the coalition was not homogenous – Corbyn's normative commitments and the motivations of his supporters were diverse (Ward and Kerr, 2021). Participants from the three steams that Nuuns (2018) identified – discontented party members, left unions, and anti-austerity activists – agreed on most major issues, but had slightly different priorities.

Participants from the traditional Labour left often wanted to shift '*the political line towards a more socialist political line'* (11) and return the party *'to its class roots'* (1) after decades of neglect by New Labour. For this tradition, Corbyn represented an opportunity to pursue a socialist programme, finally reform the party in the Bennite image, and strengthen the internal

party left. The trade union left, meanwhile, one of the more neglected dimensions of Corbyn's leadership victory[8], often shared the same socialist, class based and anti-austerity principles, but its leadership were more concerned with strengthening the internal position of the trade unions after decades of decline and sometimes saw party democracy as a distraction from the more urgent task of winning an election (see Ward, 2021). This led some participants to voice frustration at the continuation of 'stitch-ups' between the party and union leadership throughout the Corbyn era, which they thought were a relic of a bygone era in Labour politics (see Minkin, 1991). The third leading fraction were the anti-austerity activists that flowed into the party. One of the leaders of the student movement explained how Corbyn was seen by many activists:

> 'I think for a lot of people the conclusion would have been we didn't have a political expression, there was nowhere for this movement to go, it couldn't get off the streets and into parliament (...) if you're going to demand social democratic reforms it makes sense to have a parliamentary presence. So, I think in a lot of people's heads that realisation of a lack of political expression forced them to look for something (…) The social movements are all dead, there's no political expression for them and they are looking for somewhere to go and something to do. And getting him on to the ballot paper just meant that the world was open, and I think there's a small layer of people who calculated that and made it happen and without that we wouldn't have the moment' (6).

From the perspective of this participant, then, Corbyn forged the space for the '*political expression'* of the movement inside the party, helping to get it *'off the streets and into parliament'*. As the thesis hopes to later show, this irruption into party politics was pivotal to the genesis of Momentum (the hybrid left pressure group) and Corbynism (pop-socialism).

It is important not to exaggerate the differences between the three tributaries – there was considerable consensus around the key issues that Corbyn had advocated for throughout his

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[8] Corbyn picked up nominations from six of the 14 affiliated trade unions, including Unite and Unison, the former of which drew on substantial political funds to persuade many of its members to sign up to the party during the campaign and vote for Corbyn (Panitch and Leys, 2020: 199). The unions nominations, meanwhile, continued to play a decisive role despite a rule change which meant union members now had to 'opt-in' to vote, reducing the number of trade union members balloted from 2.7 million in 2010 to around 150, 000. Their nominations for Corbyn undoubtedly persuaded many of the 57.6% that voted for him in the affiliated supporters section to do so. They also provided much needed resources for the campaign: £167, 000 in large donations flowed in from the unions, included a loan and donation adding up to £100, 000 from Unite (Nuuns, 2018: 161).

career. One of the key points of intersection was on the issue of members-led democratisation, the need for which Corbyn (2015) had been outspoken about on the leadership trail. The PLP were by and large seen as an oligarchic obstacle to an anti-austerity programme of social democratic redistribution, and both the Labour left and the movementist left shared the view that grassroots internal party democracy would make them more responsive to the demands of the membership. In addition, participants also supported members-led democratisation on more normative grounds, perceiving it as the optimal way of renewing the democratic links between people, party and state during an age of political apathy and discontent (see Panitch and Leys, 2020).

The unity between these wings goes some way to explaining why Corbynism was seen, particularly early on, as both an expression of the power of social movements and as an institutional tour de force (see Wainwright, 2018). If the remnants of the Labour left had not stayed in the party whilst the left was in the wilderness then Corbyn probably would not have got on the ballot or been in place to win the election: Many of these activists held on to the view that the Labour Party was still the most realistic agent of political change and went on to launch Momentum shortly after Corbyn's victory. And yet without strong social movement networks in the anti-austerity movement – and preceding protest coalitions – Corbyn would never have gathered the support he needed to win the contest and the Labour left would have remained in the margins.

4.2. From the leadership campaign to Momentum: a social movement or a Praetorian Guard?

As has been well documented, the 2015 leadership election was the first to be held under a new OMOV system in which any member, affiliated supporter or 'registered supporter' who paid a nominal £3 fee could vote (see Collins, 2014). This reduced the influence of the PLP/EPLP and the trade unions, who were guaranteed 33.3% of the vote each under the previous electoral college. The changes enabled the existing membership and the new

registered supporters – with each individual vote now weighted equally to an MPs – to vote for Corbyn once he procured the requisite number of nominations from the PLP/EPLP. He went on to win with an overwhelming 59.5% of the vote (Quinn, 2016).

Corbyn's dramatic victory changed the arithmetic for the left, setting off several different tangents which ultimately resulted in Momentum's launch. From the top, Corbyn's team had amassed an immense amount of data during the course of the campaign: Over 17, 000 volunteers, 130, 000 supporters and 250, 000 had voters signed up (Kogan, 2019: 252). From below, a network of autonomous local groups had sprung up under several different banners, encompassing a variety of social movement activists, trade unionists and community organisers. Several groups across the broad left were invested in these developments: established Labour left organisations such as the CLPD and the Labour Representation Committee (LRC); Trotskyist groups including the Alliance for Workers Liberty (AWL) and the Socialist Party; ex Green Party members; and austerity activists from Occupy and the student movement.

Before the campaign team realised that Corbyn might win it was decided that the data being collected should be used to establish a new organisation that could support the left in its future campaigns, but no serious thought was put into its structure until the end of the campaign, after a YouGov poll had publicly confirmed Corbyn was the overwhelming frontrunner. Jon Lansman, who was Director of Operations for the leadership campaign, was tasked with building the organisation.

From early on the main disagreement was between a network of Labour left groups, including CLPD and LRC, that wanted to use the data to build the left of the party, and a group of volunteers that had little experience in organised party politics and preferred a much more ambitious, movement-like, and participative structure. The former were immersed in the hierarchical traditions of the labour movement and wanted to launch an organisation that could mobilise the left in internal selections, factional disputes, and party reform (see Kogan, 2019: 252). They wanted to model the nascent organisation on previous left groups that had

campaigned for party democracy, but on a more ambitious scale, akin to something like the RFMC, an umbrella group in the early 1980s that coordinated a network of left groups in defence of the recently achieved mandatory reselection and in support of the soon-to-be achieved electoral college for leadership elections. Jon Lansman (20) explains:

> 'I think in some ways we didn't have a plan for how it was going to be structured, the established Labour left wanted it structured essentially around them and that was not really what we had in mind, that was too limiting and that would make it very similar to organisations of Labour left in the past, especially the RFMC of the early 80s which included all of the Left organisations in the party of which I was the secretary when I was pretty young'.

The latter, meanwhile, made up the majority of the volunteer wing and had a social movement background that generally lay outside the conventional traditions of the labour movement (see Bassett, 2016). They opposed the closed-door practices of the traditional left, instead envisaging a horizontal, open, and more ambitious structure that maximised spaces for participation. They wanted to use the newfound energy of the leadership campaign as a focal point to strengthen social power by supporting social movement struggles, including grassroots trade unions and extra-parliamentary social movements, with the eventual aim of connecting these movements to the Labour Party to their long-term electoral advantage. James Schneider, one of Momentum's co-founders that was pushing for this approach, provides his take on events:

> 'Jon Lansman had always had the idea of using Jeremy's campaign and the activism in it, assuming we weren't going to win, to build the left of the party. He might have originally thought that would mean getting everyone into CLPD but as it grew it was clear it should be something bigger than that (...) so at some point in August 2015 I wrote a paper called "the movement" I think which outlined, with a couple of other people, an alternative structure. The idea was that the organisation should be a link between the party and various social struggles and would look to yes be a connection with existing social movements but also would seek to build forms of social power, the main example being a tenant's union. This organisation would help with the tenant's union which would eventually affiliate to the Labour Party, but it would have power outside its role in the Labour Party. The idea was this interstitial organisation that could movementise the party, that could fight a shared political and strategic horizon for movements which would be the electoral success of the Labour Party and which itself could help build social power in society itself' (19).

In the end, after an intervention by John McDonnell to broker an agreement between the two wings, these *'two competing programs basically got smushed together on the day before Jeremy won*' (19). 'Momentum'[9] were officially launched four weeks later. The conglomerate of local groups that emerged during the leadership campaign began to affiliate, meaning that the nascent organisation had a varying composition of members with different cultures and practices. Some of the differences between Birmingham's Momentum groups illustrate how the nature and demographics of the local left varied from place to place. One senior organiser (11) in Birmingham explained to me:

> BW: 'I've been told about Momentum South Birmingham and North being run quite differently - is that something you observed?'
>
> IK: 'Completely differently yeah. So we [South Birmingham] took a view that basically as long as you weren't a member of another party you could come to meetings. Obviously you had to be a member of Momentum to vote but we just advertised them on Facebook, we would send big emails around. We had regular meetings on a Sunday to try and maximise turnout, we'd have lengthy meetings with lots of speakers and discussions and resolutions, we'd organise lots of things, so we had lots of little sub-committees. There was a stalls, social and fundraising committee and a group set up in every constituency. Officially Momentum are not meant to be constituency-based groups because they end up looking like rival parties. The problem is if you're going to organise around democratising the party you need to have that constituency structure - so whether it's official or unofficial it has to be there. So we had a lot more structures, we did a lot more a lot quicker' (…)
>
> BW: 'So how was North Birmingham different?'
>
> IK: 'There was a lot more people who had been in the party Pre-Corbyn and in my view trapped in the routine of the Labour Party. Probably a little bit of a different situation as well in the sense that in South and Central a lot of the CLPs didn't function in any meaningful way, whereas in the North Erdington functioned so you had functioning CLPs, functioning branches. And Sutton Coldfield was always going to be a safe Tory seat so regional office just let them get on with (…) so it was a different sort of dynamic but that said I still think they were very cautious and very exclusive and particularly a lot of young people who got involved and went to one North Birmingham meeting would only go to one whereas our retention rate was much higher because we were doing more.'

[9] Other name suggestions included the rather quirkier 'Swarm' and 'Straight Talking'.

These developments were initially managed in an ad-hoc way by a small group of staff and a core group of committed volunteers, with a group of left-wing MPs that acted as a proxy for the national structure. Eventually, the first National Committee meeting was convened on the 6th February 2016 in an attempt to agree a formal structure. The fifty-three delegates in attendance reflected the composition of movement and party groups that had converged on Corbyn's leadership: there were twenty-six regional representatives, eight equalities representatives, eleven from an assortment of Labour Left organisations, and eight from trade unions (Whitby, 2016). Several of the delegates were active in other left-wing (particularly Trotskyist) groups and parties. Deciding Momentum's formal relationship to the Labour Party was an immediate sticking point:

> 'All the local delegates all the regional delegates and you know it was a big committee meeting the big division there was who gets to be a member of Momentum. Is it Labour members only? Is it that anyone can join but only Labour members can hold posts or is it anyone can be a member as long as they are not a member of a political party who is opposed to the Labour Party?' (6)

Out of the three options on the table, it was eventually decided that the membership should be open to anybody who supports Labour and does not support another political party which opposes Labour. For their internal organisation moving forward, delegates agreed on a standard 'layer cake' (6) structure: local groups would elect delegates to go to the regional network, which elected people to a National Committee that would meet quarterly, which elected a Steering Committee that would take responsibility for day-to-day business (4, 6, 20). The eight members of the Steering Committee were also elected at this meeting.

4.3. The dividing lines sharpen: an assembly based or an online OMOV structure?

Most participants agreed that the layer cake structure quickly became problematic: a local group with only a handful of members could send the same number of delegates to regional committees as local groups with hundreds of members, creating a severely skewed balance of power. This proved potent ground for factional disputes, which was dispiriting for many

newer social movement activists that had less experience with the typical intra-left conflicts that characterised the labour movement. As Jon Lansman (20) explained:

> 'it was very difficult structurally because the local groups were completely autonomous, we had no constitution and no national structure (…) I think it would be wrong to describe it as a mazy bureaucracy, but it had some similarities with that, and we did have a framework which included the left organisations that John McDonnell had wanted, and I had been involved in consulting during the campaign. So, we developed this hierarchical national structure which was okay for a while though it had a lot of difficult conversations and what really happened was that the enthusiasm that we had in such large numbers when these groups were meeting in October and November 2015 began to descend into kind of arguments and people drifted away during the course of 2016 and the informal structure came under considerable pressure, it increasingly became a battleground. Local groups became a battleground to elect people to the next level in the hierarchy, so we had this regional structure and then regional level was a battleground to get people up to the national level and that was deeply unsatisfactory' (20).

Throughout 2016 the dividing lines continued to sharpen. Although there were several intersecting tangents during this period, the principal division was between an assortment of activists that were opposed to Jon Lansman because they were concerned about what they saw as his excessive control, and others who became increasingly concerned about the overinflated influence of Trotskyists in the delegate structure, with some participants claiming that their influence exceeded that of new members. Lansman (20) explains his view:

> 'You had far left organisations outside the party, the AWL was in the mix, but they'd had people in the party before. There were people who were not prepared to join the Labour Party who were still turning up, who supported Corbyn but were not joining the Labour Party and in some cases, they wanted some kind of affiliate status – the Socialist Party wanted affiliate status. And we were very wary of them, not least because there were lots and lots of people who came completely from outside the traditional Left currents of opinion. Ex-Greens, young people who had been involved in things like UK Uncut and Occupy and people who really were completely new to organised party politics'.

To address these problems the Steering Committee decided in May 2016 that a founding principles conference would be called to agree a new constitution (6). However, before they could hold the conference the PLP passed a motion of no confidence in Corbyn's leadership following the decision in the referendum to leave the EU at the end of June 2016, claiming that

Corbyn's failure of leadership had contributed to the result. Owen Smith eventually challenged Corbyn in September of that year and lost by a landslide – Corbyn achieved 61.8% of the vote to Owen Smith's 38.2% – despite the controversial decision by the NEC that members who had joined the party in the last six months were not allowed to vote, excluding 130, 000 individuals (Panitch and Leys, 2020: 203).

The second leadership campaign briefly galvanised Momentum's warring factions around a common purpose. As Jon Lansman explains:

> '*We had the Chicken Coup* [the nickname bestowed on MPs because of their reluctance trigger a formal leadership contest with Corbyn on the ballot] *and what that did was reunite everybody. So, we had a period, for the second leadership campaign of major unity*' (20).

Momentum became the centre of the 'Corbyn for leader' campaign – to the frustration of some steering committee members who viewed this as an autocratic decision made by Lansman – enabling them to bring in many more staff members and professionalise their organisation (6). The campaign contributed to the clear sense that this was a coup against both Corbyn *and* the membership that had overwhelmingly endorsed him just one year earlier. They became the centre of a new wave of activism, including a mass rally outside parliament square in support of Corbyn, which ultimately resulted in the doubling of their membership from 4, 000 to 8, 000 members, and they launched a petition which gathered over 50, 000 signatures (Asthana et al, 2016; Kogan, 2019: 285).

However, the unity proved to be only a temporary impasse to hostilities. Throughout 2016 the divisions had been amplified by the actions of Vice-Chair Jackie Walker, who was suspended from the party in May 2016 and removed from her position in Momentum in October 2016 after antisemitic comments were uncovered on her Facebook page and she made further controversial comments at the Labour conference. Her suspension reinforced a schism between those who rallied in support of her against the Momentum and Labour 'establishment', and those that agreed with her suspension (see Murray, 2016).

These developments gradually led Lansman in the direction of OMOV – which he did not initially support – because he thought it could prevent the delegate structure's seizure by far left groups. Meanwhile, some of the movementist volunteers gradually started to accept the need for change because they shared Lansman's concern that the delegate structure was too prone to factionalism, which was distracting from the main goal of transforming the Labour Party. As Beth Foster-Ogg explained:

> 'We then had the party conference, which I think was a massive learning curve for Momentum. We had just won, but Conference was still awful. Everyone was still in suits, nearly all the delegates were from the right, all the conversations were still completely unpolitical, and we lost nearly every rule change and debate on the floor…so that was a bit of an eye-opener for me, because I thought we need to take this whole "transform the Labour Party" thing seriously' (Kogan, 2019: 295)

Subsequently, in a steering committee meeting (on which Lansman's faction still had a majority) the month after the party conference, a motion was forwarded to postpone the upcoming national committee meeting (on which Lansman's faction did not have a majority) and hold the founding principles conference according to OMOV rather than a delegate-based system, which was duly won (6; see Mountford, 2016 for report of meeting). This provoked acrimony from opponents on the steering committee, leading some regional committees to pass motions condemning Lansman, arguing that the national committee was the constitutionally supreme body and should have the final say the founding principles conference. This instigated a U-turn, and it was agreed there *would* in fact be a national committee meeting of delegates in December 2016 to decide on the future of the organisation (6).

Reports by participants highlight the deeply bitter atmosphere at the meeting (see Murray, 2016a). The divisions which had sharpened in the previous months manifested in a power struggle between delegates that rallied around Jon Lansman in support of a system where the

executive committee would be elected by an OMOV ballot of all members and only Labour members would be allowed to be Momentum members, and delegates that opposed the OMOV structure and were happy to have a broad membership of Labour and non-Labour members. The support for the former structure generally came from a network of Labour leftists with a long history in the party alongside some of the original 'movementist' volunteers. The support for the latter structure, on the other hand, was sub-divided into three groups according to Murray (2016a): first, Trotskyists (in particular the AWL); secondly, those who were angry at Jackie Walker's removal from her position as vice-chair following accusations of anti-Semitism; and third, an assortment of people who opposed any form of top-down intervention. In the end, the pro-delegate side won by a single vote and decided that a national conference would be held in early 2017 to formally ratify Momentum's founding principles and constitution.

However, in response to this Jon Lansman and some of the main office began preparing an alternative constitution whilst also preserving their majority on the steering committee (see Kogan, 2019: 302-305). They crucially managed to get Corbyn to head a consultation to members which implicitly supported OMOV and equated Momentum with Labour's electoral goals, stating that Momentum needed to bring 'fresh ideas to campaigning and organising in communities, helping members be active in the Labour Party and helping secure a Labour government to rebuild and transform Britain' (field notes, 2018). 80.6% of the surveyed members unsurprisingly came down in favour of OMOV, but the plebiscitary nature of the consultation was bemoaned by opponents, with 69% of the surveyed members stating that their level of involvement only went as far as supporting Momentum on social media (see Momentum, 2016). Following the consultation, Lansman, who now had the clear backing of LOTO and the surveyed membership, sent an email to all members of the steering committee (on which he still had a majority) asking them to vote on whether to introduce a new constitution which embedded the OMOV structure and meant every Momentum member had

to be a Labour member – the vote was duly won and the new constitution was immediately imposed. In the words of one critic:

> 'On the basis of that consultation they, in a space of just over an hour by email vote on the 7th of January 2017, abolished all of Momentum's democratic structures and instituted the system you have now got where it is essentially impossible to change the constitution ever again without a consensus on the NCG' (6).

This was a turbulent and complicated period in Momentum's history. On the one hand, supporters of the OMOV structure thought that it was a more productive way to facilitate participation in the age of digital democracy, akin to the platforms that had been introduced in Podemos. The delegate structure was too divisive, had led to stagnation, and had been taken over by an assortment of highly active left factions:

> 'There are some positives to the delegate-based system but in practice I think it was hijacked by a range of different factions within the Left that ended up having a faction fight. The national committee and steering committee became large forums for people to just row and disagree (...) I think there was a fear that the culture would become inward-focused and divisive which has been a pattern for the Left forever and we could have ended up with infighting and ultimately the demise of Momentum (...) I think it saved the ability for members to campaign on issues that matter to them, to enable groups to have autonomy in the way they organise to bring more people into politics, I think ultimately it was because that happened which meant that Momentum can grow and flourish even though I understand where the bad feelings from some come from' (5).

Members of the Labour left sometimes had more strategic reasons for reorientating Momentum around strengthening the internal party left. They wanted to make sure that Momentum was an effective Praetorian Guard for Corbyn, capable of occupying the Labour Party to win factional disputes and redistribute power towards the membership. This lengthy quote from a Momentum staff member captures the democratic philosophy behind this view:

> 'Some people, they seem to pretend, deceive themselves, into thinking that if something goes through an incredibly long process with lots and lots of votes which are conducted with different levels of delegated structures and all the rest of that means there will be no unpopular positions. That's nonsense. Decisions will still be made that upset a lot of people, it's not like everyone will suddenly agree with everything that gets done...you get people who should really know better saying

well Momentum should be more democratic and it's like well okay but what does 'more democratic' mean? Because if you are saying we're gonna run a ballot or do a delegate conference every time X or Y happen (...) it's not productive. It's a recipe for big bonfire (...) most of us who were or who had been in and around the Left of the Labour Party (...) everyone has read Miliband, everyone is aware of the 'iron law of oligarchy', everyone is into people like Leo Panitch so there is an acute awareness that you can't build a truly different politics inside the Labour Party if democratising the Labour Party is not a key part of that (...) there's a kind of lazy thinking where well we want to democratise the state, we want to democratise the Labour Party, so why do we not want to democratise Momentum? Well because they're very different institutions, with different purposes, and different aspirations (...) it doesn't aspire to hold state power it aspires to keep the party Left and reform the Labour Party so when it holds state power things are different. Unless you're basically from an anarchist tradition you would appreciate there are points when you just need to get things done and I think Momentum should throw its energies into winning positions in the party in order to reform the party not just to hold those positions but also to make sure those positions operate in a different way and that's exactly what Momentum are doing' (4).

On the other hand, those on the opposing side alleged that the idea of far-left infiltration was exaggerated by Lansman and his supporters to justify their opposition to the delegate structure and to consolidate their control. They highlight the divide between two competing philosophies, which the below participant, who supported the delegate-based system, explains:

'What this was really about was do you want Momentum to be a grassroots movement which is democratic, led from the bottom up, consists of lots of local groups having rows, that has a democratic process, but it fundamentally is messy and creates bad press, headlines and fundamentally it's a movement it is quite difficult to manage. Or do you want Momentum to be a mobilising base and that really was what Jon and others were pushing for and that's what they got and what Momentum became was a very effective way of picking up chess pieces and moving them around on the board. It is a very effective mobilising campaign, a very effective Praetorian Guard, defend Jeremy, win all the internal elections, get out on to the doorstep, run a really effective GE campaign but fundamentally very top-down and run-on data' (6).

This wing bemoaned the 'coup' for its top-down execution, condemning it as undemocratic intervention to bring an undemocratic organisation into existence. They assert, instead, that the left is still in desperate need of an organisation that it can meaningfully participate in, and that the optimal way to make sure that the Labour Party would not drift to the right, even under Corbyn, was to dissent from the party line where necessary:

> 'Ownership of data, that was the absolute thing that Momentum could not do without. The thing that Lansman is very good at understanding is that data is how you build your power (...) and what that meant was that whilst all of these fights were happening on all of these committees Lansman knew that he had a nuke in his pocket that none of us could ever have and that's what he did that was the reset button he pushed as the sole director, and you know it is deeply institutionalist and deeply conventional. You own the data, and you tell people where to be and what to do. You hold a big conference that isn't democratic it's just people talking in panels, and you build everything around haunting the leadership of a political party. And that's very impressive but I think it will fuck us in the long-run because I think we need those people to be critical thinking activists that dissent from the party line and own the movement they are a part of and there is actually still looking at it know there is no part of the labour movement including Momentum that an activist can meaningfully democratically own' (6).

Those who share this critique remain deeply frustrated at the direction Momentum have taken since then:

> 'My attitude towards Momentum in general isn't very positive (...) I still think they have a useful role and there should be a left-wing organisation within the Labour Party which helps to solidify a left-wing leadership and push the party in a left-wing direction and helps to organise both within the Labour Party and outside. However, I think I am basically just incredibly depressed about the way in which Momentum is constituted and lacks any meaningful form of democracy and has become a top-down organisation which gives pronouncements to its base for them to knock-on doors, to vote for the right person, but doesn't actually let them form political policy and stand up to the leadership in many cases' (2).

The introduction of the constitution reinforced Momentum's integration into the Labour Party. Some of the leading 'movementists' – who started out in support of a more open and plural structure – had come to rally around a broadly inward-looking vision that assimilated Momentum into the party structures. It became increasingly clear to them that a 'coup' was necessary to end the state of inertia, to the frustration of other left groups that felt, with some justification, that this was to the detriment of grassroots democracy. As the next section will show, from this moment onwards Momentum gradually came to prioritise 'insider' strategies at the expense of 'outsider' strategies.

4.4. Analysing Momentum's organisation and practice

This section will analyse Momentum's internal organisation and external practice after the new constitution was ratified. Their internal organisation is described as 'centralised pluralist': A multitude of groups carved out a space at the local level and they were often free to prioritise whichever form of activism they pleased (within limits), but the National Momentum group was fairly top-down, controlled by a relatively small group of elites, and had a plebiscitary relationship with lay activists. Their external practice, meanwhile, fits with the definition of the HLPG described in Chapter Two. However, whilst they experimented with combining 'insider' and 'outsider' methods, their internal organisation and integration into the Labour Party was more tailored to 'insider' methods such as party reform and conventional factionalism, which tended to be prioritised at the expense of 'outsider' methods.

After the constitution was introduced the executive – the National Coordinating Group (NCG) – was elected via a digital OMOV ballot in annual and then bi-annual elections (after a constitutional change in late 2019). Participants that supported this system still generally acknowledged that there was scope for improvement. As time wore on it was clear that it was difficult to hold the NCG to account between elections, there were very few intermediary linkages between the NCG and the local groups, and the OMOV electoral system meant that the highest profile figures tended to dominate (see Gerbaudo, 2019). The NCG set the strategic direction but the limited number of meetings (only four a year) alongside time constraints (they are mostly volunteers) left a lot of responsibility with the Officers Group – which comprised the chairs of the NCG sub-groups[10] as well as the chair, secretary, treasurer, and a trade union representative (4, 1, 20) – alongside the staff who take responsibility for day-to-day issues. There were regular meetings between Momentum and LOTO representatives, which indicates a close integration with the leadership. The staff are headed by the National Coordinator – who is managed by the chair (Jon Lansman at the time) – with

[10] The three subgroups at the time I interviewed the participant were complaints, party reform and resources.

the number of staff varying from one or two dozen outside of campaign time to up to 56 during the 2019 election campaign (see Proctor, 2019). Jon Lansman painted a picture:

> 'we (…) have an Officers Group which comprises the people who chair all of those different groups including the chair, secretary and treasurer plus an extra trade union rep, and that deals with urgent matters but in terms of what the link is between that and day-to-day decision-making – day-to-day decision-making is largely with the staff so now it would be the National Coordinator that is responsible for day-to-day decision-making, there is consultation if it is urgent. Major things they'll be a consultation with an Officers Group, informal between meetings – so email consultation for example. I as chair am responsible for management of the National Coordinator, so I meet at least every two or three weeks, but we speak on the phone. The treasurer may also be involved formally in some things and there are NCG members who take on particular areas of work and are involved in those areas of work, so there is more NCG involvement than just through the formal process, there are some informal things. So, for example, things like the most obvious decisions are Comms decisions so how we respond to things, social media, there is a Whatsapp group and that's primarily comprised of staff though I am also on it though I don't intervene in it that much. I keep a watching eye, serious matters that require more intervention are supposed to be raised with me. Sometimes I will consult others. The other thing is we liaise closely with the leader's office so we can try and align with what we are doing. And that happens on lots of different levels, I have meetings with the leader's office, sometimes we have broader meetings with the leader's office and staff also talk to the leader's office and staff too' (20).

Some participants said that the use of online OMOV ballots was inspired by Podemos – alongside other movement-parties – but tailored towards Momentum's nebulous goals in a way that is more suitable for them than a political party. Another reason for supporting OMOV, despite the left's historic opposition, was because of the effect it had at the 2015 leadership election (e.g., see Murray, 2016a).

However, research has challenged the idea that digital OMOV ballots constitute a more democratic form of governance. They have poor turnouts, tend to be conducted on a plebiscitary basis, and have little space for internal deliberation and the organisation of competing factional blocs, leaving them in the control of elites who can utilise them to reinforce or ratify decisions already made (see Gerbaudo, 2018, 2019). Online consultations offer either binary or very limited choices, and leave little room for grassroots input (see Dennis, 2020;

Momentum 2018a). This was a concern that was raised by opponents of the online structure, who claimed that its plebiscitary nature discouraged participation and offered no incentive for lower profile activists that might otherwise be willing to hold Momentum's elite to account.

Centralisation at the summit was, however, combined with pluralism at the base. Dennis' (2020) analysis of Momentum's online activity has illustrated that the centralisation of National Momentum is matched by much more participative local activism in which members have the opportunity to steer the local group, which were semi-autonomous from the national group and often left to their own devices with limited intervention. This upside of this was that it encouraged a considerable degree of internal differentiation and pluralism, with local groups able to adjust to local political demands and political structures, but the downside was that they had very few means of inputting into the National Momentum structure outside of elections.

In my observations at the local level, I also saw that Momentum were a focal point of a broader network of activists in the trade unions, community groups, and social movements. Online apps such as MCM facilitated the establishment of autonomous Whatsapp or Facebook groups for local organisers which then '*went dark*' (25) from the perspective of national organisers. The invisible nature of this mode of organisation reinforces the proclivity for localised participation but an absence of links between local groups and national strategy. The NCG also endeavoured – to a limited extent – to reflect the pluralism of the labour movement by including members from different regions elected by OMOV; stakeholders from the trade unions, socialist societies and public office holders; and additional members 'who may be co-opted onto the NCG at the discretion of the NCG' (Momentum, 2017: 3).

In terms of their external practice, Momentum's centralised but also pluralist structure aimed to accommodate the strands that had converged around Corbyn whilst carefully managing them around consensual rather than divisive issues. As Jon Lansman explains, this involved mostly focusing on 'insider' strategies within the Labour Party:

> 'Agreeing the objectives can sometimes be divisive so we focus on things we broadly agree on, so we focus much more on internal party democracy than we have on taking policy positions and okay at Conference we did take a line on policy positions, but we did it very closely with the leaders office and really we don't go out on a limb and take decisions on things where there is likely to be lots of division. We will make recommendations which we think will be broadly supported, and it's one thing to get people involved in devising ideas that people can pick and choose from, but if we're going to take a position and make a recommendation to delegates at Conference it needs to be something we want to have a consensual basis for' (20).

Their centralised pluralised structure and integration into the Labour Party was well suited to prioritising 'insider' strategies, such as mobilising the membership for internal selections and elections and party reform. They would remain closely aligned to the interests of LOTO:

> 'We try and align what we are doing as much as possible with the leadership – that's not to say I think we wouldn't ever take a different position from the leadership – but we don't want to undermine the leadership'.

Their orientation around the leadership was particularly pertinent with regards to Brexit, because the Momentum membership were overwhelmingly pro-remain whereas sections of the leadership were concerned that a pro-remain strategy would alienate Labour supporters in marginal constituencies – this tension will be explored in more detail in the final empirical chapter. Suffice it to say for now that Momentum insiders were happy to keep wedge issues such as Brexit off the agenda if it was not deemed to be in the leadership's political interest.

Participants were not always wedded to the Labour Party as the be all and end all of socialist politics, but the rise of the Corbyn leadership had altered their reading of the balance of forces:

> 'The Labour Party has half a million members, because the Labour Party has the resources to stand in elections - I mean what's the alternative? I don't think there is any viable counter to that. Three or four years ago I felt differently because it just seemed impossible and so many people had given up the belief that change could be achieved within Labour or through Labour. But actually there wasn't really a functioning strategy to move society in a better direction other than campaigns, protests - lots of things that good in their own small ways, single-issue campaigns that made real difference. But if you are looking at the overall direction of society as a whole you need to find a way to affect it and I think there was a very clear

> strategy to do that through the Labour Party in Britain and I can't conceive of how there can ever be a time when that wouldn't be the best vehicle (5)'

Nevertheless, Momentum remained a hybrid to some extent. Bigger groups with a higher density of active members and a better performing Labour Party were often led towards extra-party forms of activism outside of campaign times. In addition, the national group continued to pursue more experimental 'outsider' strategies in some cases, as the next chapter will explore, such as protests against Boris Johnson after he became Prime Minister and campaigning alongside environmental groups in opposition to major banks investment in fossil fuel companies.

Applying the concept of the HLPG to these developments suggests that Momentum pursued a primarily 'insider' strategy after the constitution was ratified that looked to strengthen the internal party left in the hope that it could influence the direction of the Labour Party. As will be explored in more detail in the next chapter, they still utilised outsider strategies on occasion, but internal party organising was their main focus. They can also be described as a cause-based pressure group (Grant, 1999) – although not a single-issue one – because the ultimate aim was to unite around Corbyn's leadership and pressure the Labour Party into advocating for a more left-wing policy agenda. They may have been reluctant to clearly state their own policy agenda, but they rallied around Corbyn because they hoped they could push the party in that direction.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined key developments in Momentum up until the imposition of its constitution in early 2017. It explained how Corbyn's leadership reconfigured movement and party politics by forging a space for the convergence of different traditions. This was not a seamless process, however, with considerable internal conflict before its current governance structure was implemented, which consolidated Momentum's integration into the Labour

Party. The upside of this was that it ensured they were established as a key player in the Corbyn coalition because of their ability to mobilise their membership towards the interests of the leadership, whether through party reform, internal selections, or as we will see, election campaigns. The downside in the view of some participants was that it negated the 'movementist' experimentation, and the democratic input, that many activists had hoped for when Momentum were first launched.

Now that Momentum's internal evolution has been described, the next chapter can tackle the second research question – how should the relationship between Momentum, Corbyn, and the Labour Party be understood? The chapter will use the concept HLPG to explore how Momentum reconfigured the relationship between movement and party politics by fusing 'insider' and 'outsider' strategies: internal party organising *in and against* the party; extra-parliamentary activism *outside* the party; and campaigning as an *appendage* to the party. The chapter will go some way in helping to achieve the main research goal of defining and understanding Momentum and positioning them within the existing literature on political parties and social movements.

5. Mapping out Momentum's Relationship to Corbyn and the Labour Party

'We went years without a political expression for our big social movement and our social movement withered and died as a result and now we're sitting here with a massive political expression but where are the strikes, where is the student movement, where is the occupy camp, where is the local anti-cuts committee that is drawing hundreds of people to protest outside their local A & E, nursery or whatever? There are bits and bobs of these things in some very good campaigns, but Momentum should be the backbone for creating that grassroots level social movement and it's not doing that because it is entirely focused on technical changes within the Labour Party' (6).

'I don't think there is anybody in the staff team or governing body who doesn't believe in movementism and party facing work, but I think it's no secret that people hold these different objectives in different balances depending on where they have come from. So, there will be people in our organising team who come from a trade union background or who have been in the party for many many years and whose focus is on transforming the Labour Party and elections. Then there might be someone in the comms team who might have a climate activist background who is more focused on wider movement-building. I think the trick with Momentum is finding a way of balancing these approaches and groups of people, because that's when the Labour Party will be strongest. And if it becomes too inward focusing then it will underachieve but by the same token, we must be realistic about the power of the left within the party and there is a huge amount still to be done (...) *but there is also work about transforming the party, and different bits of our broad family get a bit frustrated at times because they have different areas of priority'* (14).

Introduction

This chapter will attempt to answer the second research question – how should Momentum's relationship to Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour Party be understood? Answering this question this is an important task if the research is to achieve its main aim of defining and understanding Momentum. The first section establishes how and why the hybrid left pressure group is a useful heuristic for exploring Momentum's combined use of 'insider' and 'outsider' strategies in respect to Corbyn and the Labour Party. This leads the chapter to bracket Momentum's external relations into three categories: (1) internal party organising *in and against* the party; (2) extra-parliamentary organising *outside* the party; and (3) campaigning as an *appendage*

to the party. Identifying these three dimensions establishes a way of positioning Momentum in relation to the literature on political parties and social movements.

The second section provides more detail on Momentum's 'insider' strategies *in and against* the party which, as the previous chapter illustrated, were prioritised after the new constitution was ratified in early 2017. The tactics deployed to this end were reminiscent of the methods used by Labour left groups in previous decades but on a larger scale and with the novelty of a left-wing Labour leader. This led Momentum to orientate their organising inside the party around the Corbyn leadership's two conflicting party-based objectives: (1) the pursuit of internal party democracy (IPD) as the first step towards the democratisation of state and society, and (2) the pursuit of internal party control (IPC) to secure Corbyn's factional interests. By exploring the evolution of the campaign for 'open selection' and the Democracy Review (2018), the section describes how the contradictions between these two objectives eventually led Momentum to relinquish the pursuit of party reform.

The final two sections explore how Momentum went beyond previous Labour left groups in their scope and ambition. The third section explores their role *outside* the party. Although this was gradually mitigated by their focus on internal party objectives, some extra-parliamentary 'outsider' strategies remained, including the occasional use of direct-action tactics to pursue what the thesis calls 'electoral', 'fandom' and 'single issue' causes. The section also explores the role of political education at The World Transformed festival, and the launch of the Community Organising Unit (COU), which arguably constituted Corbyn's most tangible step towards building a so-called 'movement-party'.

The final section investigates the third and most expansive dimension of Momentum's external relations – their role as a party *appendage* during election campaigns. The section focuses on the 2017 general election – leaving 2019 to Chapter Seven – illustrating that they combined 'connective' and 'collective' action to mobilise their membership on behalf of the Labour Party (see Bennett and Segerberg, 2012). During the election they gained widespread recognition

for their innovative use of digital technologies and their targeted campaigning in marginal constituencies, playing no small part in tilting the election in Labour's favour.

5.1. Using the concept of the hybrid left pressure group to position Momentum

A number of accounts in the literature have touched upon the relationship between Momentum, Corbyn and the Labour Party. Existing scholarship has highlighted Momentum's attempts to democratise the Labour Party as part of the quest for democratic socialism (Panitch and Leys, 2020). Their rearguard action in defence of Corbyn's factional interests has also been well documented – in particular their mobilisation of the membership in internal elections and selections (Dennis, 2020). The literature has also explored how their electoral campaigning methods have reconfigured the approach of Britain's two main parties (Dommett and Temple, 2018; Rhodes, 2019). Finally, their use of a 'movementist' rhetoric and occasional use of protest tactics has led scholars to highlight their potential to 'movementise' the Labour Party and renew their relationship with civil society organisations (Dennis, 2020; Muldoon and Rye, 2020).

Chapter One introduced the idea of the HLPG as a way of defining and analysing Momentum. One benefit of this framework is that it can help to conceptualise and unpack Momentum's multifaceted relationship to the Labour Party and Corbyn. Their strategic practice on these fronts, which is the concern of this chapter, fits the definition of a 'thresholder' pressure group, which is characterised by 'strategic ambiguity and oscillation between insider and outsider strategies' (May and Nugent, 1982: 7)[11].

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[11] The reason for adopting the term 'hybrid' in the definition, rather than thresholder, is because it provided a means of framing Momentum's internal organisation as well as their strategic vacillations, as the previous chapter explained.

Whilst they combined both insider and outsider strategies, the former was prioritised after the 2017 constitution was ratified. 'High profile'[12] insiders (Grant, 1999: 20) – individuals that use their access and profile to enforce their preferred decisions inside the party – sought to influence decision-making on the NEC, at the party conference, within LOTO, and in different regions across the country. As the next section will explore, the membership was mobilised in internal selections and elections in an attempt to introduce internal party democracy (IPD) and consolidate Corbyn's internal party control (IPC), both of which were seen to be in the interests of the left.

However, they still persevered with a twofold strategy which sought to combine insider strategies with extra-party strategies that sought to build social power on the 'outside': This included the use of more short-term tactics such as protests, as well as more long-term strategies such as political education. 'Ideological outsiders' (see Grant, 1999: 20) – individuals who rejected some of the interventions made by Momentum and the Labour Party and so remained aloof from the party structures – tended to prefer this type of mobilisation. Many local activists were more inclined to organise 'outsider' strategies that aimed to strengthen progressive constituencies to the benefit of both the leadership and the left in the long run. The third section will explore this dimension.

The final section will outline the findings on the third component of Momentum's relationship to the Labour Party and Corbyn – their role as a party appendage during election campaigns. In this dimension they were on the frontier of an 'insider' and an 'outsider' strategy: They were an extension of Labour that aimed to enhance their performance with the ultimate aim of helping them form a government, but they were also independent, instilling them with the freedom to experiment in both their online and offline campaigns. As the section will illustrate, the unwillingness of the central party campaign to adhere to Corbyn's preferred strategy during

[12] Many of the 'high profile' insiders were relatively 'low profile' before Corbyn became leader.

the 2017 election meant that in practice Momentum remained relatively independent from the party but aligned with the leadership.

5.2. 'In and against' the party: the role of internal party organising

During his time as Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell (2007) was wont to use the phrase 'in and against the state': 'That's what government should be about in terms of socialist practice – you go into the state to transform the state' (Meacher and McDonnell, 2007). This figure of speech intended to illuminate what a socialist government should be doing, but it also described the contradictory pressures a prospective Corbyn government was likely to face if it pursued a transformational politics whilst constrained within the institutions of the capitalist state. Such pressures had, so the argument went, led previous Labour governments down a more moderate path than that initially mandated to them by the extra-parliamentary party (see Panitch and Leys, 2020).

For many participants, internal party democracy (IPD) was a safeguard against the possibility of another 'betrayal' by a Labour government (see Pettitt, 2018). Stronger links between Labour's parliamentary representatives and the party members would make sure that the former enacted the programme they had been mandated to follow by the latter, ensuring that a left-wing government would stay on course once they had been elected. The following participant explains their view on the importance of party democracy:

> 'If you have a more democratic party when you're in the Government you are less liable to capture. If you've got a mass vibrant democratic party that means that the progressive social forces in Britain will be stronger which will help in Government, it will help to get you into Government (...) I think you want a mass movement-party and to do that requires thorough democratisation and that stands your best chance of having a socialist advance (...) So yes, I think that a mass party, a democratic party, is the way to win but it may not be the only way for the entity called the Labour Party to win but it is the only way for the Labour Party to win and then effect long-term meaningful change which cannot just be undone by a future swing back to the Tories' (19)

In the 2015 leadership contest Corbyn tapped into this sentiment by consistently repeating the claim that the 'members needed to be more enfranchised' in the party's decision-making

processes. He had spent his backbench career firmly within a Labour left tradition that had consistently advocated for the extension of IPD, leading many to believe that members-led democratisation would be one of his main ambitions on becoming party leader (see Ward, 2021).

However, despite Corbyn and his supporters erstwhile commitment to IPD, there was a second ulterior motive behind the pursuit of party reform – internal party control (IPC). It was in the left's factional interest to redistribute power towards the pro-Corbyn membership and away from the PLP and party bureaucracy, which continued to be dominated by figures to the right. As one participant put it:

> 'From the very beginning what was limiting Corbyn's ability to put out the vision and the campaigns that the Labour Party needs to be the heart and soul in, is the fact that the bureaucracy was going a different way than the leader. There was a duty almost to take over some of the bureaucracy. I think what Momentum has to some extent done very well is to say we are taking over the bureaucracy to change it' (18).

Because IPD also had the added effect of strengthening Corbyn's IPC in the short-term, it was hard to disentangle whether reform was pursued in the name of bottom-up democracy, or contrastingly to secure the leaderships' top-down control over competing factions. The tension between these two aims led more critical participants to the view that: 'there is no absolute democracy, only different ways of getting control' (12). A LOTO aide, on the other hand, claimed that it was possible to aspire to both IPD and IPC at the same time:

> 'Each reform that has been made in favour of democratisation has basically been: What's in favour of democratisation? Won't be blocked by other elements of the party? And is it in the short and medium-term interests of the leadership?' (19).

In their pursuit of both IPD and IPC, Momentum 'insiders' turned to a strategy that had its origins in the CLPD campaigns for internal party reform in the 1970s and 1980s. CLPD were the first major left-wing group to turn their attention to the Labour Party's internal processes: They recognised that, if the party were to escape the parliamentaristpursuit trappings that Miliband (1972) had mused over, then a significant redistribution of power to the party

grassroots was needed. Their approach, therefore, was to retain a laser sharp focus on party reform, circulating left-backed resolutions to as many CLPs as possible, urging NEC members to support key votes, and lobbying trade unions and conference delegates to pass key resolutions at the party conference (Seyd, 1987). This strategy worked with great effect in the successful implementation of the electoral college and mandatory reselection of MPs (see Seyd, 1987).

But Momentum also shared a lineage with RFMC – an umbrella group set up in 1980 to coordinate the struggle for party reform among Labour left factions. Indeed, when Momentum was launched some Labour left activists had the RFMC in mind in initial discussions, as illustrated in the previous chapter. Both had assembled a multitude of groups in an attempt to put aside faction fighting in the pursuit of party reform, served as a 'forum for discussion which otherwise would not have taken place' (Kogan, 2019: 32), and went on to take on a more expansive role outside of internal party organising. In Momentum's case, as we will see, this involved supporting various election and selection campaigns and initiating a dialogue with supportive groups outside the party, whereas RFMC coordinated Tony Benn's 1981 deputy leadership challenge, in which they also reached out to extra-parliamentary groups across the labour movement and beyond (Seyd, 1987).

In their pursue of IPD and IPC, Momentum deployed two overlapping strategies that mirrored the CLPD and RFMC, but on a bigger scale and with the added bonus of a supportive parliamentary leadership. The first short and medium-term strategy had everything to do with IPC: They mobilised their 40, 000 strong membership (and any sympathetic party members that were not Momentum members) for factional purposes in internal party selections and elections. In doing so, they were able to consolidate a pro-Corbyn majority on the NEC: all six candidates in the was Centre for Grassroots Alliance (CLGA) slate were elected to the constituency section in August 2016; three new seats were added at the 2017 conference, to be voted for via OMOV, and the Momentum nominated candidates won them all; and all the 'JC9' Momentum-backed candidates were elected on to the constituency section in

September 2018. These victories ensured there was a pro-Corbyn majority on the NEC from early 2017, although the trade union still retained the decisive influence if the left- and right-wing unions united on certain decisions.

Furthermore, Momentum ensured there was a pro-Corbyn majority on the important Conference Arrangements Committee (CAC), which allowed the left to set the agenda at the party conference in 2018 and 2019 (see Waugh, 2017). Finally, they played a part in shifting the composition of the PLP: the number of left-wing Socialist Campaign Group MPs had jumped from no more than a dozen in 2015 to 34 after the 2019 General Election. A Momentum staff member stated to me that they won around 60 per cent of the selections they endorsed a candidate in, which was '*as well as we could reasonably have been expected to do*' (7). All of these internal victories aimed to consolidate Corbyn and the left's IPC but did occasionally lead to confrontation with other left factions that Momentum now dwarfed in size and influence. This was seen, for example, in a sequence of squabbles over the CLGA slate, first for NCC (an organ that is responsible for deliberating on Labour's internal complaints procedures) elections in 2018, and then again for NEC elections in early 2020, which concluded with a failure to agree a united left slate.

The second strategy utilised by Momentum was to use their access and influence to introduce party reform that would redistribute power to the membership – consolidating Corbyn's IPC in the short and medium-term because of Corbyn's support among the membership and enhancing his IPD in the long-term. Before the research window, some fairly substantial but hardly transformative reforms were introduced. In 2017 the 'McDonnell Amendment' reduced the number of nominations required to get on the ballot for a leadership election from 15% to 10% of the PLP or EPLP, and the 'registered supporters' scheme was retained (Quinn, 2018a). Momentum's advocacy for both reforms was essential, although the unions resisted their demand for a 5% threshold out of a concern that it would cause divisions within the PLP (Quinn, 2018a).

The attempted restructuring of the party was at its pinnacle in 2018 but ultimately faced defeat at the party conference, whilst the research was being conducted. The two most important proposals for reform – open selection and the Democracy Review (2018) – did not result in any substantial changes. Drawing on my participant observation at the conference and my interview data, the next section will trace how and why these proposals were defeated. The findings show that as an election grew nearer and divisions over Brexit sharpened, the leadership lost its resolve to press ahead amidst internal opposition by sections of the PLP and the trade unions. IPD no longer aligned with the goal of IPC, as it had done before, meaning that party reform was dropped. Momentum did not wield the necessary influence to press ahead with the reforms without wider support across the party.

The defeat of party reform

In some respects, Momentum's pursuit of party reform suffered from the same obstacles famously described by former Labour cabinet minister Richard Crossman:

> 'The Labour Party requires militants, politically conscious socialists, to do the work of organising the constituencies. But since these 'militants' tended to be extremists, a constitution was needed which maintained their enthusiasm by apparently creating a full party democracy while excluding them from effective power. Hence the concession in principle of sovereign powers to the delegates at the Annual Conference, and the removal of most of this sovereignty through the trade union block vote on the one hand, and the complete independence of the PLP on the other' (cited in Elliot, 1992: 33)

Although trade union influence (including the block vote) had eroded from the peak of labourism in Crossman's time, the unions were arguably more decisive in Corbyn's Labour than at any point since the genesis of New Labour. The difference from the classical labourist alliance described by Crossman was that left-wing union leaders were a ballast for a left-wing

parliamentary leadership. In practice, many participants conceded that Unite were far more influential than Momentum:

> 'It's an elephant in the room when you're doing a project about Momentum because essentially there's two organisations Corbyn relies on. One is Momentum, the other is Unite. The reality is that the big player in the Labour Party in 2019 is Unite. Jennie Formby, Karie Murphy, Len McCluskey, Howard Beckett. These are the powerful people in the movement, and they are either current or ex-officials of Unite. Corbyn's parliamentary office lead is ex-Unite staffer, you look through the party structures and the Corbyn leadership team and there's been a huge influx of Unite people into the leadership of the party (11).'

Unite was Corbyn's largest donor in his initial leadership campaign, remained Labour's biggest financial backer throughout his tenure, and controlled a considerable portion of votes throughout the root and branch of the party. Many of the most senior people in Corbyn's inner circle were from Unite. Karie Murphy – a close ally of Len McCluskey – was hired as Executive Director of the Leaders Office in early 2016. Murphy was central to the appointment of Jennie Formby – Unite's former political director and regional secretary – as General Secretary in March 2018. Accusations were made at the time that the appointment was a 'stitch-up', leading Jon Lansman to put himself forward as a candidate in outrage at the absence of a democratic process. Lansman eventually dropped out of the race, but the episode constituted another example of differing objectives between Unite and Momentum, and between the demands for full party democracy and Unite's utility as a ballast for the Corbyn leadership.

The perseverance of this nexus of power contrasted with the more participative and often individualised vision of party democracy held by many participants in Momentum. Union representatives, including Unite, persisted with the 'backroom deals' that frustrated grassroots activists, leading to an occasional tension between Unite, Momentum and sections of the membership. Jon Lansman recalls one episode when the union representatives on the NEC worked together to block the Momentum slate's preferred reforms to leadership elections:

> 'The unions acted as a block for lowering the threshold in the leadership elections, and that was very much left unions agreeing to go along with the right-wing unions in the interests of a united trade union position. I don't have a problem at all with unions taking a united trade union position on things which are directly related to trade union organisation in the country, but it is very disappointing that left unions

> do that in relation to issues of party democracy. We're not going to not challenge that. We've got to criticise that when it happens' (20).

The second obstacle Crossman identifies is the PLP, which remained a thorn in Corbyn's side throughout his time as leader.[13] Once elected to parliament MPs have 'complete independence', as Crossman puts it, and they naturally prefer to keep it that way. Most members of the PLP believe that they 'ought to be free from interference from the extra-parliamentary party – that they are responsible, through elections, to the voters broadly and not more narrowly to the party members' (Pettitt, 2018: 292). This view, as well as a fear that they would face deselection, underpinned the opposition to party reform coming from the backbenches.

As the remainder of the section will show, the trade unions and the PLP were more influential in the passage of party reform than Momentum. Together they proved a formidable corrective to open selection and the more radical ambitions of the Democracy Review, putting an end to the full party democracy that Momentum participants aspired to.

Open Selection

'Open selection' was an updated version of the policy of 'mandatory reselection', which was introduced in 1980 following a long campaign by CLPD, and then dropped in 1990 by the Kinnock leadership (Thorpe, 2015). Supporters of open selection – which includes the majority of Momentum participants – call for a full selection procedure between each General Election,

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[13]The first major confrontation came in December 2015 when Foreign Secretary Hilary Benn – kept in the Shadow Cabinet to appease the Labour right – gave a rousing speech in defiance of Corbyn and in favour of airstrikes against Islamic State in Syria, instigating a backbench rebellion of 66. The party commissioned a survey of over 100, 000 members at the time – over 75% were opposed to airstrikes, with only 13% in favour. The members again demonstrated their support for Corbyn in 2016 after the PLP triggered another leadership contest. Further realignment against the membership came with the re-launch of the centre-left Tribune Group of MPs in April 2017 which accepted some of the social democratic policies of Corbynism but resisted the demands for party democratisation (Panitch and Leys, 2020: 231). Seven MPs then quit the party in early 2019 to form Change UK in protest and what they considered to be poor leadership over Brexit and antisemitism, although they tanked at the 2019 election, receiving less than 0.1% of the vote.

in which every individual member within a CLP would be entitled to cast a vote to decide their parliamentary candidate. By placing substantial limits on MPs' autonomy the aim was to make it more difficult for them to stray from the extra-parliamentary line, and in this case, the leadership's line.

Before the 2018 conference, to activate a selection contest over 50% of local party branches and affiliated branches (trade unions and socialist societies) needed to call for a contest, but this rarely happened in practice due to the trade union policy of avoiding reselections unless necessary. For participants, the existing 'trigger ballot' was seen as impractical and negative compared to open selection:

> 'to trigger an open selection the implication is you're unhappy with the existing member of parliament whereas if you had an open process which was just a matter of routine it wouldn't have that element to it which can create some ill-feeling and deter people from putting themselves forward because they don't want to get embroiled in all of the difficulty associated with trying to win a vote to trigger an open contest' (13).

A series of grassroots campaigns were established in the build-up to the 2018 party conference which aimed to put open selection on the agenda. Buoyed by Chris Williamson's 'Democracy Roadshow', and officially backed by Momentum, Unite and the FBU, there was a genuine hope that open selection was on the cards (see Hudson, 2018). Momentum confirmed their support at the beginning of September, then ran a sequence of videos outlining its basic principles and launched a petition which gathered more than 50, 000 signatures. They also commissioned a survey of over 1000 delegates from 450 local Labour Parties – 72% responded that they supported open selection (field notes, 2018). The clear support held by the majority of Labour members led national coordinator Laura Parker to state on the eve of conference that 'it would be a great betrayal of the members if open selections weren't properly debated' (Rodgers, 2018).

The events which followed shed light on the internal obstacles to party reform. In the days preceding the conference, some of Corbyn's inner circle began to backtrack on their support

for open selection. Rebecca Long-Bailey voiced her support for the trigger ballot because it would allow MPs to remain focused on Westminster politics (see Elgot, 2018). This was followed by LOTO brokering a compromise which they hoped could keep both the unions and members satisfied: the threshold for initiating a full selection would not be removed but would be reduced from 50% to 33% of party branches *or* affiliate branches (see Labour Party, 2020: 31). This was passed unanimously at a meeting of the NEC at the dawn of the conference, and it was the only motion on the subject to be discussed on the conference floor, meaning that open selection was kept off the agenda.

This incensed delegates who argued that retaining a watered-down trigger ballot would only aggravate the already controversial nature of the process because party branches would still have to signal their dissatisfaction by triggering a contest, whereas open selection would avoid the acrimony altogether because it would happen automatically between every election. Angry delegates put forward a motion to reject the CAC's proposed timetable and put open selection back on the agenda, which resulted in a dramatic spectacle in which over 90% of the union delegates voted against the amendment whereas over 90% of CLP delegates voted for it. The union delegates marginally carried the vote, meaning the agenda continued as proposed, and the trigger ballot passed whilst open selection remained off the table.

The exact sequence of events which preceded the compromise remain unclear, but four conclusions can be drawn. First, the major trade unions instructed their delegates to support the trigger ballot rather than open selection. Unite had endorsed open selection at their 2016 annual conference, but they now instructed their delegates to support the trigger ballot, which McCluskey (2020) insisted did not contradict the mandate bestowed upon him at the Unite conference. It was unclear whether McCluskey personally supported open selection or not – he later claimed that Corbyn tasked him with gathering trade union support for the trigger ballot – but it was clear there was little appetite for open selection among the major unions.

Second, the leadership were unwilling to pursue open selection because of the risk that it might antagonise sections of the trade union leadership and the PLP. They depended on Unite to broker the type of compromise that has long been a hallmark of the Labour Party. Indeed, a LOTO aide indicated that party reform was a low priority after the 2017 election, because they felt they were on an upwards trajectory and did not want to risk fuelling internal splits with another election on the horizon:

> 'I think 2017 was a blessing because there was a fear that the project was stagnating, and it reinvigorated the project and changed people's perceptions both within the Labour Party and the PLP about the electability of a left platform. However, because we came so close, because it was a hung parliament, because we felt that Corbyn could be PM and the government might fall at any moment, and because we felt like we were a government in waiting, we lost the radical edge. We lost the propensity to take risks so they did back off from the forms that would have created antagonisms, the adversarial stuff. That's genuinely what happened, I know that happened. And that was a mistake' (26).

Third, the trigger ballot preserved the autonomy of MPs on parliamentary issues. Opponents of the reform valued the representative traditions that the party was founded on and saw open selection as a challenge to MPs' freedom to represent their constituents. One LOTO aide described how sections of the leadership were concerned about the possibility of a split, although opined that he personally was 'sanguine' about the prospect of centrist MPs resigning. Nevertheless, fears that MPs would desert the party led sections of the leadership away from more radical reforms that might have instigated a rebellion, perhaps staving off the resignation of others who may have resigned alongside the seven MPs that formed Change UK in early 2019.

Fourthly, it illustrated the weakness of Momentum in comparison to Unite and the parliamentary leadership. Despite Momentum's vocal support for open selection they whipped delegates to support the compromise, defending it as a step in the right direction, to the frustration of many delegates who condemned what they saw as a U-turn. However, this admonishment arguably overestimates Momentum's influence. Their strategic commitment to open selection should not be in doubt, but their institutional weakness relative to the trade

unions and the PLP meant that to continue to campaign for open selection would have likely resulted in defeat, and so the tactical decision was made to accept the compromise. When asked their view on the criticisms that had been made of Momentum, national coordinator Laura Parker responded:

> ‘We were campaigning against people who had a different end-point they wanted to reach. So, we could have either just said “let’s have a modified version of the trigger ballot and that would be okay”, or we could say “we want open selections hell for leather”, and we settled for a modified version of the trigger ballot. It is actually a massive step forward (...) and yes there is a tension between an organisation which is based at least in part on the principles of OMOV and a union organisation who by necessity and absolutely rightly have built into their very existence the concept of the block vote. I mean they’d have to, or they would never bloody well get anything done (…) but there are some inherent tensions as you put it there, everyone wants to make a big hullabaloo about it looking like they won and we didn’t but actually things just changed and they changed a bit in a way that we wanted but might have been uncomfortable for others’ (14).

The pressure that Momentum was able to exert inside the party in comparison to the trade unions should not be overstated. With a general election, and a potential government, seemingly on the horizon, the leadership withdrew from reforms that might crumble their support in the unions and PLP.

The Democracy Review

Whilst open selection was probably the most important single constitutional reform, the Democracy Review constituted the most significant package and generated the most excitement among supporters. As one commentator put it, the review went ‘some way to institutionalising the Corbyn surge and opening the party to control by its members’ (Chessum, 2018). Launched by the party in September 2017, it was led by Corbyn’s political secretary Katy Clark, and took place over the next twelve months in three stages, outlined in figure 3:

November 1st	Submissions Open
January 12th 2018 (track 1)	Deadline for Bame Labour, Young Labour, and Women’s Conference submissions (Wave 1)

March 23rd 2018 (Track 2)	Deadline for submissions on CLP governance, Strengthening the involvement and participation of members, building mass movement, social media, the role of socialist societies, diversity and gender representation (Wave 2)
June 29th 2018 (Track 3)	Rules for leadership elections, local government, regional structures, NEC composition, freeze dates, policymaking structures, local and national links with trade unions (Wave 3)
September 2018	NEC Meeting where Review may be released
Late September 2018	Party Conference where Review may be voted through

Figure 3: taken from Momentum (2017: 2)

Momentum, for their part, provided guidance on making proposals independently and did various consultations with relevant groups. In February 2018 they launched an online platform called 'My Momentum' so that members and local groups could make submissions on what they thought should be included in the review. Submissions that reached a certain threshold were composited by the NCG – who could also send proposals – alongside the submitters of the original proposals (Momentum, 2017). 50 members were also randomly selected to be part of a 'Members Council' that worked in breakout groups to develop submissions that were automatically considered in the compositing process. The final composited motions were then voted on via OMOV and circulated through CLPs and into the Democracy Review (Momentum, 2017).

The final results indicated the importance that Momentum activists placed on more direct forms of party democracy. For the 'track 2' proposals (see above) 3759 members voted, and 12 proposals passed, calling for, among other things: A Charter of Members Rights; reforms the process for selecting MPs; improving the representation of women on CLPs; creating a standalone Women's Conference; and online voting for parliamentary selections (see

Momentum, 2018). Other radically democratic proposals were made during the track 3 stage. This included a call to ban MPs and MEPs from sitting on Labour's NEC, and the proposal that party members rather than councillors should select the council leader.

By the time the Democracy Review was completed it had received over 11, 000 submissions from CLPs, trade unions, socialist societies, and individual party members (Labour Party, 2018: 10). Some of the headline proposals included: OMOV at various levels, most controversially for the election of all councillors and the Council leaders; a new NEC policy committee and sub-committees; reforms of CLP governance structures; and the strengthening of the equality groups structures. The proposals were popular among participants, although for some pro-Corbyn participants they were too procedural, and for Corbynsceptics they were too radical.

However, only a few proposals (and none of the important ones) made it to a conference vote. The reasons for this resemble that of open selection: an NEC meeting prior to the annual conference decided that only a selection of minor reforms which they drew up themselves would be voted on, rather than the content of the report itself. A Momentum spokesperson criticised the NEC for 'falling well short of what the members want, with many key proposals being watered down or blocked' (Press Association, 2018).

The union position was often integral. Jon Lansman (20), who was on the NEC at the time, explained how the unions effected the evolution of the proposed BAME structures in the Democracy Review:

> 'in many ways the unions, particularly when they acted collectively through TULO, were a restraining influence on what we were trying to achieve. And there are some very specific examples, in the equalities structures that we are introducing and in particular in relation to the new BAME structures which we regarded as being really of enormous political importance, to create a self-organised BAME organisation within the party – the unions insisted on having essentially 50% of the votes within those structures (...) we want the OMOV principle to be applied to the national structures of the BAME organisation whereas the trade unions want it to be a 50/50 split. And that really is a weakening of the self-organising nature of those structures, and we see that as a really big problem'.

The leadership, meanwhile, were unwilling to push through with any controversial packages that threatened to alienate the PLP. A LOTO aide suggested that the membership were not organised enough to force the leadership's hand, which made it difficult to resist the reactionary pressure of the PLP:

> 'I think it stalled because until Conference 2019 the leadership was substantially more advanced than the membership. The leadership was taking the lead on policy, it was pushing things forward the most, and I'm not saying the membership wasn't in the right, there just wasn't pressure from below dramatically on the leadership in the best direction. There's lots of reactionary pressure that came from the PLP and places like that' (19).

Democratic reforms risked sharpening already acute splits and the leadership were therefore reluctant to press ahead because of the risk that they might inadvertently undermine their IPC. The more they were swamped by electoral matters – and under barrage from an 'attackdog' (Cammaert et al, 2020) press – the more likely they were to shy away from reforms that threatened to provoke a retaliation from the PLP. The unions were, in essence, used as a political ballast to support the leadership's compromises.

Momentum, moreover, were also divided by the contradictory imperatives of IPC and IPD – they were at the forefront of the campaign for IPD but they were also tasked with securing Corbyn's control. It should also be noted that despite party reform forming the centrepiece of their long-term 'insider' strategy, their influence was relatively limited:

> 'Despite the advances we have made we are still quite limited. We have a certain influence within the party, let's be honest we're not that dominant and we're not a dominant trend within the Corbyn movement, we are just a part of it which has got the strongest ideological and political orientation' (7).

As a result of these various factors, members-led democratisation was relegated as a priority after the 2017 election. Another significant contextual factor was that the campaign to support a second referendum was in full flow by the 2018 party conference and was widely supported by the membership. As will be explored in more detail in Chapter Seven, this was problematic

for the leadership because it was a path they were unwilling to go down, which provided them with another incentive to retreat from members-led democratisation.

5.3. Outside the party

The beginning of this chapter emphasises that 'insider' strategies were prioritised at the expense of 'outsider' strategies after the constitution was ratified in early 2017. However, if Momentum are to be considered an example of a HLPG, 'outsider' strategies should also be deployed as part of a broader hybrid strategy. The findings outlined in this section explore the ways in which Momentum continued to utilise experimental outsider strategies alongside internal party organising[14]. Indeed, even though they were secondary, their deployment of experimental strategies outside the party is one of Momentum's distinguishing features in comparison to other Labour left factions that do not fit the definition of a HLPG.

Three different outsider strategies are explored in the section. The first part identifies three forms of protest: *electoral, fandom,* and *single-issue*. The second part outlines the findings in relation to the political education festival, The World Transformed (TWT). The third part investigates the scheme which brought the vision of the 'movement-party' closest to reality– the Community Organising Unit.

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[14] This section focuses primarily on the findings in relation to the centre of Momentum. Some local groups dedicated ample time and resource to building relationships with an eco-system of groups outside the party, as one senior organiser in Manchester explains:

> IV: 'Well, so, there's anti-fascist groups, there's a group called 0161 who do incredible anti-fascist work in Manchester and not explicitly political. Groups like Acorn who aren't explicitly political, they're about housing. Greater Manchester better Buses – campaigns like that. Shelter, the Tenants Unions Greater Manchester Housing Action. Environmental groups like Extinction Rebellion, and of course the unions, just get enough people to go along to stuff finding out who these people are, building relationships, not wanting anything at first but just maintaining those relationships and then over time just trying to collaborate on stuff. And that's taken a long time but the more you do that stuff the more people trust each other and the more you can do collectively' (22).

Three types of protest: electoral, fandom, and single-issue

Muldoon and Rye (2020) contend that Momentum represent a potentially transformative moment in redefining the relationship between parties and movements. Their 'movement-like' tactics are a 'means by which actors, within the party, could harness it to serve longer-term left-wing goals, drawing in support from new, non-traditional sources' (Muldoon and Rye, 2020: 2). However, the role ascribed to protest is not explored in the article, which, as this section will attempt to show, were often organised towards party-based or leadership goals, as Muldoon and Rye would probably expect. This section identifies three forms of protest that Momentum pursued to this end: *electoral, fandom, and single-issue*.

Momentum's first noteworthy campaign in October 2015 combined social movement tactics with traditional electoral objectives: the thesis has labelled this an *'electoral'* protest. Following Conservative changes to voter registration which resulted in an estimated 1.9 million people falling off the electoral register, Momentum launched an initiative called Democracy SOS to encourage voter registration, which targeted young people. In particular, they urged students on campuses to register, embarked on a National Day of Action, and leafletted student protestors with advice on how to vote (see Momentum, 2016a). The drive to enfranchise more young people bore fruit as a higher turnout among 18-24's at the 2017 election helped the Labour Party make some gains (see Sloan and Hemm, 2019).

Another *'electoral'* protest that Momentum co-hosted alongside the Women's Strike Assembly was the 'Fck Boris' demonstration, which was organised in Central London on the day Boris Johnson assumed office as Prime Minister (24th July 2019). The protest conveyed many of the pop-culture features of pop-socialism – the 'Fck Boris' name was taken from lyrics in Stormzy's 'Vossi Bop', the march had an atmosphere more akin to a street festival than a political protest, and a 'Boris Bus' emblazoned with the words '£350 million for the NHS'[15] led

[15] A not-so-subtle reference to Johnson's pledge that the NHS would receive £350 million a week if the electorate voted to leave the EU in the 2016 referendum

the chanting protestors round the streets of London (field notes, 2019). A whole host of movements and left parties from the broader left eco-system were in attendance: Greenpeace were reported to have blocked Johnson's car on arrival at parliament (Walker, 2019); Sisters Uncut, a feminist direct action group, were visible and audible ('Sisters! United! Will never be defeated!); and the usual SWP placards could be seen in tandem with creatively self-made placards. The protest, meanwhile, was followed by a countrywide sequence of 'fck Boris' raves.

A range of direct-action tactics usually associated with extra-parliamentary movements were on display at the protest, but they were tailored towards opposing the Prime Minister in the expectation that a General Election was on the horizon. Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell spoke at the rally, beginning his speech by bellowing out that Boris Johnson *'is dangerous. The first form of resistance is to demand a General Election. This is the first day of the resistance!'* (field notes, 2019). The protest is an example of how Momentum connected protest groups, fringe groups on the left, and the Labour Party's electoral goals across a broad left-wing network. Recent protest coalitions – including the anti-war and anti-austerity protests – have tended to oppose the Labour Party as well as the Conservatives. Protests such as this, however, aimed to strengthen the Labour Party's electoral prospects.

'*Fandom'* protests, on the other hand, were organised around Corbyn personally. An example was the protest outside of Parliament Square after the PLP passed their motion of no confidence against Corbyn in June 2016, outlined in the previous chapter. One of the organisers described the protest:

> 'the project is at its best when the largest number of people are involved, it's as mass as possible, and it's standing outside the rules of SW1 politics (...) the clearest example for me was the Monday after the referendum when there was the PLP meeting for the vote of no confidence put forward by Ann Coffey and Margaret Hodge and we had 10, 000 people outside Parliament Square which we had organised in 24 hours with just two things – an email chain with 3 or 4 of us sorting out the logistics, the police, the fire trucks and all that. And then maybe 8 activists in a flat in Bethnal Green putting in calls and audience building' (19)

Like electoral protests, *fandom* protests were a corollary of Momentum's party-facing objectives. However, in distinction from electoral protests, they were organised in the factional interests of the pop-leadership, rather than in support of the party as a whole. The proximity between celebrity culture and political leadership has added a degree of uniqueness to *fandom* protests: the leaders invoke an emotional and personalised appeal that would be expected of a popstar. The whole range of cultural phenomena in the period of 'Corbynmania' – concerts, memes, and even a festival – add to this appeal and lead to a sense of community and togetherness among supporters: They co-produce the shared values of the political community by identifying collective goals and collective opponents (Dean, 2017). In the above case, the 'enemy' was the PLP that had passed a motion of no confidence against Corbyn in the aftermath of Britain's vote to leave the EU, and the collective goal was to make sure that Corbyn remained leader and pursued the left-wing policy demands that supporters advocated.

Momentum also launched 'outsider' protests which could fit into the more conventional '*single-issue'* category – both before and after Corbyn was leader. Single issue protests are not directly connected to the leadership or to Labour's immediate electoral aims, but they do attempt to introduce left-wing goals by connecting the grassroots of the Labour Party to single-issue social movement campaigns. A clear example was the campaign against climate change throughout 2019 (see Momentum, n.d.). During this period the Labour for a Green New Deal campaign was in full force, as was Extinction Rebellion (XR), and Momentum also took different forms of action. They partnered with People and Planet to protest outside of Barclays banks to raise awareness of their funding of fossil fuel industries, and they combined this with an attempt to inspire party members to pass more climate friendly motions passed at Labour conference.

Momentum have also, formally and informally, provided various forms of support in trade union disputes. They mobilised members to join the picket lines of striking Picturehouse cinema workers in late 2016 and in mid-2017; supported the McDonalds strike in 2017 and 2018 by

posting online videos and raising awareness of the dispute at TWT; and supported protesting CWU workers in 2017. In addition, after the research window Momentum launched a keynote Eviction Resistance Campaign in conjunction with the London Renters Union and Acorn (see Rodgers, 2020). This represents further evidence of the extent to which Momentum seek to utilise different forms of social movement activism including electorally based protest, conventional non-class based single-issue movements, traditional trade union strikes, as well as newer non-labour based union activism.

Political education / The World Transformed

TWT was launched in September 2016 to equip activists with the knowledge and skills required to render them effective political actors capable of challenging elites in their own party and outside. It is a long-term, rather than a short term, attempt to build forms of social power outside the party that could ultimately benefit a left-wing Labour Party. It is billed as a political education festival of arts, culture, discussion groups and music, and has grown in popularity every year to cement its place as the most well attended fringe event at the Labour Party conference. The below organiser captures the inspiration behind the festival:

> ‘it was one of those Beavis and Butthead moments when we were like wouldn't it be really good if we had this festival, and it wasn't really about politics, but we could have music and art and theatre and dance and then we had some political stuff, and we kind of had this brainstorm about how cool it would be and next week I got a call from (…) saying remember that festival we talked about? We are gonna do it – it's called The World Transformed’ (8).

Momentum’s initial staff members were responsible for coining the idea of a festival. However, they did not take the lead in organising it because their focus was to help deliver Corbyn’s victory in the second leadership campaign[16]. Instead, a small team was assembled which included some Momentum staff members and volunteers alongside an assortment of people from an organisation called Brick Lane Debates and a cooperative called Common

[16] Momentum launched their own training network following the success of their ‘persuasive conversations’ programme during the 2017 election campaign, it was a lower priority than immediate party-based objectives during the research window.

Knowledge, academics, and other volunteers. This group went on to book the venues and organise the festival in time for the 2016 party conference (5). Although the festival was relatively independent from Momentum, they were connected: '*it's not like there isn't a link, we are kind of cousins if you like, but at the same time they don't have any organisational control'* (8). They were both part of a story which began with the Corbyn leadership campaign:

> 'Both Momentum and TWT grew out of the moment of Jeremy being elected leader of the Labour Party and trying to capitalise on the moment of all this new energy and dynamism. I think they've taken different calls, but they are part of the same story (…) but a culture of freedom within Momentum is really what we wanted to pursue the whole time. If people have an idea or an initiative, we wanted to try and enable them to go and do it and not to have loads of tight central control but let people experiment and take initiative and build a political culture through that, which of course has its downsides but overall has been very very beneficial' (5)

One of the participants stressed that the independence from Momentum enabled the festival to take on a more 'horizontal' ethos which benefited the movement in the long run because of its contrast to Labour's more bureaucratic procedures. Its independence furnishes it with the space to establish a more radical and participatory experience, with panels such as 'Group Dynamic and Movement-building', 'Why the Labour Party needs Socialist Women', and 'Class Justice' (field notes, 2018, 2019). Participants were urged to actively take part in conventional political panels on Labour's economic policy, workshops to develop environmental policy, poetry sessions led by famous pop-culture figures (Jordan Stephens of Rizzle Kicks in one case), live podcasts, political games, quizzes, chat shows, and parties late into the night. There was a prefigurative dimension to the festival:

> 'It's deliberately fun. Good stuff is going on and it is an attempt to prefiguratively shape the politics that we want to see – this is how we think the party should function and how we think society should function' (24).

A second striking feature of TWT was the breadth of workshops and panels on a diversity of topics, including the role of education in the Labour Party, the importance of the Green New Deal in tacking climate change, how to support strike action, the latest research from progressive thinktanks, and so forth. The sharing of such educational resources aimed to equip

individuals with the tools to go back into their communities and challenge elite common sense in pursuit of transformative goals.

Additionally, organisers attempted – more so in 2019 than in 2018 based on observation – to link the workshops to the Labour Party directly: participants designed policies at interactive workshops that would be passed on to senior members of the shadow cabinet, and a sequence of events were held which geared activists up towards preparing for the upcoming General Election. This was an attempt to set the agenda for the policies that they hoped would eventually filter into the party manifesto: '*we want to shape the policy agenda of the party. The ideas that we were talking about in the first TWT made it into the manifesto – they travelled right the way from the fringe into the manifesto'* (24).

The Community Organising Unit

The COU was launched in January 2018, with forty staff members, to work with 'CLPs and trade unions in key marginal constituencies, as well as so-called "held back" (de-industrialised and abandoned) constituencies where Labour had lost its trust' (Klug and Rees, 2019: 132/133). It was arguably the most 'movement-like' party reform that was introduced under Corbyn – and dismantled by Starmer in late 2020[17] – having been tasked with organising among social movement campaigns, renters unions, grassroots trade unions and local community groups. One participant explained the thinking behind the COU:

> 'The community organising unit was a tacit admission that Corbynism only cut through in some places (...) Corbynism is hugely successful in the metropolitan areas. In lots of areas that simply wasn't the case: smaller towns and smaller cities didn't cut through. And obviously the West Midlands has lots of places with that profile – deindustrialised areas didn't cut through, leave voting areas didn't cut through. So, community organising was an understanding that if we're going to change that we have to go to those areas and work them over, work them hard. Find out what the issues are, find out what the problems with the party are. So, we needed to understand that. To be honest with you I spend a large amount of my time just building a picture of what was going on, just talking to as many people as possible. Meeting as many people from civil society, members of the party, from

[17] The scrapping of the COU was described by one left commentator as a 'war on grassroots politics' (Blackburn, 2021). Corbyn later claimed that the party bureaucracy put up more resistance to the COU than any other reform he tried to introduce during his time as leader.

> businesses in the area and getting an understanding of why the Labour Party was something people were either indifferent to or disliked' (11)

In its short lifespan the Unit organised hundreds of events up and down the country in an attempt to connect the party to local communities and gauge a firmer idea of what a Labour government could do for them. Momentum was one inspiration for the initiative and had close connections to some of the organisers, particularly with regards to the delivery of training courses and social media campaigns. The aim was to encourage participation and engagement at the base of the Labour Party in order to strengthen the linkages between the party grassroots and initiatives taking place outside of the party.

For its advocates, the COU was a desperately needed initiative which aimed to connect the Labour Party to community groups and social movements outside of the electoral cycle. It would build forms of social power outside the party which promised to revitalise their electoral fortunes by enlarging progressive constituencies, which in the long run would deliver a long-term source of support for the party. Labour would be transformed from an electoral vehicle seen *'for a few weeks at election time'* (11) into a mass movement-party to sustain Corbyn's legacy. To its fiercest critics, however, it was a factional battering ram stacked with left-wing cadres, with no purpose other than completing Corbyn's takeover of the party, which in the process was costing the party a fortune. It is perhaps no surprise then that the COU was scrapped when Starmer took over the party.

5.4. Party appendage

This section explores the third dimension of Momentum's relationship to Corbyn and the Labour Party – their role as a party *appendage*. This transpired mostly during election campaigns in which Momentum were formally independent of the official party campaign but in support of it (see Dommett and Temple, 2018). They expended considerably more resources supporting Labour during elections, alongside mobilising for party reform and internal elections, than they did on social movement mobilisations.

Electioneering does not fit neatly into either side of the 'insider' and 'outsider' distinction in the pressure group literature – Momentum remained formally independent of the main party campaign but were integrated into it and in many respects an extension of it. However, their electioneering does still constitute an attempt to 'influence the formulation and implementation of public policy' (Grant, 1999: 9) without seeking office, which is an essential part of the definition of a pressure group. Momentum's optimal outcome was for the Labour Party to become the majority party and form a government, and then introduce their preferred legislation. Corbyn's leadership encouraged many Momentum activists to take part in an election campaign for the first time because they were more invested than ever before in the idea of a Labour government.

The 2016 local and mayoral elections were Momentum's first foray into an election outside of the Labour Party. They mobilised their membership to canvass for the elections and launched a website – 'where's Zac's tax?' – to campaign against Conservative London mayoral candidate Zac Goldsmith. Shortly after the elections Momentum joined Labour in the Remain camp in the EU referendum, under the umbrella group Another Europe is Possible (AEIP). Some members wanted Momentum to remain neutral in the campaign – the Labour left has traditionally been critical of the EU – but the National Committee voted to campaign for Remain in line with the views of most Momentum members.

Their first major nationwide campaign, however, was the 2017 general election, which is the main focus of this section. Labour was of course the dominant partner in this relationship: the party selects the candidates; plans and organises the official campaign; decides where to send resources; has many more staff who are well resourced and experienced; and has a wider reach. Momentum, in comparison, played a supporting role which aimed to enhance Labour's chances with a more truncated but precise and experimental approach. One participant used an interesting metaphor to describe their role:

> 'In WW2 when they were preparing for D-day the American's built all the tanks, the UK didn't build any. So, the UK focused on all these little bits of technologies that

> they could attach to tanks to make tanks more useful. So, they invented this big floating skirt that you could put round a tank that would turn it into a boat, or they invented these attachments that would throw hay bales into ditches, all this kind of shit. And they were called Hobart's funnies. And this was a great metaphor to think through what we were trying to do in the general election. We don't have the resources to build tanks, we can't do all the data collection and don't have access to all of it, what we can do at Momentum is play with the funny ideas and generate smart and unusual innovative things we can apply to campaigning.' (25)

Momentum played a key part in Labour's defiance of most commentators' expectations (Dorey, 2017). The methods they used were inspired by the model of 'Big Organising' (a model of 'distributed organising') that had been successfully pioneered by Bernie Sanders' in his 2016 presidential campaign (see Bond and Exley, 2016). A team of organisers from Bernie Sanders' campaign travelled to the UK to organise 40 'persuasive conversation' training sessions in preparation for the election (Momentum, 2017; see Klug and Rees, 2016). A leading Momentum organiser explained Big Organising to me:

> 'It's based on the idea that with an open plan, with trust in volunteers, and using digital platforms you can mobilise large numbers of people to do things together (...) Key tenets of it are openness and trust, make the whole organisation as open as possible, if volunteers want to give time you empower them, you can take positions of responsibility, that can go right the way down to organising events that other people attend – so that's a way of scaling (...) There's also a big principle of centralisation in the sense that it isn't democratic in that everyone gets to feed into the strategy, they don't but it is democratic in the sense that everyone gets to get involved and if you do lots of work you end up in an operational position because there often isn't a staff/member block (...) that said, distributed organising is really about, the questions round it are like: how can you run organisations on distributed organising principles without intense campaigns going on? How can you maintain volunteer's activity? What campaigns are going on so how could you make that organising technique interact with others?' (24).

Big Organising relies on a centralised but open plan that is distributed to volunteers who are encouraged to self-organise according to the plan whilst taking on leadership roles so that they can feed back into the strategy. This combination of centralised control alongside a culture of participation and openness is tailor-made for Momentum's centralised but pluralistic network that has a lot of volunteers but relatively few resources, and light infrastructure, outside of the membership. The leadership group can circulate a plan which is adhered to by the membership, who are responsible for coordinating and scaling the campaign. The main

aim was to mobilise their volunteers in a way that could enhance the Labour Party's more conventional campaign.

Momentum's autonomy from the official campaign and openness with their members and supporters equipped them with several advantages. In particular, they gained widespread appraisal for mass canvassing mobilisations that helped secure victory in key marginals that the party HQ refused to target because of Labour's poor polling, and for digital campaigns which connected Labour to new audiences, particularly young people, to help turn the tide in Labour's favour. The remainder of this section will explore how they coupled their digital strategy with a more conventional ground campaign.

The social media strategy: the 'connective' dimension

Bennett and Segerberg (2012) create a distinction between 'collective' and 'connective' action, which may help to frame how Momentum combined their long-term digital strategy (a largely outsider strategy) with a more conventional ground campaign (a largely insider strategy) during election times. Collective action refers to conventional action taken by robust centralised institutions that coordinate participation to achieve clear goals from the top-down. 'Connective action', on the other hand, describes how social media has affected the logic of collective action. Organisations in the background may harness the network through inclusive and personalised communications, but it is less centrally coordinated than collective action, and more conducive to 'self-organisation' without a clearly defined leadership. Social media enables 'co-production' and 'co-distribution' of shared content by individuals which scales up the network, with more freedom for personal expression tailored towards each individual's social network (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012: 752). Individuals are mobilised through the identification of common problems, which are shared through 'personalised communication', simple slogans such as 'we are the 99 per cent', and the sharing of themes which are easily spreadable on social media platforms (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012: 744/745).

Bennett and Segerberg (2012) describe connective action as a distinct logic with a different dynamic to the more conventional logic of collective action. However, in a distributed model of organising, connective action can be used to compliment collective action goals. In the case at hand, for example, Momentum utilised personalised forms of communication on social media to scale up the left's online visibility outside of and during election campaigns (see Dennis, 2020). Supporters and like-minded individuals independently share the content on social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and Whatsapp, which enhances and grows the 'movement'. This loosely integrated network could then be mobilised at moments when collective action was needed, such as internal elections, or in other cases, general election campaigns.

The idea of connective and collective action establishes a useful way of understanding Momentum's election campaign strategy. Taking the former first, on election day Momentum sent out a chain-message on Whatsapp asking people to go out and vote, which was circulated by a reported 400, 000 people (Rhodes, 2019). They consistently shared videos on Facebook and Twitter which provocatively targeted the Conservatives whilst conveying Corbynism as an insurgent 'movement' (Dennis, 2020). One video, called '*Daddy, why do you hate me?*', which was viewed 7.6 million times, featured an imaginary conversation between a father and his daughter about why he had access to free school meals and university grants but she did not (see Rhodes, 2019). Another video which reached a third of all Facebook users involved a firefighter, a care worker, and a policeman that turned to the camera and stated, 'I am paid too much', followed by a wealthy man in a suit and bowler hat turning to the camera and declaring 'I am not paid enough' (Panitch and Leys, 2020: 205). Their humorous and quirky social media output communicated a socialist discourse in a common-sense way to a broad audience:

> 'If you think the 2017 election was because the public actually agreed with a lot of policies, that's where the genuine centre-ground is and this would have improved people's material interest, then Momentum were just like we need to sanitise and rehabilitate socialism in the eyes of the public and that I think is the better route - it is to define it as the new common sense' (26).

Momentum popularised Corbynism through social media with a vision that reached computers, laptops and mobile phones across the country, shaping the lasting image of the election (from the perspective of participants). As Momentum's national coordinator put it:

> 'We produced one which reached 7.9 million people, which was 1 in 3 of every Facebook Users in the UK. So, Momentum clearly made a difference to the look and feel of that election and some of the energy, which over time did play a part. Now how do we quantify that, that's a bit difficult to say' (14).

In distinction from Labour, Momentum was free to experiment with innovative and interesting videos because their operational independence allowed them to be much more flexible and spontaneous, which had clear advantages. As one participant puts it:

> 'We didn't have to go through this extensive process where we got signed off from 7 different departments or whatever. That allowed us to be really flexible. In a way Labour had this good thing going for it with this "party within a party" thing' (25).

Outside of campaign times, Momentum's use of social media connected activists by promoting a 'movement-like' image that made activists feel as though they were part of a collective group of like-minded people struggling for transformative change against the establishment. Their popularisation of Corbyn's 'authentic', 'principled' and 'anti-establishment' image enabled them to reach out to a vast network of social media 'fans' despite their light infrastructure, and these supporters were more likely to either vote for the party, share supportive communications online, or even get involved in the party campaign. This contributed to the so-called 'Youthquake' of 2017, which involved 'unprecedented rates of youth support for the Labour Party', 'high levels of youth activism in the campaign', and strong evidence of an increase in the youth turnout (Sloam and Henn, 2019: 109).

One of the main aims of connecting activists on social media was to inspire them to participate in the more conventional 'collective' ground campaign – volunteers are the main resource in a Big Organising model. To this end, Momentum launched some of the digital tools which supported the Labour's election campaign by establishing a transmission belt for activists to

move from the online world into key election campaigns. The most notable was the freely accessible MyNearestMarginal (MNM) app, which directed canvassers to strategically important constituencies and supplied them with contact details of lead organisers. MNMs interactivity and openness was a conduit between enthused supporters that had engaged with the 'movement' online and activists involved in Labour's ground campaign: 100, 000 individuals used the map during the campaign, four times Momentum's individual membership at the time (Klug and Rees, 2016). It established a pathway for activists to support constituency campaigns that were most in need, as Momentum's National Coordinator explained in an interview:

> 'If you were a new joiner who joined because of Corbyn and weren't having a great time in their local party, maybe they weren't feeling welcome, maybe they just didn't like the party. Maybe people who come from a movement background have no interest in going to party meetings (...) I remember walking past Battersea CLP office and being told in the early part of the campaign, oh we're not campaigning here. So that's what the party machine was doing because at this point the machine was not working in perfect tandem with the leadership, but if you looked at MNM you would be told that your nearest marginal is Battersea and so it gave people some direction' (14).

MNMs capacity to establish a pathway for supporters to get involved in the campaign was one reason for its success: 2017 was Labour's biggest mobilisation in recent memory and MNM played a part in involving supporters who might not otherwise have been involved (Rhodes, 2019). This is a key example of how Momentum used experimental innovations 'outside' the party to compliment a more conventional campaign and boost Labour's electoral fortunes.

<u>The Ground Campaign: the 'collective' dimension</u>

One demographic weakness at the 2017 election campaign was that activists and supporters enthused by Corbynism were concentrated around metropolitan safe seats. The skewed nature of this demographic was exacerbated by the decision of Labour HQ – for all intents and purposes operating independently and even opposed to LOTO at this stage – to avoid supporting marginal constituencies which they thought were a lost cause because of Labour's

poor polling and expected heavy defeat (see Pogrund and Maguire, 2020). Momentum, however, alongside the leadership, decided to run a more aggressive campaign that targeted marginal constituencies in the hope that they could make some unexpected gains (see Goes, 2018). Their social media content had inspired thousands of new activists, but they now had to ensure that volunteers were channelled into the marginals that were at risk of being gained by a competing party.

Social media helped to mobilise a network of members and supporters and MNM directed them to the local ground campaigns where they were most needed, even including carpool services so that motivated activists could travel to constituencies that they would be most useful in. Lead organisers in local campaigns sometimes received hundreds of activists to support them as election day approached, and they were equipped with the tools to provide training, as well as organise canvassing and phonebanking sessions. Often these local groups *'went dark'* (25) to national organisers, with freedom to organise their own campaigns autonomously and collaborate with the local Labour Party however they saw fit. In some constituencies, Momentum turned a handful of activists into hundreds, which had a tangible impact in marginal seats that Labour eventually won. Although it is hard to quantify Momentum's exact impact, participants point to some examples where they made an important contribution to a positive result:

> 'We do know there are certain seats, for example Battersea, where it hadn't been in the Labour Party's original plans because people didn't think we could win it. Momentum activists led by a young councillor who is a Momentum member mobilised in Battersea – we organised the door-knocking, we organised mass canvassing sessions where we did persuasive conversation training as well in the early part of the campaign explaining to people how to knock on the door, which sounds ridiculous but lots of people haven't done it before and we were told in Battersea and some other places that we went to that we were the first people that had knocked on their doors in years because parts of Labour and become quite moribund really or there were sort of no go areas. So I think that Momentum played a really significant role, particularly in mobilising younger people' (14).

Persuasive conversations training, which I attended in 2019, was a particularly useful innovation for preparing activists for political conversations on the doorstep that could change

voters' minds, something which the Labour Party has been slow to embrace (fieldnotes, 2019; see Momentum, n.da). After the election Momentum cited their successful mobilisation on the doorstep as a key reason for the reversal of Corbynism's fortune during the six-week campaign:

> 'Between 2010 and 2017, around half of voters changed their party loyalty. Around 30,000 people don't vote in any constituency – these are people who can be persuaded to vote for us. In canvassing, around 7% of people can be persuaded with a leaflet, 30% can be persuaded on the first doorstep conversation, 55% on the second and 70% on the third' (Momentum, 2019: 3).

Momentum was often described by participants as the campaign's only spark of '*political energy*' (11) in areas where Labour was not strong. Momentum groups were often mobile enough to travel to places they would be most useful:

> 'my local Momentum group ran loads and loads of volunteer phone banks in the 2016 campaign, in 2017 we travelled all around the Northwest travelling to marginal seats trying to win them. And thankfully near to Stockport, Laura Smith got in with a 47% majority' (9).

One senior organiser in Manchester – a city with a high concentration of Momentum activists and safe Labour seats – also described how they organised minibuses to send out hundreds of activists to key marginals around the city (22). Participants were certainly of the view, whether rightly or wrongly, that they had played their part in dragging Labour to a respectable result.

Momentum vastly improved their methods in the 2019 election – refining their digital tools, and running a more expansive, well-resourced, and professionalised campaign – but received more acclaim in 2017 because there was an element of novelty and the result was better (24). In both elections they supported the Labour Party by using innovative and experimental methods to encourage their network of followers, supporters and members to participate in the election campaign. Most notably, they built a big social media profile to grow the 'movement' online by connecting supporters and developed various real-world and digital tools

which established a transmission belt for activists to participate in the ground campaign. The HLPG provides a useful way of conceptualising how these different strategies were synthesised within the campaign.

Conclusion

This chapter has utilised the concept of the HLPG to answer the second research question – how should the relationship between Momentum, Corbyn, and the Labour Party be understood? The first section explored Momentum's main strategies inside the Labour Party. Their dual imperative was to cement the leadership's (and therefore the left's) IPC at the same time as rolling out further forms of IPD. Whilst they were able to pursue these sometimes contradictory objectives for a period of time, IPD was eventually aborted amidst bitter internal struggles over Brexit and significant obstacles emanating from within the party. The second section explored Momentum's extra-parliamentary 'outsider' strategies. These were gradually mitigated the as Momentum became integrated into factional struggles inside the party; however, aspects of movementism did remain as evidenced by the occasional use of direct action and political education. The third section explored when Momentum was a party appendage. At the 2017 election they combined connective and collective action to mobilise supporters – helping to organise Labour's biggest campaign in recent memory – and this played a part in swaying the election in Labour's favour.

The next chapter turns to the third research question – how do participants in Momentum understand Corbynism? The chapter will explore how the pop-socialism can help scholarship conceptualise how Corbynism gathered the support of a broad membership during its rise between the 2015 leadership contest and the 2017 general election.

6.
Understanding the Rise of Corbynism from the Perspective of Participants

This chapter contains some material that has previously been published in a peer reviewed academic journal (Ward and Guglielmo, 2021).

> *'If you talk to Corbyn's most ardent supporters, it's not the man himself but the project of democratising the party that really sets their eyes alight. The Labour party, they emphasise, was founded not by politicians but by a social movement. Over the past century it has gradually become like all the other political parties – personality (and of course, money) based, but the Corbyn project is first and foremost to make the party a voice for social movements once again, dedicated to popular democracy (as trades unions themselves once were). This is the immediate aim. The ultimate aim is the democratisation not just of the party but of local government, workplaces, society itself'* (Graeber, 2016)
>
> *'With new forms of democratic public ownership, driven by investment in the technology and industries of the future, with decent jobs, education and housing for all with local services run by and for people not outsourced to faceless corporations. That's not backwards looking. It's the very opposite. It's the Socialism of the 21st Century'* (Corbyn, 2016)

Introduction

This chapter utilises the concept of pop-socialism to analyse how and why Corbynism gathered the support of participants in Momentum. In doing so, the chapter hopes to elicit some insight into why it made its unexpected rise between the 2015 leadership contest and the 2017 general election. The first section provides a brief overview of Corbynism's rise and reiterates the three main dimensions of pop-socialism: (1) the emergence of a 'pop-star' leader forges a space for the convergence of a plurality of ideological traditions from movements and parties; (2) appeals to a 'people' unite these traditions together and provide a justification for the pursuit of popular-democratic reforms; and (3) the appeals form the basis of an attempt to renew a conventional vision of democratic socialism.

The remainder of the chapter uses this as a framework to explore the politics of Corbynism's support (Gamble, 1994). The second section expands on the themes discussed in Chapter Four to examine why participants continued to support Corbyn personally, the 'pop-star'

leader. Three interconnected discourses particularly stood out in the findings: (1) Corbyn was an 'authentic' left-wing politician on the 'right side of history'; (2) he was the personification of a 'movement'; and he was (3) an anti-establishment 'outsider'. Together these discourses forged a space for the convergence of a multitude of traditions by establishing who Corbyn's 'people' were (the 'movement'), who the 'elite' were (anti-establishment 'outsider'), and what they collectively stood for and against ('authentic' left-wing politician).

The third section investigates the extent to which Corbynism's appeals to a 'people' were seen by participants as a restoration of democratic socialism or a rupture with it and explores whether this should be considered 'popular-democratic' or 'authoritarian populist'. The findings show that participants anticipated that Corbynism would renew the conventional class-based claims of democratic socialism in the long-term *and* introduce a raft of popular-democratic initiatives, in particular party democracy. This established a basis to appeal to traditional left-wing groups in the labour movement together with newer activists from the anti-austerity movement that were less accustomed to organised party politics.

The final section explores the extent to which this was seen as a radical form of politics by participants – it is important to consider this point because some scholars have presented Corbynism as a radical shift whereas others have stressed its lineage within the conventional traditions of the Labour Party. The findings indicate that participants supported Corbynism because it promised to deliver a standard social democratic package in the short and medium term, but in the long-term constituted the first step towards a more radical socialist transformation.

6.1. How can pop-socialism help to explain Corbyn's rise from the 2015 leadership contest to the 2017 general election?

The result of the 2019 general election is always likely to eclipse the memory of Corbyn's dramatic and unexpected rise during the first two years of his leadership. He overcame 100/1 odds to become leader in 2015, defeated Owen Smith in a second leadership contest in 2016,

oversaw a ballooning membership which more than doubled to around 540, 000 at its peak (see Audickas et al, 2018), and exceeded all expectations at the 2017 election to increase Labour's share of the vote by nearly 10%, the highest such rise since 1931 and the first time that the party had increased its representation in the House of Commons since 1997 (Dorey, 2017; Goes, 2018). Corbyn had thrust the left back into the mainstream of British politics for the first time in a generation. Following the 2017 result, they were credibly portrayed as a 'government-in-waiting' (Corbyn, 2017b), a far cry from their 'darkest hour' in the aftermath of the 2015 election defeat (McDonnell, 2015).

On the one hand, it would be an overstatement to suggest that Corbynism alone was responsible for the left's upsurge during this period. The majority of the PLP and party bureaucracy were not fellow travellers. Labour's mass membership, meanwhile, may have been inspired by Corbyn but not necessarily enough to join Momentum: Labour saw around 300, 000 new members but Momentum's membership peaked at around 40, 000. Additionally, Keir Starmer's victory in 2020 in favour of 'continuity Corbyn' candidate Rebecca Long-Bailey illustrates that the membership was not as monolithically 'Corbynista' as many commentators assumed at the time. Finally, there were several factors at play in the 2017 election result other than Corbynism's brand of politics: a successful campaign; Theresa May's plummeting popularity; a poor Conservative campaign; and an opportune electoral moment as public attitudes shifted against austerity and in favour of redistribution for the first time in decades (Goes, 2018: 68).

On the other hand, it would be an understatement to suggest that Corbynism was in no way responsible for the left's ascent during this period. The Labour left had come from relative obscurity to the centre of British politics during Corbyn's dramatic rise to the leadership. Labour's inflated membership remained overwhelmingly supportive of the direction of Corbyn's leadership, and his ability to stay in control of a largely hostile party machine was in no small part due to Momentum's rearguard action. The 2017 manifesto (Labour Party, 2017a), meanwhile, proved spectacularly popular amongst the electorate, with its launch in

mid-May sparking Labour's upswing in the polls. Finally, whilst Corbyn was never the most popular leader, his improving ratings alongside Theresa May's plummeting popularity was a decisive factor in swinging the election in Labour's favour (Goes, 2018).

The rest of the chapter utilises the idea of pop-socialism to explore why participants continued to support Corbynism during this period. This approach cannot possibly explain all the underlying factors in its success the 2017 election or its support in the broader Labour membership. It can, however, shed light on how and why he gathered the support of the Momentum membership, and as an extension of that, provide some insight into how it appealed to supporters across the Labour Party and the broader extra-parliamentary left in the manner envisaged by Stuart Hall. To recapitulate, the main dimensions of pop-socialism are: (1) the emergence of a 'pop-star' leader forges a space for the convergence of a plurality of ideological traditions from movements and parties; (2) appeals to a 'people' unite these traditions together and provide a justification for the pursuit of popular-democratic reforms; and (3) the appeals form the basis of an attempt to renew a conventional vision of democratic socialism. This conceptualisation aims to clarify how Corbynism fused traditional class politics with newer popular-democratic initiatives drawn from the extra-parliamentary left to develop a relatively consistent and coherent politics of support. The next section will turn to analysing the first dimension of pop-socialism – the pop-star leader.

6.2. The pop-star leader: why did participants support Corbyn?

Just over two weeks after the 2017 general election, Corbyn took to Glastonbury's Pyramid Stage to deliver a speech to the tens of thousands in attendance. As had come to be expected, the baying audience welcomed his entrance on to the stage with a chant of 'Oh Jeremy Corbyn' to the riff of the popular White Stripes song 'Seven Nations Army': a rendition that was first heard in May 2017 at a Reverend Makers performance at Tranmere Rovers Football Club, before spreading around the country throughout the summer to be heard at various music venues, football grounds, and festivals. This was the pinnacle of the period of 'Corbynmania'

that had swept over the country in the previous two years, which included a range of cultural phenomena such as the #Grime4Corbyn movement, the Labour Live festival in June 2018 (although this turned out to be a damp squib), the 'JC4PM' pop star tour, and a whole selection of fan art and surreal memes (see Dean, 2017: 417/418).

His reception at Glastonbury was the zenith of a 'celebrification' (24) which began in earnest during the 2015 leadership campaign (see Dean, 2017). Timing played a big part. The three 'tributaries' that Nuuns (2018) identified had gradually widened since the previous leadership election in 2010. Corbyn happened to get on the ballot just when the anti-austerity movement was looking towards the party for representation, and the left of the Labour Party and the labour movement were looking outwards to harness the movement to the benefit of the institutional left. In addition, changes to the rules for Labour leadership contests may have helped Corbyn – the previous electoral college concealed some support for left candidates in the membership.

Nevertheless, there can be little doubt that Corbyn's popularity soared in comparison to John McDonnell in 2007 and Diane Abbott in 2010[18]. Even supporters recognised that Corbynism was at least in part a personality-driven project. The fandom that Corbyn enthused over the subsequent years was a qualitative shift that cannot be entirely explained by the socio-political climate and changes to the leadership rules (see Dean, 2017). The following participant explains why Corbyn inspired them to join the Labour Party and Momentum:

> 'BW: So you feel like he actually shaped your views?
>
> 'Yes. Yes he definitely did. He is somebody that can inspire. He inspired me to say okay the Labour Party is a place where you can come and have those conversations now. After that I found this thing called Momentum and I had no clue what it was about. And basically I went to a political meeting where there was Christine Shawcroft. She was very prominent in Momentum then. And she was talking about Momentum this, and we do that, and I thought well this sounds interesting, this was the first meeting I went to. I then talked to a friend of mine and then at something like 3am (…) you know what I will take a chance and join it so I signed up' (4)

[18] Diane Abbott received only 7.3% of the vote of the Labour Party membership in 2010.

Corbyn seemed to be welcomed to every rally by hundreds and even thousands of supporters. The proximity between Corbyn and his 'fans' at these rallies – who have become more personally and emotionally connected as the gap between celebrity culture and politics has narrowed – enables both to affirm a sense of association and comradeship with groups that share similar normative values (Dean, 2017). Momentum aimed to provide an expression for these supporters: 'many were not involved in organised politics previously; some did not see Labour as a space for their political expression. But then a candidate arrived who not only championed the causes they identified with, but who was also trustworthy' (Klug et al, 2016: 38). A Momentum staff member used the helpful metaphor of 'reverse Jenga' (25) to describe how the leader was the first part put in place, unusually, and the organisational base had to be built from that starting point:

> 'You've got a Jenga tower and you've got the leadership office at the top but everything else down here is shaky as fuck and you have to shove things in to firm it up. So the limitations I was mostly interested in was how to we shore this up, how do we build this organisational base, this vast base for socialism, having already taken control of the leadership'.

The remainder of the section draws upon the interviews and participant observation to flesh out some of the reasons for Corbyn's support in Momentum. Three key narratives that sustained his popularity are identified: (1) that he was an 'authentic' left-wing politician on the 'right side of history'; (2) that he was the personification of a broader 'movement'; and (3) that he was an anti-establishment 'outsider'. Together these narratives delineated Corbyn's 'people' (the 'movement'), the 'elite' that they were collectively opposed to (anti-establishment 'outsider'), and what they stood for and against ('authentic' left-wing politician). Sustaining these narratives enabled Corbyn to forge a shared space for the convergence of left-wing traditions.

An 'authentic' left-wing leader

From my observations and interviews there is ample evidence that the causes Corbyn had stood for throughout his career – anti-war, anti-imperialist, anti-racist, anti-austerity, socialist and environmentalist causes – were held up as proof by supporters that he was consistent in his views' (12) and had been on the 'right side of history' (6) throughout his career. Equally as important as the left-wing substance of these causes was the perception that he had seemingly never veered from them regardless of the context. One of Momentum's initial steering committee members explains how activists in the student movement viewed Corbyn:

> 'Everyone knows this man was on the right side of history even when it wasn't popular to be so. He was very clearly extremely personally principled and had stood by these movements. I remember when – I can't remember whether it was Jeremy Corbyn or John McDonnell – who on the night of one of the major protests, I stood next to him as he climbed into the window of SOAS occupation because they couldn't get through the doors, it was one of them that climbed through the windows. You know John McDonnell very closely allied to all of the stuff we were doing around living wage workers struggle on campuses, so if you are a student activist you know these guys and you know you can trust them' (6).

His attendance on the 'picket lines' (6) added to the so-called 'myth' that he was a trustworthy leader who put 'principle before politics'. His history of rebellion against his own party, which included defying the whip a record 428 times in the 1997-2010 Labour governments, added to the narrative. It instilled him with an air of transparency and openness which was seen as a rare virtue in modern day politics – no other politician compared – and so activists saw no reason to believe that he would veer from this path if he became leader.

Participants were prompted to view Corbyn vicariously – as an activist-leader – because he had championed the same causes as them and participated in many of the same pickets, rallies, protests and movements (also see Dean and Maiguashca, 2020). This inspired some participants to join a party they previously viewed as hostile to the left:

> 'Up to 2004 I had always voted Labour no matter what even under Blair but then when he lied to the British people and had that illegal war then I just thought this is not right I don't want to go out and vote, so I didn't vote. But then fast forward to Corbyn and I knew he had been a prominent activist because I remember him

> talking to the IRA to bring peace to Ireland, he was actually heavily criticised but he was one of those MPs who went and spoke to Nelson Mandela and all that kind of stuff, and I thought well he is probably somebody who I can get behind, and then when there was talk about him getting on the ballot for the leadership thought oh man he has got to get on he's got to get on (...) it's just his whole attitude, he was speaking something different. He wasn't talking about penalising the working class, or anybody. There are many of us who were on that edge. You could be one accident away and then you're on social security and you need that support. If you have been paying in the state, you should not have to go and prove yourself. There should be support to get you back into work so that's what I do think Corbyn believes, he doesn't believe in punishing people' (4).

An important aspect of the theory of 'politicising fandom' is that the communities are distinctly political: Corbyn personified 'a particular vision of socio-political change, in opposition to, rather than merely distinct from, some aspect of wider society as it is presently constituted' (Dean, 2017: 415). Supporters identified what they collectively stood for and against by narrating him as an 'authentic' politician that stood alongside them for several left-wing causes. Far from the passive relationship that this is often purported to be, supporters from a variety of traditions *actively* supported Corbyn because they recognised their common agreement on issues as diverse as climate change, party democracy, feminism, and war. Moreover, his activist biography nurtured the belief that he would continue to pursue these causes whilst leader of the party. This cemented a level of trust in Corbyn that cultivated a *shared* sense of community between supporters (Dean, 2017).

<u>The Corbyn 'movement'</u>

One of the prevailing narratives that enabled Momentum to maintain support throughout the research window was the shared view that Corbyn was the figurehead of a collective 'movement'. One of Momentum's founders, for example, depicts how Corbyn's leadership helped bring different groups together into a 'movement':

> BW: 'what was it you think that bound these different groups of activists together?'
>
> 'I think it was Jeremy. Any movement needs shouldn't be dependent on one figure and it's not because of a disempowering top-down hierarchical mentality of like "oh Jeremy he's the great leader". But it just so happened that his character, his position, his level of experience, and what he was offering at a particular time in history, enabled a coming together of a range of different groups within the left

> around the potential to transform the Labour Party into a party that could come up with a platform to govern that would make a huge difference in improving people's lives going forwards. It was also about bringing lots of people into politics, it was a moment that brought together those different groups – and most excitingly people new to politics people that had never been involved before' (5)

Some participants understood that Corbynism had as much to do with a '*very small left*' projecting *a lot of power*' (25) as it did with a movement. However, the 'movement' narrative was based on certain realities. Supporters from a multitude of traditions, including current and former party members, anti-war groups, grassroots trade unions, climate change campaigners, anti-austerity activists, anti-racist activists, and feminist activists, now converged around the Corbyn leadership in a manner analogous to the mainstream definition of a social movement as a network of people engaged in collective and conflictual action (Della Porta and Diani, 2006: 20).

The 'movement', moreover, equated to the 'people' of Corbynism. They came from a range of traditions and had a plurality of reasons for supporting Corbyn, but the idea of a 'movement' instilled the feeling that they were 'in it together'. Moreover, Corbyn's leadership team actively nurtured the perception that the 'movement' was acting on behalf of the 'people' by utilising a left populist communications strategy from around the end of 2016. The move was confirmed by a LOTO aide:

> 'Seamus used to say – if you are playing a sport the more left-wing you are the more it's tilted. Let's say this is a football match – the more left wing you are it's like that [uses hands to gesture a slope slanting steeply downwards to the left] and if you're less left wing it's like that [hands indicate a flat pitch] and if you're right wing it's like that [hands gesture a slope slanting steeply downwards to the right]. It's a really good analogy. So Jeremy's like so we're like this [hands gesture a comically vertical slope]! And from that we landed on left populism' (26).
>
> 'the left populist language was a way of creating an enemy. If you don't create an enemy that is grounded in reality and in the actual reasons why people are feeling like they are less well off at the moment than they were maybe 10/20 years ago, then the media creates it for you, and the right-wing press will blame the immigrants and then you get the rise of a right-wing nationalism and that's what happened in the states - the nativism and stuff (…) and we were thinking that that could work here, and obviously you had the context of the leave vote and Brexit and the feeling that the establishment was letting people down' (26).

He named the (plural) ‘people’ that his politics traversed: ‘when we win it is the people, not the powerful, who win. The nurse, the teacher, the small trader, the carer, the builder, the office worker, the student, the carer win. We all win’ (2017a). The language found its way into the manifesto title ‘*For the Many, Not the Few*’ which aimed to *‘have a clear antagonism: say who is going to be made to pay, who is going to benefit, transformational, and use the outrage of the media to spread the message’* (19).

Policy announcements were communicated with references to the ‘many’ in contrast to clearly defined ‘enemies’. Corbyn’s Head of Strategic Communications James Schneider cites one excerpt from a John McDonnell speech: ‘the Labour party is now the party of low taxes for middle and low earners, while the Tories are the party of tax handouts for the super-rich and big corporations’ (Schneider, 2021). After the success of the campaign, Corbyn (2017b) described his party’s programme as the ‘common sense’ mainstream of public opinion: ‘We are now the political mainstream. Our manifesto and our policies are popular because that is what most people in our country actually want, not what they’re told they should want’.

Adding to the sense that Corbynism was a ‘movement’ was that its initial impetus and its long-term vitality was grounded in extra-parliamentary politics. One LOTO aide made this point: *‘the project is at its best when the largest number of people are involved, it’s as mass as possible, and it’s standing outside the rules of SW1 politics’* (19). A Momentum staff member also agreed that the long-term viability of a Corbyn government would have needed pressure coming from a broader ‘movement’:

> ‘Ultimately, we need to build a movement and it needs to be a movement - why does it need to be a movement? Because firstly to actually deliver in Government you need something far stronger than just the parliamentary wing. It needs something much stronger and much deeper and more profound in society – we haven't got that. Most of the time when left-wing governments get in it is on the back of some sort of movement. When Jeremy became leader, the existing movement was quite small and limited – and that's one of the reasons the first

> couple of years of his leadership were quite challenging because we hadn't demonstrated it was there. Even though we knew it was there we hadn't demonstrated that it was there. Then there was the 2017 election that had a much better result than a lot of people thought, fine (...) but even having that there isn't the same as actually having a movement of people who are actively engaged and involved' (7)

Momentum mobilised supporters to Corbyn's extraordinarily well attended mass rallies by cultivating the idea of a 'movement' on social media. They plugged the 'movement' into popular culture through 'a mixture of memes, emojis, and provocative videos' which included, for example, a comparison between Corbyn and the England World Cup team in 2018 (Dennis, 2020: 2). This undoubtedly had some effect in gathering support considering that more than a quarter of UK Facebook users saw Momentum's videos in the build-up to the 2017 election (Momentum, 2020: 4).

Despite the erstwhile importance of social media in propagating the view that Corbyn was the figurehead of a movement, Momentum's national coordinator was eager to stress that 'social media driven celebrity stardom' alone was not enough:

> 'I do think there is an X factor now, although I think it will fade. I always said to everyone mark my words Facebook's numbers will go down. They're not going to stay at 3 billion, the exponential growth has stopped because young people have moved on to something else (...) I don't think Corbyn is presidential but to some it was all about him, he would always say well it's not about me at all actually but yeah, I think there is a wider phenomenon of stardust you know what I mean. It's not like he is Bruce Springsteen but one of the reasons we can get out loads of people is because we get Owen Jones, and okay he is great and brilliant and incredibly supportive but that isn't sustainable because it isn't like Owen Jones can spend every weekend going out canvassing. And we need to get to a point when people feel that their activism is legitimate even if there are just Bill from Burnley and he is the guy with the microphone, so I think there are some inbuilt risks in the kind of social media driven stardom version of politics' (14).

Some were also quick to point out that a debilitating change to the *'Facebook algorithm'* (25, 26) following the 2017 election limited Momentum's outreach by prioritising content shared by friends rather than news feeds, which served as a warning about the unreliability of such 'technologically mediated opportunities':

> 'When you're creating content like memes and all this stuff in 2017 you are getting reach that is challenging the Tory Party and would cost them huge amounts of money. But that basically is destroyed as a method by 2019 in one fell swoop Facebook fucks it. And that basically ruins what had been developing as the dynamic around 2017 which was the leader as a meme figure. May was portrayed as this ghoulish scary person who hated children and wanted to put your granny in a cage; there was this real sense of cruelty. And then Corbyn as your naughty uncle who says do you want a tenner for a couple of cans for the lads. That was a technologically mediated opportunity: what was the equivalent in 2019? There was none because the algorithms fucked it. This ability to meme the leader was for a short time really powerful for the left but that got destroyed by the way platforms were interacting with organic content (25)'

Nevertheless, Momentum gathered support for Corbynism by circulating the idea that activists were engaged in a collective 'movement'. This helped to fuel Corbynism's initial rise in the 2015 leadership contest and its aftermath by making supporters from a plurality of left-wing traditions feel as though they were one of Corbyn's 'people'. Corbyn's leadership attempted to build on this impetus in preparation for the 2017 election by utilising a left-populist communications strategy. The continued sense of a 'movement, widely circulated by Momentum on social media, defined the image of Corbynism in the eyes of supporters and was a key reason for their collective support.

The anti-establishment 'outsider'

The third narrative that can be observed in the findings was that Corbyn was an anti-establishment 'outsider'. Him and the 'movement' that he personified were opposed to political elites in his own party, media elites, billionaires, bankers and 'tax dodgers'. Intentionally antagonising these groups enabled Corbynism to identify 'elites' that the 'people' (the 'movement') stood in opposition to and reaffirm what they stood for and against.

The party elite were one particular 'enemy' often cited by participants – their staunch opposition was symbolic of their 'inauthentic' politicking and obstructive to the vision that many members shared with Corbyn. In particular, Corbyn was perceived as an outsider to the mainstream traditions of an undemocratic and oligarchic PLP (see Watts and Bale, 2019). The hostility of the PLP, particularly during the second leadership contest, served to reinforce this view:

> ‘When I joined in April 2016, I underestimated the degree to which there was such hostility to Jeremy because he was on the left (...) every day was a massive challenge and we felt like we were drowning. It was constant negative attacks, negative briefings, and then after the referendum we had the leadership challenge and they were resigning one day after the next coordinated one morning, one afternoon, one evening. Resignation letters would go up on the news for 30 days or whatever it was. So, you had the shadow cabinet, the frontbench and the PPS’s they all resigned systematically (...) they couldn’t even wait a year (...) the feeling among the party was why the hell are you doing this now – the members want to win, and they see the government are on the ropes after Brexit, Cameron has resigned, and they are in disarray. Why are you doing it now! We only elected him 8/9 months ago. So, he won on a landslide again’ (26).

Negative attacks by ‘elite’ Labour politicians were welcomed – Deputy Leader Tom Watson once described Momentum as a ‘bit of a rabble’ (BBC, 2015) – because it fortified the idea that they were a ‘people-powered movement’ challenging the Labour establishment. They fed into the belief that Momentum were ‘outsiders, somehow distinct from the norms of party-political organising that have given rise to a sense of anti-politics in the UK in recent decades’ (Dennis, 2020: 7). As one participant explains:

> ‘Obviously any new organisation which has got a profile, we had a massive profile from day one because of the media attacks – they contributed to a profile which subsequently contributed to people getting involved. In some ways it was beneficial’ (7).

Establishment elites – billionaires, media moguls and bankers – were also a clear target. One critical participant on the NEC recalled Corbyn’s dispute with Richard Branson (the ‘bad’) – over whether there were available seats on one of Branson’s Virgin trains – as an example of how this moralised appeal played out:

> ‘So, you see it as a personalised thing?’ (BW)
>
> ‘Yeah. There were no seats on the train? I mean there was CCTV, but who do you believe Richard Branson or Jeremy Corbyn? If Jeremy says there were no seats then there were no seats. Which is why I do not think any other candidate, any other potential successor has that degree of personal adulation. People write poems, there are books and poems dedicated to Jeremy’ (12).

Corbyn later played into this by asserting that ‘we shouldn’t really have billionaires’ before directly asking Branson in a tweet that referenced accusations from several years earlier: ‘Perhaps the NHS could have the money back from when you sued it?’ (see Corbyn, 2019a). By identifying the ‘enemy’ Corbyn reinforced the sense that he stood on behalf of the collective values that supporters stood for and against. Economic and political elites such as Branson were seen to stand in the way of the democratising and equalising values that the ‘movement’ collectively supported.

LOTO’s left populist communications strategy bolstered the view among participants that Corbyn represented a ‘new kind of politics’ that was opposed to the ‘establishment’. The strategy, however, aimed to generalise Corbyn’s appeal across society, as well as consolidate support in the organised left. In Corbyn’s first major speech in the 2017 general election campaign he declared that he does not ‘play by the establishment’s rules’ and vowed to ‘overturn the rigged system’ by redistributing wealth and power back to the ‘people’ (Corbyn, 2017a). He continued to name the enemies throughout the campaign:

> ‘We don’t fit in their cosy club. We‘re not obsessed with the tittle-tattle of Westminster or Brussels. We don’t accept that it is natural for Britain to be governed by a ruling elite, the City and the tax-dodgers’ (Corbyn, 2017a).

One ambiguity is whether the left populist communications strategy was a reactive strategy that was endorsed because of circumstance, or whether it was proactively pursued as the optimal medium for communicating Corbyn’s politics. Research has demonstrated that during Corbyn’s leadership the British press ‘went well beyond [a] watchdog role and amounted more to what we could characterise as an attackdog journalism’ (Cammaert et al, 2020: 203). The authors assert that ‘the British press commonly treated Corbyn, the second most important politician in the UK political system, as a danger and as someone whose voice should be silenced’ (Cammaert et al, 2020: 192). In the view of LOTO aides (19, 26), this gave them little room for manoeuvre:

> 'There were rules that really we felt like we had no choice but to break because there was such media hostility that we had to create an antagonism with the media. We had to show that the media was part of the establishment that was holding people back. They were not these neutral and impartial referees. They have an agenda and are political actors – so therefore we decided to attack them like they are our political opponents. We are going to attack the Telegraph; we are going to attack the Daily Mail' (26).

Whether by choice or not, LOTO aides felt that the media's constant attacks benefitted Corbyn in the build up to the election by reproducing the narrative that he was an 'outsider' to the establishment – a threat to the elite 'few' – at a time when the citizens had extremely low levels of trust in parliament (Hansard Society, 2017, 2019). This was similar to the claim made by participants that Momentum benefited from attacks by a hostile PLP:

> 'The hounds of anguish from the media helped spread the message but also helped spread the antagonistic message – people fucking hate the political media class and the fact that they were so obviously against us on terrain that was so obviously in our favour' (19).

Some questions remain around whether the left populist communications strategy could have gone further. James Schneider (2021) has made the case that Brexit ripped up the populist script between by creating a new polarisation which cut across Labour's electoral map, and Corbyn's reticence to pick a side, as is necessary in a populist strategy, meant that he appeared more and more like a typical politician bogged down in arcane parliamentary procedures. This is something that other participants also repeated:

> 'I am basically just a class-struggle populist: I was always like yeah fuck the media, be really rude, tell them to fuck off, point in their face and be like you're lying just go all out hard agro. There was a line that Engels really likes to quote from Gotha which is - 'all that exists deserves to perish'. Whoever uses that line, whoever says that everything is fucked, no one in power deserves respect, we need to junk the whole thing the system is broken. Whoever can most effectively articulate that logic wins. When Corbyn got caught up in all this 48% crap and arcane procedures and you can't suspend parliament, all this kind of stuff, he basically failed to take that mantle of the persistent destroyer and instead started to look really lame. If I had controlled the messaging, I would have gone harder and harder and harder on that insurgent message' (25)

In summary, the left populist communications strategy reinforced the view held by participants that Corbyn was an anti-establishment 'outsider'. This, alongside the view that Corbyn's 'authentic' left-wing values were the personification of a 'movement', enabled supporters to collectively identify who the 'people' and the 'elite' were and what they stood for and against. This certainly helped Corbyn gather support in Momentum and across the broader left in their initial surge – it naturally dovetails with the critical views of parliamentary democracy and capitalism held by socialist activists – and it may have additionally fed into Corbyn's surprising gains in the 2017 election. However, Corbyn gradually retreated from the populist communications strategy as he became caught up in parliamentary centred Brexit debates – this will be explored further in the final chapter as part of the analysis of Corbynism's decline.

6.3. Was Corbynism a replacement or a restoration of democratic socialism?

Pop-socialism establishes an alternative to the oversaturated populist literature for considering how a conventional socialist discourse – which has a long lineage in the labour movement – was coupled with the popular-democratic impulses stemming from the anti-austerity movement. This provides a useful grounding for exploring how participants in Momentum viewed Corbynism and therefore why it sustained such support across large sections of the left more generally. Specifically, this section will explore whether participants viewed its appeals to a 'people' as a restoration or a replacement of the class-based demands of democratic socialism, and if this should be considered 'popular-democratic' or 'authoritarian populist'.

The findings indicate that Corbynism had more in common with the traditional class-based demands of socialist politics than left populists would call for. Organised class politics was a key influence: the left of the Labour Party and a leftwards shift in the trade unions propelled Corbyn to his leadership victory in 2015 and continued to sustain him throughout his leadership. Participants who self-identified as socialists saw the trade union link as one of the

reasons to stay in the party (if they were members before Corbyn) or join the party once Corbyn became leader:

> 'I joined the Labour Party because I thought this is the best chance for socialism. If it would have been something else it would have been something else. I'm not religiously committed to the Labour Party but in our political system people talk about FPTP and our political system as the determining thing. That's one factor but the biggest factor is the party's relationship to the trade unions. Because whatever Blair did he didn't sever that. He just couldn't. That link with the union is what gave the Labour Party it's potential to do something, to be useful. So I don't think in British politics there is any way around the Labour Party and if you're serious about socialism you have to engage with the party (11)'

The link meant that participants often viewed Labour as a class-based party. For this reason, Corbyn's leadership established an opportunity to return to the party to its historic mission in '*relation to class*' (1) following the neglect of previous leaders:

> 'To put it simply the attempt is to take back the Labour Party and take it back to its core values of equality and social justice, in particular in relation to class. Because the last 20-30 years, well I do not have to tell you how the Labour Party's been. It's been a technocratic bureaucratic body that basically espouses values that have been oppositional to the authentic original values of the Labour Party. So it has deliberately ignored the plight and the needs of ordinary working class people be they black, white or female. And we want to basically take it back to a position where that is the core of what the party is about, and it is there to address the need and interest of ordinary people' (1).

The first tangible sign that 'socialism' was back on the agenda came shortly after the 2015 leadership contest, when John McDonnell announced that Labour's vision was 'socialism with an iPad'. At the 2016 party conference McDonnell (2016) declared that 'in this party you no longer have to whisper it, it's called socialism', and this was followed by Labour's most left-wing manifesto in at least 25 years (Allen and Bara, 2019).

However, the scale of Labour's ambition only became clear on the publication of the Alternative Models of Ownership (AMOO) report shortly after the 2017 election (Labour Party, 2017). The report, commissioned by McDonnell and Rebecca Long-Bailey, took some of the proposals in the 2017 manifesto in a more radical direction by exploring forms of common ownership suitable for new and increasingly automated times: municipal socialism; workers

cooperatives; as well as traditional forms of nationalisation. Public ownership promises to resolve Britain's low levels of productivity and investment, and to democratise the economy and redistribute wealth. Whilst there are some tensions in the document, which the chapter will come to later, the programme accommodated the class-based demands of the conventional Labour left (such as the Alternative Economic Strategy) and the more popular-democratic ethos that had emerged amongst much of the left in recent times (see Guinan and O'Neill, 2018).

In addition to developing a new economic programme, Corbyn frequently combined a discourse of the 'people' with an articulation of a class antagonism. For example, he contrasted the 'greed of UK banks who paid out £15bn in bonuses last year' with the lives of 'ordinary workers: 'nurses, teachers, shopworkers, builders' (quoted in Mason, 2017). Participants took this type of language, the supposed renewal of the trade union link, and the direction of Labour policy, to indicate that Corbyn constituted the opportunity to push the Labour Party in a more socialist direction. Even participants who felt that the party could not be socialist felt that Corbyn's leadership opened the pathways for socialism:

> 'The reason I ended up reconsidering my position on that was basically I think it was mainly tactical more than anything else. I have come to appreciate that, whilst I still don't think socialism will be achieved by parliamentary means, I saw that there was a point in having a further Left Labour Party. One that did advocate for further Left policies, and that was something useful in society that whilst it wouldn't improve society as it currently is it would help shift the terms of the debate leftwards. I think I kind of saw a point in becoming active within the Labour Party and organising to support the left tendency which had sprung up (2)'

Corbyn and by extension Momentum took on the mantle of presenting this as a 'common sense' choice to an electorate with extremely low levels of trust in parliament (Hansard Society, 2017, 2019). Momentum in particular were tasked with *'sanitising and rehabilitating socialism in the eyes of the public – to define it as the new common sense'* (26). If we consider this through the lens of the 'politics of support' (Gamble, 1994), then constructing a new 'common-sense' can be seen as an attempt to win the 'ideological argument' over their opponents within both main parties and in wider society, with the eventual aim of recruiting

new voters to the Labour Party outside of Corbyn's core support on the left. Seen from the perspective of the HLPG, it might even be said that this constituted Momentum's most long-term 'outsider' strategy during the Corbyn years.

From LOTO's perspective, the view that Corbyn was an anti-establishment outsider directed them towards a left populist strategy, which in turn enabled the leader to announce his support for a maximum wage policy in a more supportive climate:

> 'Jeremy's strength is that he isn't compromising on anything. How can we amplify that strength? That can come with its own challenges – you've got a hostile media so if you compromise sometimes you can get better coverage and have an easier ride (...) and from that we landed on left populism. I don't think we had much choice – he had to be anti-establishment otherwise he would just be portrayed as this kind of bumbling incompetent guy: "why is this old guy doing this job?" That would have been it, it would have been "who is this allotment dweller?" "What's he doing leading the opposition, he's not suited to it". We countered that with no he's against the establishment that's the whole point that's why they hate him, that's why they want to attack him, so you tell a story along those lines and that really started around November/December 2016 and then we briefed it. And then we did this speech (...) the one in January 2017 in Peterborough I think on Brexit [see Corbyn, 2017 for transcript of speech] – and in the morning he was doing the Today programme and he dropped in the maximum wage thing (...) so Corbyn said he was in favour of something like a maximum wage and then the whole news agenda that day was defined by the maximum wage because he had just dropped it in unexpectedly, it was a massive talking point. Then at Peterborough later in the day they did vox pox, they were saying oh this Corbyn he supports the idea of maximum wage, and they were saying yeah yeah I agree that's the way it should be. And then the policy that came were pay ratios and you could use the levers of Government, public procurement and all that stuff to drive pay ratios – 20 to 1 or whatever it was. And then you just refine the policy from there, but what you're doing that you're sending a signal out to someone that this is the type of politician that he is' (26).

The coupling between the left populist communications strategy and socialist content, meanwhile, arrived in the form and content of the 2017 manifesto: '*For the Many, not the Few*'. The title is explicitly populist, but, as pointed out by a LOTO aide, it was a 'signifier' for the socialist content of the manifesto:

> 'For the Many not the Few was Blair's way of avoiding saying socialism. It was to empty it out of its social context. But then we thought well actually no we will just change the meaning of for the many, not the few. Emphasise the word "not" and insert social content. We are going to tax these people, the few, and the many are going to benefit' (19).

The LOTO aides I interviewed certainly appeared to be influenced by the left populist thinking of Laclau and Mouffe; however, the views of many participants are more aligned with the legacy of democratic socialism than these authors would advocate, particularly those on the Labour left. One senior LOTO aide, for example, pointed out that Corbyn's critique of the 'establishment' shared some features with right wing populism but was distinguished by its commitment to socialist policies:

> 'we thought if we can campaign in the style of Trump, like have the big rallies, talk about big spending commitments in areas that have been left behind, our equivalent of the rust belt is the red wall so in leave seats in towns that have been left behind. But not do the racism and focus on the economic programme, the intervention, and sell it as a new form of democratic socialism, which is what it fundamentally was. You can use the state for different ends – for right wing ends or left-wing ends – and we wanted to use it for left wing ends and we wanted to show like Trump did there was a political and economic establishment and they are trying to hold people back. He was right about that but wrong with the description, we have a different analysis obviously' (26)

Indeed, Mouffe (2018a) appears to acknowledge Corbynism's lineage within a conventional left politics when she claims that its left populist articulation was held back by the traditions of labourism. However, whilst Labour's programme under Corbyn was undoubtedly influenced by the traditions of labourism, the foundations of its support were more multifaceted. Some participants welcomed Corbyn because he promised to return of the labourist brand of social democracy, but the majority of Momentum members heralded it as the return of a socialist politics which they saw as a challenge to the mainstream traditions of the Labour Party in recent years. Whether this should be considered a radical form of politics will be discussed in the final section of this chapter.

Distinguishing between authoritarian populism and popular democracy

Pop-socialism is more than just the coupling of socialist policies with a 'people' vs 'establishment' discourse emanating from the leadership. Its popular-democratic credentials are distinguished from authoritarian populism, as described in Chapter Two, because it

assembled support by elevating the 'people' rather than bending them into established common sense. The findings outlined in this section show that participants were united by a popular-democratic vision of socialism, whether they were active in the Labour Party before Corbyn or joined because of Corbyn. Two particular popular-democratic initiatives which gathered the support of participants from a plurality of traditions are discussed: (1) IPD and (2) the political education festival The World Transformed. The former was seen by participants as an attempt to institutionalise popular democracy in the party and eventually the state, whereas the latter constitutes an intervention in the field of popular culture and education.

As the David Graeber quote at the beginning of this chapter illustrates, Corbyn supporters tended to view democratisation of the party as the first step towards the democratisation of state and society. A leadership aide explains their view on party democracy:

> 'the reason why you need to have democratic pressure from below as much as possible into a state and into state institutions is because powers from above have huge amounts of influence in those institutions, and so it's very easy for MPs, and you see this throughout the literature on the party and parliamentary socialism and all the rest of it, to become insulated from pressure from below and form a separate set of interests from that of the base of the party. And so, I think it's absolutely necessary, if you're trying to pursue a socialist strategy of reforms, Westminster is not the mother of all parliaments. The form of political contestation is also part of the fight, is also part of the debate, it is something that requires change. We need to democratise the space if we are to democratise the economy' (19).

The below pro-Corbyn MP further expounds on why he believes redistributing power away from the PLP and towards the membership is important:

> 'I think it was Tony Benn that said we need to democratise our party before we can democratise society, and I just think that giving people a greater influence is a common sense approach to delivering a socialist agenda. The more people that are involved in it the better in my view' (13).

> 'I think that we desperately need more democracy to hold the PLP to account, because what I worry about is labour winning an election on a relatively radical and common-sense socialist programme and being in Government and not in power because they couldn't get their programme through because certain MPs would vote against it. And there are still some who sit in the House of Commons who

> wouldn't support things the vast majority of the members and most people in the country would want to see happen' (13).

Opposition by the PLP reinforced the perception among participants that Corbynism was a 'movement' against the vested interests of Labour's parliamentary representatives. A clear example was the 2016 leadership contest in which Momentum assembled a mass protest outside of parliament following the PLP's motion of no confidence against Corbyn, and then convincingly denounced the challenge as an attack on the members that had voted for him just one year earlier**.** One of the participants involved in the campaign articulately laid out how it benefitted Corbynism:

> 'In that campaign I think we probably made four advances. One to reaffirm that the membership wanted the party to change and change in the direction as laid out – as a strong force. The second was that the campaign was extremely effective in the ground operation, the number of people it could call, distributed organising, and that would sow the seeds for what Momentum eventually did in '17 and '19, and also what we'd bring it to the party, community organising, so one of the announcements in the campaign was the community organising academy and that paper which we worked out became in a different form the party's community organising unit. The third advancement we made was on policy – we put forward the ten pledges which when Jeremy won went through the NEC and that Conference and that formed the groundwork for the 2017 manifesto, so those things were now party policy. The fourth advance was TWT being allowed to be free and independent essentially. If it hadn't been for the leadership election, we would have been far more involved in running TWT but because we were all doing the campaign it got handed over to younger people to sort out and that more bottom-up, more horizontal ethos was really what was needed and was a real break from the traditional Labour bureaucratic process (19)'

During Corbyn's tenure Momentum were unable to introduce significant party reform, as the previous chapter discussed. Nevertheless, 'members-led' democratisation was a vital part of Corbyn's support in his initial leadership campaigns, remained a key ambition of most participants in Momentum, and was a central part of Momentum's agenda inside the party. It united the new left tradition that has advocated for the enhancement of grassroots democracy since the era of Bennism together with newer activists drawn from the anti-austerity movement – they both sought to dismantle the gap between represented and representative and introduce people's power into party and state (see Gerbaudo, 2017).

Participants believed that members-led democratisation could lead to socialism for two primary reasons. The first was practical: as long as the membership remained on the left a grassroots redistribution of power would mean that MPs would find it more difficult to retreat from a programme they had been mandated to follow (party reform would have therefore strengthened Corbyn's IPC – as discussed in the last chapter). The two participants below provide different practical arguments:

> 'I suppose it depends how democratic and members-led the party is able to be and if enough people within the Labour Party do genuinely share politics which are further to the left then potentially the party could continue to be pushed further to the left. But as I've said I don't think socialism in its true form is going to be arrived at by parliamentary means it's going to have to be a much wider mass of a movement that would force capitalism to back down' (2).
>
> 'when you have a party where all those democratic structures have been taken apart it becomes top down and elitist and most of its members aren't being represented. So they idea of pushing for party democracy and making that happen will mean it is naturally going to become more socialist because we are representing workers and workers' rights (8)'

The other reason participants gave was more normative – party democracy was not just consistent with the concept of socialism; it constituted a natural extension of the socialist doctrine. Indeed, this view was analogous with the argument that had been made by advocates of grassroots democracy since at least the Bennite years (see Pettitt, 2018). The three below participants explain why they believe party democracy and socialism go hand-in-hand:

> 'Socialism in my opinion is about involving people and giving them greater influence. It is important to allow people to have a much greater say over the direction of travel. If you do it in an isolated and top-down way I think it just leaves people behind and they don't necessarily buy into it. I think some of the mistakes in the past, whether you can call it socialism or not I don't know, but the statist approach to nationalisation for example when the Tories were privatising utilities and the rest of it and those of us at the time were arguing that we already own it but a lot of people didn't feel that they did and I just think therefore we need to be finding a different route that gives people that sense of ownership really' (13).
>
> 'For me there is a continuum in terms of policy and democratisation and the members-led party is part of it. If you look at the economic agenda of John McDonnell about mutual and co-operatives, workers on boards, it is not quite about democracy but notions of localism in the Preston economic model, whatever it might be, a logical continuation of that is I'm not going to believe that you really

want to have workers on board if you don't want to listen to your own party members' (14)

> 'The Labour Party claims to be a democratic socialist party so part of that is equality, and I firmly believe that it doesn't matter if you are a member of parliament, or a councillor, or a Labour Group leader, or an ordinary member. If you're in the Labour Party you're equal so it is about equality. And you can't expect people to sign up and pay and then not give them a say in the direction of the manifesto on the local level but also on the national level. So, we need to have a system where members can shape our policy (...) it's all well and good going on and on about growing from 200, 000 to 500, 000 members but what does that actually mean except for financial gain. We need to give people the opportunity to have a say, we need to engage people, we need to make conference more accessible to people from various income backgrounds, from various parts of the UK' (9).

The above participants either did not think 'parliamentarism' alone could sustain a radical politics, viewed Corbynism as an opening for democratic participation, or supported 'members-led' democratisation because it open the party to a mass 'movement' that could propel the left to power. In all three cases party democracy is seen as the first step towards the democratisation of society and state, which is why the thesis sees it as a popular-democratic means of gathering support.

The second initiative, which relates closely to Stuart Hall's conception of popular democracy, is the political education festival TWT, which I attended as a participant observer in 2018 and 2019. Chapter Two discussed how a 'popular' form of education is one way of distinguishing popular democracy from authoritarian populism. A popular democrat mobilises support by equipping the 'people' with the resources to challenge 'elite' common sense, in comparison to an authoritarian populist who gathers the support of the people so that they can be moulded into elite common sense. Political education attempts, broadly, to introduce new ideas and practices into popular consciousness by encouraging activists to take progressive ideas into their communities. A senior staff member at Momentum the importance of political education to me:

> 'Activists and Labour members have to understand what is going to be necessary to win power and properly change society. A lot of the media characterise the rise of Jeremy Corbyn as this sort of Corbyn fandom where people are enamoured

with Jeremy as an individual and there is a certain amount of that but there is also quite a lot of people who saw it as a serious socialist project. And the task always was to try and get the Labour membership or at least the active section of the membership to be politically educated to be able to understand what was going on so they could go out into their communities and know what needs to be done. Political education is all about action' (24)

TWT furnishes activists with ideas from a multitude of progressive ideas at workshops and panels such as: '*Economics for the Many'; 'Floods and Fires: Living the Climate Crisis'; or 'A People-Powered Manifesto for Radical Cultural Democracy'* (field notes, 2018, 2019). Some explicitly put a popular-democratic vision of education at the forefront of their agenda, such as a panel titled *'History Lessons: Popular Education in the 20th Centur*y', which asked:

'What knowledge did effective movements share? How did they design popular education programmes which engaged and inspired people to act? What can we take from our history to develop popular education for the 21st century?'

Activists were equipped with the ideas to challenge 'elites' from below by, for example, providing the tools for activists to hone their organising skills (*e.g., Renters Unite! How to Organise and Win*). In addition, it encouraged the participation of individuals who may otherwise have had few pathways into political activism, as the below organiser explains:

'we were thinking about how we are going to make these subjects relevant and accessible and part of my argument always was like I don't live in London, I'm a person of colour, I'm a single mum, this is really really massively inaccessible to me on so many levels. What are we going to do as an organisation even as a team to make this okay to me?' (8).

Some workshops were also designed so that policy could be passed from attendees to members of the shadow cabinet. In 2019, I participated in an interactive workshop called '*The Policy Lab: The Green New Deal and its Internationalist Potential'*, in which we were split into groups and given a subject area (my group's topic was 'corporate accountability') and, under the guidance of a volunteer helping to run the lab, were asked to develop policy ideas which were then voted on by attendees, with the winner being passed on to a senior member of a shadow cabinet.

The emphasis on participation alongside the circulation of progressive ideas from a diversity of left-wing traditions distinguishes Corbynism's appeals to its 'people' from authoritarian populist counterparts that aim 'win for the authoritarian closure the gloss of populist consent' (Hall 1985: 116). Supporters that were enthused by Corbyn's leadership were urged to participate and take the ideas into their own political communities. As a participant jokingly declared – *'that's one of the problems with Momentum, if you have an idea someone is like you should totally do that!'* (8). Indeed, the success of the main festival encouraged several groups across the country to organise their own TWT events along similar lines, including in Birmingham and Bristol.

The spectrum of pop-socialism

The unity between popular-democracy and democratic socialism does not mean, however, that every participant combined these two poles in the same way. This section will explore the internal differentiation in pop-socialism by identifying the different ways in which participants combined popular-democratic and democratic socialist thinking. This will allow the chapter to provide a thicker description of how participants understood Corbynism and therefore why it was able to gather such support in Momentum.

There was a consensus among participants that party democracy was essentially beneficial to the left for either practical or principled reasons. However, as outlined in Chapter Four, there was an internal division in Momentum between advocates of the online OMOV structure that was eventually introduced in early 2017, and supporters of more deliberative assembly model of democracy. Their views differed on the purpose of democracy in the Labour Party and Momentum, which were linked to more general beliefs about the relationship between socialism and democracy. On the one hand, some participants equated direct forms of democracy with socialism:

> 'For me socialism isn't socialism without democracy. Socialism is the government of the working class within society, and I think the only true representation of the working class is an extremely democratic society basically,

> so one of the main defining features of previous so-called socialist systems which weren't at all was the fact they lacked that democracy and yeah that's one of the main reasons why I wouldn't consider them socialist in its true form' (2).

> 'How else do they become accountable? I keep saying when you're electing people around a table you need to feel capable of saying things without scrutiny. How will the new ideas come if you don't have same people sitting there for decades and not bringing the new people along? It can't be right and that's why I fundamentally believe in open democracy. If you do a good job you should be able to stand against anybody' (4)

For participants on this end of the spectrum, Momentum represented an opportunity to meaningfully restore democracy by opening participatory avenues for left strands of thought previously excluded from effective representation in Labour. They considered Momentum to be undemocratic following the 'coup' in early 2017 because it no longer had the space for deliberation and participation, meaning that the control of the leadership was all but guaranteed, which contradicted its approach to democratisation in the Labour Party. The above participant, who viewed democracy and socialism as synonymous, held this view:

> 'This is the whole contradiction I think with Momentum. So much of their organising within the Labour Party is to improve the Labour Party's democratic structures and yet they are so against the democratisation of their own structures, and I think it's all about power. Unfortunately, a lot of people within the leadership at Momentum see democracy as a good thing when it's in their favour, so democracy is only valuable so long as it allows you to gain power whereas I think others of us would still support the democratisation of the Labour Party even if the right were in control of it. I think it's the right way in which a representative organisation of the labour movement should be constituted. So yeah, I find it quite sad and quite ironic that Momentum talk a good talk in terms of democratising the Labour Party and isn't willing to look at itself' (2).

> 'I think I'm basically just incredibly depressed about the way in which Momentum is constituted and lacks any meaningful form of democracy and has become a top-down organisation which gives pronouncements to its base for them to knock-on doors, to vote for the right person, but doesn't actually let them form political policy and stand up to the leadership in many cases' (2).

When challenged on occasions democratisation might not necessarily correspond to a socialist outcome the following rebuttal was offered:

> 'I'm still in favour of democracy if it doesn't agree with me. I think it would be a shame if there was a system where the only expression of democracy in Labour

and Momentum was online voting. Because I think within democracy something very important is the ability debate ideas and challenge views and I think one of the main ways democracy within the student movement has been eroded is doing just this: is taking power away from democratic assemblies general meetings etc and instead giving students buttons to vote with basically that doesn't allow them to hear other sides of the argument or have their views challenged so I think a system isn't really democratic unless it often has the possibility for debate effectively. I don't consider that we currently live in a proper democracy because a vote every four years isn't democracy in mind, when I imagine a democratic society it's democratic in all aspects of life. So much so it contains forums where ideas are debated and where discussions are had and anything which just involves a simple binary choice doesn't really allow for that' (2)

On the other hand, some participants who defended the new governance structure pointed out that Corbyn had been elected on the basis of OMOV. This was seen as the optimal way to encourage the participation of new activists, whereas a more deliberative delegate structure would have been monopolised by experienced activists that typically dominated left organisations:

> 'I think there is a possibility to have a much more members-led bottom-up participatory culture within Momentum with OMOV (…) if you keep structures that are time-consuming then who are the people who are going to end up putting the most time in? Of course there are great people who commit loads of time but often it is the same old activists who are obstinate enough to carry on and stick through fights, which is admirable but we don't want it to be people like that shaping the direction of the movement' (5).

In addition, these participants often saw Momentum more instrumentally – they were a vehicle for transforming Labour into a 'members-led' socialist party. Internal democracy in Momentum, therefore, was a means to an end rather than an end-in-itself. The following participants convey this view in different ways:

> 'there is an acute awareness that you can't build a truly different politics inside the Labour Party if democratising the Labour Party is not a key part of that (...) there's a kind of lazy thinking where well we want to democratise the state, we want to democratise the Labour Party, so why do we not want to democratise Momentum? Well because they're very different institutions, with different purposes, and different aspirations' (10)

> 'Momentum it is a different kind of organisation, it is a political organisation set-up to support Jeremy Corbyn but also to support left-wing ideas and policies within Labour. And we are only going to be able to do that if we stay focused on Labour

> membership, rather than non-Labour members. So, I actually quite welcome the change in the constitution' (9)
>
> 'The establishment of Momentum wasn't to create another bureaucratic layer or a forum for us to all oppose each other within a much bigger struggle. It was to bring new people in to transform the Labour Party and get the Labour Party into Government, to transform political culture. There are so many things that Momentum are seeking to do which means that actually having its own bureaucratic layers I don't think was an end in itself. The Labour Party has a form that dates back through its long history, which is fairly hard to navigate anyway, and there's new layers of bureaucracy to navigate within Labour in order to do stuff, to influence policy and influence campaigns' (5)

There were several moments where the differences between these strands became more pronounced. Internal tensions over Momentum's democratic structures and formal relationship to the Labour Party can be traced from their launch up until the governance structures were ratified in early 2017. Furthermore, criticisms about a lack of transparency were levelled at Momentum during the 2018 party conference after they instructed delegates to agree to the NEC's compromises over party reform, which some members saw as a 'stitch-up' by the union and party leadership. The accusations were repeated in the 2020 leadership contest when the NCG balloted members asking which candidate they should support but included only a 'yes' or 'no' choice for Rebecca Long-Bailey and Angela Rayner, excluding the other candidates.

The differences between these different strands may appear fairly nuanced, but they indicate that participants had a multitude of views about the importance of popular-democratic initiatives and what role they should play in socialist politics. Participants agreed that IPD was consistent with the broader goal of democratising state and society, but some participants were more willing to sacrifice this principle in Momentum if they felt it could strengthen Corbyn and therefore the left's control inside the party. Although Corbyn's leadership papered over these cracks by cementing a degree of unity, the fissures reappeared once more following his resignation after the 2019 election defeat.

6.4. How radical was Corbynism?

The literature review highlighted that one of the main points of contention in the literature on Corbynism was the extent to which it should be seen as radical. Some scholars have underlined important points of continuity between Corbynism and mainstream renditions of social democracy in the past (Seymour, 2016; Bassett, 2018). Others, meanwhile, have emphasised its lineage with an 'urban left' tradition that remains highly critical of labourism and stressed its democratic socialist and even 'utopian' credentials (Butler, 2021; Byrne, 2019). This section uses the concept of pop-socialism to explore the extent to which Corbynism was seen as radical by participants. The findings indicate that participants understood that in the short and medium term its aim was to introduce a social democratic package, but in the long run they hoped that this would establish the first step towards a more radical socialist transformation.

Part of the ambiguity derives from the fact that scholars have not considered Gamble's (1994) distinction between the 'politics of power' and the 'politics of support'. Accounts that emphasise continuity tend to focus on the former: They mostly examine Labour's immediate political economy and programme were they to enter government, which was undoubtedly social democratic in its immediate ambition (see Manwaring and Smith, 2020). However, those that stress its more radical credentials often tend to place more emphasis on the latter: They discuss the political ideology of its main protagonists, the views of supporters, how it aims to gather support from the public, and what it aspires to achieve beyond its immediate practical constraints.

It is the latter which concerns this section. If defined as a 'politics of support', then pop-socialism fits with the two-pronged definition of the radical left in the mainstream literature. A common denominator among participants was that they supported (1) a gradualist pursuit of an alternative economic structure to capitalism in the future, even if it was not immediately

possible; and (2) a more democratic party, state, and society that accommodated parliamentary democracy but remained critical of its limitations (see March and Mudde, 2005).

The findings demonstrate that when participants considered Corbynism's immediate prospects there was a consensus that its aim was to introduce a social democratic programme:

> BW: 'So do you think Labour could now be a vehicle for radical change?
>
> 'I think it can be a vehicle to a limited extent I suppose. We're at a point where capitalism in this country is so harsh and so much of the social democratic safety net, the concessions that were won by the organised working class in the twentieth century, all these things have been greatly eroded. We're now seeing the more extreme versions of capitalism with widening inequality, a crisis in the standard of living, a crisis in the power of ordinary people. I think Labour can do something to tackle a number of those things and I think those things are absolutely worth tackling. I think it's therefore worth being in the Labour Party and fighting on that terrain to get those things changed. I don't think you'd ever have socialism as I believe it is properly termed, not what Jeremy Corbyn calls socialism, because I think he really means social democracy. I don't think you can get proper socialism through the Labour Party, but I think it has a role to play in taking a step in that direction' (2).

However, as the above participant illustrates, members of Momentum hoped that Corbyn might lead to something more radical than conventional social democracy in the long term – even if he couldn't personally lead the party any further than that. The same participant, for example, considered themselves to be on the so-called 'hard left' of the political spectrum:

> 'I guess I would describe myself on the variously termed far or hard Left on the NUS and within the student movement. Pro direct-action, pro-workers' rights. I consider myself anti-capitalist etcetera. I wasn't really interested in parliamentary politics at all, and I was very critical of the Labour Party (2)'

Participants in Momentum had a range of different reasons for supporting Corbyn, as described at the beginning of this chapter, but they were united by a critical view of capitalism, the first part of the definition radical left provided above. Socialism was the solution to the various problems that it caused:

> 'I would identify as a socialist whatever that means – it is quite a broad in its own terms. I'm not wedded to the Labour Party in the same way I'm not wedded to Momentum. I'm not wedded particularly to any organisational form or tribalism as

> much as I am transforming society in a more equal, more sustainable, and more hopeful direction. And as we see our particular economic system collapsing, we see the redundancy of the ideas of the people who were part of that establishment and we see the threat of something far more sinister rising – the far right. A vibrant active left is the only way to move society in a better direction' (5)

The support for socialism came in different forms. Some participants evidently did not believe that the party could ever be socialist, but that it could nudge society in that direction. Other participants, however, believed that Corbyn was the beginning of a long process of transforming the Labour Party into a vehicle for democratic socialism. The following participant argues that this should be the main objective for Momentum:

> 'I wouldn't personally have a problem if 5, 10, 20 years down the line if Momentum wasn't needed because the structures in Labour were a lot more democratic and representative (...) So you know, we shouldn't be supporting Momentum in order to keep Momentum going, we should be supporting Momentum so it achieves our aims and objectives, which is a democratic socialist Labour Party' (9)

Participants hoped that a social democratic Labour government would establish the space for a more radical programme to be pursued if the party were able to then win consecutive elections. James Schneider, in an interview with me, delineated a potential Corbyn government into three stages with each stage more radical and far reaching than the last:

> 'Stage one getting elected. Stage two being able to carry out ameliorative forms to improve the material conditions of the majority. Step three carrying out some radical reforms that shift some of the balance of power in society, and step four to have non-reformist reforms which point to the area for actual socialist advance and democratise aspects of the economy and rearranging in some way property relations. I think you need each one of those steps to get to that point. (19)'

Gamble (1994: 8) asserts that the long-term aim of leaders mobilising a 'politics of support' is to establish a claim to 'political, moral and intellectual leadership'. If the Labour Party were to reach 'stage three', therefore, they would have to win the ideological argument so that they could recruit the necessary support for radical change in the long run. This was why, for example, Momentum sought to '*sanitise*' (11) socialism by redefining it as the new '*common*

sense' (11), and why the leadership deployed a left populist communications strategy, to name a couple of things discussed in this chapter.

Hope in historical progress moving progressively towards a better future, whether in a gradualist or a revolutionary sense, is fairly normal within the socialist worldview (Freeden, 2003). Labour's cautious programme, in that sense, was seen as the first step on the road to establishing long-term support and opening the pathways for a radical break with capitalism in the future. Corbyn could shift the debate to the left in the 'here and now', establishing an anchor to move beyond capitalism at some point in the future:

> 'I do believe at least John McDonnell is genuinely a Marxist and is anti-capitalist however I don't believe he's going to present that within a Labour manifesto anytime soon. I don't think that would be sensible to do either. I'm not saying that I think the Labour Party should suddenly just say right we want to do away with capitalism this is how we're going to do it. I think fundamentally Labour can never occupy that role, but I want to see them pushed considerably further to the left as time goes on and public debate changes. I want us to keep going on and pushing that narrative because I think Labour have successfully pushed that narrative further to the left than it was before, and I think it is possible to keep on doing that but it's only going to be done if there are people who are willing to try and do so' (2)

For the second part of the definition of radical left – a preference for more direct forms of democracy but not necessarily a rejection of parliamentary democracy (see March and Mudde, 2005) – there is abundant evidence that participants shared this view. IPD was not a rejection of parliament but was predicated on the view that more direct forms of democracy were needed to hold parliamentary representatives to account, and this was part of the broader commitment to pluralistic and inclusive forms of participation:

> 'Given the Labour Party formed when it did in Britain and we are in the moment we are with the electoral system I think Labour is the best vehicle to deliver that broad, pluralistic, inclusive, radical change that is needed' (5)

This participant supported more inclusive and direct vision of democracy and viewed the Labour Party as the most likely vehicle to pursue that. They accepted that parliament would remain a cornerstone of British politics, but hoped that the 'movement' might one day deliver an alternative democratic system:

> 'I suppose what we look at is a series of campaigns, activities, resistance, initiatives, education, solidarity, action. All these things and parliamentary democracy - which is what we have. I'm not wedded to parliamentary democracy and I don't think it is the best form of government necessarily but that's a route to power. I don't think there's another route which is more likely or more desirable necessarily so therefore we utilise that system to bring in new blood, new energy, new ideas, to diversify the type of people involved in politics and through that process think shit who knows Labour's form might change within that context. Maybe the party system will completely erode. Labour and the Conservative Party are very old. In many ways it is kind of bizarre the type of system we have governing the realities of the world we live in now but it is the system we have and I think we need to transform it through a process of shaking up the personnel who are involved and building a broad, pluralist, inclusive, imaginative culture within the process' (5)

One final point worth mentioning in this section is that TWT prefigured both aspects of Corbynism's political ideology: its support for alternative socioeconomic arrangements, and its more participative and direct vision of democracy and participation. Sessions such as '*Taking What's Ours: Public Ownership from Below?'* and *'Creating an Economy that Works for all'* popularised discussions around radical public ownership and accountability and democracy in economic policy. IPPR, as another example, were given a platform to present their ongoing research into platform capitalism and their advocacy for the Digital Commons. The festival was, more generally, brimming with debates on radical electoral reform and participative democracy which sought to discuss alternatives to Westminster (field notes, 2018, 2019). Organisers stressed that some of the policies first discussed at TWT had travelled into the manifesto by 2019, but for the most part, and certainly before the 2017 election, TWT painted a more vivid picture of Corbynism's politics of support than the party conference could.

Socialism for the Twenty-First Century

One point to consider, highlighted in the literature review, is that Corbynism has been influenced by a multitude of 'popular left' traditions which are not necessarily socialist: environmentalism, anti-racism, feminism, and so forth (see Dean, 2020). Chapter Two explained that the unity between these intellectual strands and conventional socialism is one reason the term pop-socialism has been coined. This section will explore participants views on these strands of thought and explore the implications for the thesis' understanding of

Corbynism. The findings indicate that it absorbed green politics into its pop-socialist vision but was unable to make significant progress in terms of feminist or anti-racist politics, despite the initial aspirations of participants in Momentum.

Jeremy Gilbert (2020) asserts that 'twenty-first century socialism'[19] needs to advocate for a diversity of issues that previous renditions of socialism were inclined to ignore. One of the first challenges is the looming climate crisis, which has established the need to connect green politics to a programme of social justice and wealth redistribution. From a pop-socialist perspective, moreover, connecting socialism to a green political agenda is advantageous because it could build popular support among new sectors of society that might not typically consider themselves socialists.

Corbynism made some substantial advancements on this terrain. At the 2019 election the Green New Deal (GND) was central to Labour's 2019 manifesto, which came top of climate campaign group Friends of the Earth's (2019) assessment of the environmental criteria of party manifestos. The GND combined a programme of wealth redistribution and infrastructural investment, more conventional socialist policies, with a plan for a 'just transition' to a zero-carbon economy (see Labour Party, 2019). Momentum proactively supported climate change campaigns, particularly during the peak of the Extinction Rebellion movement throughout 2019, and the GND was also a particularly prominent topic at TWT in 2019 (field notes, 2019). Finally, Momentum pursued a twofold strategy that aimed to support the climate change movement inside and outside the party:

> 'I think we have identified two particular ways we can make a contribution. One is direct action, the role of the banks and finance, and there's something that's been part of the project so far. A much more critical analysis of finance than you had under previous Labour administrations, and then the role we can play within the party in terms of inspiring people to be ambitious and hopefully get an ambitious motion passed through Conference (14).'

[19] The inspiration for the title of the book came from Jeremy Corbyn's 2018 party conference speech.

Another of Gilbert's assertions is that a modern socialist movement needs to draw on the legacy of other social movements that cannot necessarily be reduced to the logic of capitalism, which includes issues of race, gender and sexuality. When Corbyn was first elected, some participants hoped that his leadership would encourage a debate on such topics, such as the below participant who joined the Labour Party in the belief that the new leadership might finally force the party to respond to issues they had previously ignored:

> 'I saw my politics as being about, especially because I went to SOAS and studied a lot of African history, as about emancipatory politics, about international politics, about trying to strengthen the black agenda and all these various different things that I thought ran completely contrary to the Labour Party and ran completely contrary to any party politics in Britain. I saw Britain as the imperial core and it was still about that even though colonialism had ended, it hadn't really ended in terms of exploitation. So I never thought I would ever get involved with one of the political systems within Britain but it just so happened that Corbyn was talking in a way that resonated and with me and people around me – I had my mum calling me. My mum doesn't care about politics and she was calling me saying '"who is this Jeremy? He's going to do great things"' (18)

There were some strides forward in these areas in the initial part of Corbyn's leadership. Liberatory strands of thought were commonplace in the events and panels at TWT: '*Collective Principles of Anti-Racism in the UK today'; 'what can Labour do to deserve the title "anti-racist" party'?*; *'Feminism for the Many'*; or *'Women on Strike: learning from history'* (field notes, 2018, 2019). Women's sections were revived in Momentum and the party, and there was a firmer commitment to gender-based policies in both the 2017 and 2019 manifestos (Dean and Maiguashca, 2021: 241). Pro-Corbyn participants were more likely to embrace socialist or intersectional feminism, which sought to highlight the gendered impacts of austerity and articulate a feminist politics alongside issues of race, class, and sexuality, in distinction from feminist anti-Corbynites who adopted a radical feminist analysis but were 'typically aligned' with centre-left political ideology (Dean and Maiguashca, 2021: 240).

However, in the following years Corbynism's progress on this terrain was more uneven. Dean and Maiguashca (2021) have since noted that a more feminist articulation of left politics ultimately did not gain as much traction as many supporters hoped. The authors make several

interesting observations about why this was the case, some internal to the Corbyn movement, and some a consequence of its hostile political terrain. One key reason that is relevant to this thesis is that was that nuanced debates on feminism were increasingly sublimated by factional power struggles. Mainstream feminist voices were dominated by figures that opposed Corbynism and portrayed Corbyn supporters as 'irrational, misogynistic, fannish, cultish and all too willing to sacrifice feminism at the altar of his support for Corbyn' (242). This provoked pro-Corbyn activists into a bunker mentality that rendered them incapable of accepting immanent critique in the fear that this would be used for factional purposes against the left. This stifled Corbynism's intellectual evolution and hindered the interesting socialist feminist strands that had germinated in the initial part of Corbyn's leadership.

This conclusion leads Dean and Maiguashca (2021: 243) to lament the highly fractured and factional political landscape of modern British politics, leaving them 'in no doubt that any discussion of feminism and gender will always be overdetermined by the ideological coordinates of the wider context in which it happens'. The failure to make progress on this front contributed to the sense of deflation and disillusionment that began to mark the left even before the 2019 election defeat. Corbynism was seen by participants as a 'movement' that might be able to position feminist debates at the centre of its analysis, but it ultimately became trapped by the factional demands of party and parliamentary politics. The next chapter will explore these tensions in more detail as part of its analysis of Corbynism's decline.

Conclusion

This chapter utilised the idea of pop-socialism to answer the third and fourth research question – how did participants understand Corbynism? In doing so, the chapter elicited some insights into why Corbynism, as an instance of pop-socialism, gathered such support in Momentum and across the left between the 2015 leadership contest and the 2017 general election. It cemented a measure of unity not seen for a long time: Corbyn's leadership sustained a sense community between plural traditions that continued to remain united by their support for

popular-democratic initiatives, such as party democracy and a multitude of ‘popular left’ intellectual strands, alongside more conventional socialist objectives.

The next chapter will turn to analysing the downfall of Corbynism. It will interrogate some of the difficulties faced at the 2019 election, particularly over Brexit, and it will also identify some of the intractable tensions that preceded the election defeat and contributed to the failure of ‘Corbynism beyond Corbyn’ following Corbyn’s resignation in the aftermath of the defeat.

7. The 2019 Election Defeat and the Failure of 'Corbynism beyond Corbyn'

'A very small left was able to project a lot of power through taking control of the leadership of the opposition. We didn't earn it. It wasn't this long march thing. We fluked it' (25)

Introduction

The main aim of this chapter is to answer the fourth research question – how can Momentum help to explain Corbynism's rise and fall? By analysing the rise and fall of Corbynism from the perspective of Momentum, the thesis continues to tackle its main aim of defining and understanding the two phenomena and their intersection.

The findings indicate that aspects of its decline can be traced back to the foundations of Corbyn's leadership. The first section establishes the context for the chapter by providing a brief overview of the failure of 'Corbynism beyond Corbyn': Whilst the election defeat was particularly crippling, Corbynism's rapid transition from 'total control' (Stewart, 2018) back to the margins of the party was perhaps more surprising. The second section outlines the findings on Momentum's 2019 election campaign: Participants reported that they made significant advancements on their widely acclaimed 2017 campaign but were ultimately a casualty to weaknesses in Labour's overall strategy.

The election defeat alone does not explain the decline of 'Corbynism beyond Corbyn' in the aftermath of the defeat. The third section utilises the findings on Momentum to trace the decline to tensions that stemmed from the leadership-driven nature of Corbynism and Momentum, in a party otherwise controlled by opposition factions, which contributed to a sequence of clashes between 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. Three recurring dilemmas that were not resolved put the survival of Corbynism in jeopardy: (1) the need for internal party control vs. the demand for internal party democracy; (2) strains between party-based objectives and movement-based objectives; and (3) the constraints of representative democracy vs. the

appeals of direct democracy. It would be an overstatement to suggest that these were the sole reason for the decline of the left post-Corbyn. Taken together, however, they help to explain why party reform – which might have consolidated the long-term prospects of the left – was not introduced, and why the left was therefore vulnerable to decline once the 'pop-star' leader resigned.

7.1. What happened to 'Corbynism beyond Corbyn'?

Whilst Corbyn was leader his supporters were wont to use the phrase 'Corbynism beyond Corbyn' to draw attention to the need to maintain his legacy after he moved on (see Pike, 2020; Pike and Diamond, 2021). Implicit in the expression was a recognition that Corbyn-ism was at least in part a personality driven project spearheaded by their (anti-) charismatic leader, and more long-term foundations were needed to secure the gains that had been made over the previous years. Acknowledgement of this fact prompted Momentum to pursue internal party reforms in in an attempt to put the left on a more stable footing for Corbyn's eventual resignation. However, when that resignation eventually arrived following the 2019 election defeat, the 'total control' the Corbynites supposedly had quickly dissipated amidst a resurgent right, who quickly moved to renounce the reforms that had been introduced under the Corbyn leadership.

The election of former Shadow Brexit Secretary Keir Starmer as the new leader in April 2020 was the first indication that the support for Corbyn was not as homogenous as many were led to believe. Starmer was elected with an overwhelming 56.2% of the popular vote, more than double the 'continuity Corbyn' candidate Rebecca Long-Bailey, who had been nominated by Corbyn's leading parliamentary figures and supported by Momentum.

Starmer's appointment, however, was not immediately seen as a death knell for Corbynism. Indeed, many Corbyn supporters voted for him on the basis of his 'ten pledges', which included a commitment to fiscal redistribution, a reversal of austerity measures, the abolition of tuition fees and Universal Credit, commitment to a Green New Deal, and continued support for

common ownership, the rights of migrants, workers and trade unions (see Starmer, 2020). These pledges convinced many Corbyn supporters that he would continue with the programme whilst providing the more polished and media-friendly presentation that Corbyn was perceived to lack[20]. Following the conclusion of the election Momentum tweeted Starmer to remind him of his promises: 'His mandate is to build on Jeremy's transformative vision, and this means appointing a Shadow Cabinet who believe in his policies and will work with members to make them a reality'.

However, during Starmer's first few months a departure from his predecessor's direction seemed more and more inevitable. Rebecca Long-Bailey, the only inner-Corbynite given a seat in the Shadow Cabinet, was dismissed less than three months later after sharing an article which contained an antisemitic conspiracy theory. This was followed by Jeremy Corbyn's acrimonious suspension from the whip in November after becoming mired in yet another controversy pertaining to antisemitism. Without going into details of the suspension, which have been widely reported elsewhere, many on the left saw it as a 'blatant political attack', with Momentum's co-chair accusing Starmer of 'making it up as he goes along' (see Stewart et al, 2020). Local parties were banned from discussing the suspension following the strengthening of guidance which prevents discussion of ongoing disciplinary cases – with a raft of suspensions for officials that allowed it to happen – in a move which Momentum decried as 'yet another disturbing attack on the rights of members to democratically discuss matters vital to the party' (field notes, 2020). The now minority left caucus on the NEC staged a digital walkout in protest at the suspension, a move which had little tangible effect as the meeting was still quorate, but which underlined the discontent that was festering on the left (see Massey, 2020).

[20] His winning coalition also included some supporters on the right of the party, Remainers, and members of the soft left that had lent their support to Corbyn on the basis that he would advocate for social democracy and an end to austerity.

The denouncement of Corbyn and Long-Bailey coincided with a renunciation of the party reforms and policy direction of the previous years. This has included, among other things, the dismantling of the COU described in Chapter Five[21], one of the only tangible party reforms Corbyn introduced, a policy of 'abstentionism' on bills seen as anathema to left-wing values, provoking several rebellions by Corbynite backbenchers (see Rodgers, 2020b), the imposition of single transferable vote for NEC elections which disadvantaged the left slate and boosted Starmer's majority, and a failure to embrace some of the more daring policies of the former leader (see Bastani, 2020). In addition, the relatively minor constitutional amendments that Corbyn introduced were reversed at the 2021 party conference as Starmer reaffirmed the 'parliamentary independence' view of party management – the trigger ballot threshold was restored back to 50% of party branches whilst the number of nominations by MPs needed to enter a future leadership contest was raised from 10% to 20%[22] (see Chappell and Rodgers, 2021). For critics on the left, these changes divided the party at a time when unity was more important than ever. For supporters on the right, they were a vital step in improving the party's capacity to appeal to the median voter after five years of Corbyn's disastrous leadership.

Meanwhile, without Corbyn at the helm, the cohesion of the pop-socialist moment soon dispersed. The soft left was always part of the Corbyn coalition, but they now flooded to Starmer. Momentum split between different slates in their July NCG elections – which resulted in a wide sweeping change of guard – and their internal party influence has gradually waned as they shifted towards more movementist aims, most notably launching an eviction resistance campaign in conjunction with the London Renters Union and Acorn. Other left groupings emerged but made little headway, including the so-called 'Love Socialism' and the more soberly named 'Don't Leave, Organise'. Overall, in the absence of the sweeping party reform that was aspired to during the Corbyn years the left have very few means by which to leverage

[21] One notable commentator described this as a 'war on grassroots politics' (Blackburn, 2020)
[22] Both of these reforms had a majority against in the CLP section but passed with the backing of the unions

the leadership into a change of direction, although Unite, the biggest financiers of Corbyn's Labour, have flexed their muscles by cutting their donations to the party.

The ease with which Starmer won the leadership contest before rapidly changing direction raises questions about why 'Corbynism beyond Corbyn' did not materialise, despite the 'total control' that the Corbynites were alleged to have in the aftermath of the 2017 election, and the persistence of Corbyn's popularity among the membership. The final section traces this failure to the nature in which Corbyn rose to the leadership of the party. Three dilemmas stemmed from Corbynism and Momentum's roots as leadership-driven phenomena inside a party that was otherwise controlled by factions to their right: (1) the pursuit of internal party democracy vs. the need for internal party control; (2) strains between movement-oriented and party-oriented groups; and (3) the constraints of representative democracy vs. the appeals of direct democracy. These dilemmas established formidable external barriers that curbed Corbynism's momentum *and* instigated internal splits which only became more apparent after Corbyn resigned. Taken together, this provides some preliminary (certainly not exhaustive) explanations for the failure of 'Corbynism beyond Corbyn' in the aftermath of the election.

The next section, however, will outline the findings on Momentum's 2019 general election campaign – a significant stage in Corbynism's decline. Participants claim that they made several innovations and improvements on their 2017 campaign but were ultimately a casualty of the tactical and strategic errors made by the main party campaign. The election defeat alone, it will be claimed, does not provide much insight into the decline of 'Corbynism beyond Corbyn' in the aftermath of the defeat.

7.2. The 2019 general election campaign

The gains made at the 2017 general election were reversed by an even more precipitous downfall at the 2019 election: Labour plummeted to 32% of the vote and were left with their lowest number of seats since 1935 (see Cutts et al, 2020: 7). The Labour Together report (2020: 10) conducted following the election – which was based on over 11, 000 survey

responses, interviews with 50 key activists, and submissions from key institutions across the labour movement – sheds light on the scale of the defeat. Labour lost all types of voters in every region except London, and across all classes, but working-class communities the most. The Conservatives increased their vote share for the sixth election in a row, and won their biggest majority since 1987, despite the internal splits and conflicts which had marred their previous two years (Prosser, 2021: 455). Labour requires an unprecedented swing of 10% to win a majority of just one seat at the next election.

The causes of the defeat are not the aim of this chapter. Suffice it to say that several factors have been attributed to the result but Labour's Brexit policy – to negotiate a new deal with the EU and put it back to the people in another referendum, before holding a special conference to decide whether to campaign for Leave or Remain – is generally considered the most decisive factor (see Mellon et al, 2018; see Prosser, 2021; Cooper and Cooper, 2020). In their attempt to navigate a pathway between Leave and Remain supporters they landed on an ambivalent policy that pleased neither side:

> 'We ended up on the worst of all worlds because there are people who say we should do a soft Brexit and there are people who say we should stop Brexit, so we just combined those two policies by saying we would negotiate a soft Brexit and basically that has no positive elements to it really. It's a nonsense framing, it's ridiculous. We would combine that with the referendum which could overturn it. You could see that was where the compromise was going to be driven, so I think it would have been extremely difficult to do something else, but we didn't try enough in a concerted way to shift the terrain on which we were fighting' (19).

By the time the election campaign got underway Labour were already a long way back in the polls (see Goes, 2020). For the first four weeks key marginal constituencies were targeted in an aggressive strategy – only 29 out of 80 seats that Corbyn visited during the campaign were Labour held seats – and daily policy announcements were made to divert attention from their Brexit policy (see Goes, 2020: 88-91). However, they reverted to a more defensive strategy with two weeks to go after acknowledging that Leave voting 'red wall' seats were at a high risk of collapse. This prompted them to place prominent Leave voices at the forefront of the campaign, but due to the intractable divisions at the apex of the party these overtures did not

go as far as many in the Leave camp wanted (Pogrund and Maguire, 2020: 325). In the end, only Putney swung to Labour, a seat which voted 72.3% for Remain in the referendum, and no Leave voting marginals swung back in Labour's favour.

Momentum, for their part, made several enhancements on their widely appraised 2017 campaign, which largely went under the radar because of the result. They enhanced their 'distributed organising[23]' techniques to combine 'connective' action which mobilised the network online with a conventional 'collective action' ground campaign that was an appendage to the main party campaign. One of the senior campaign organisers gave me an overview of the main aspects of their strategy:

> 'Distributing organising is a large part of the strategy - opening the strategy for members to do stuff like knock on doors or volunteer in parts of the campaign, or actually organise themselves and then become instead of being passive recipients at an event they go to actually become the organiser and then the scale of the movement thickens out like that. One thing we also did was relational organising - so not just get people to knock on doors but also speak to friends and family and grandparents in the knowledge that they are going to have more leverage with those people than they would with strangers, which the Bernie campaign did a lot of this time around but they didn't do before. And then the other thing was that we emphasised peer-to-peer more. The distributed organising model of the Sanders campaign is more command and control whereas often we would very deliberately enable activist self-organisation, for instance when you go on MyCampaignMap it wouldn't just show events you can go to, or a Zoom call you can sign up to, it would also show a Whatsapp link for example where you could join a group with lots of other local activists and then in those groups people would self-organise. Some are still going and being used for different things - which has provided lasting infrastructure in an informal sense' (24)

One of the first principles of distributed organising is to develop a centralised but transparent plan that encourages the mass participation of volunteers by informing them of the campaign strategy and equipping them with the information to self-organise[24]. Momentum accordingly (2019a) published a 'Plan to Win' with three main parts. First, they would 'build people power' by mobilising thousands of volunteers to knock on millions of doors and hosting hundreds of 'phone bank parties' and voter registration events; they would raise as much funding from

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[24] This is well suited to Momentum's centralised decision-making structures but plural and relatively autonomous local groups.

individual donations as possible; and they would organise ‘persuasive conversations’ sessions to train prospective canvassers on how to win over swing voters. Second, they would play a supporting role in Labour’s campaigns in key marginal constituencies: they asked their army of volunteers to knock on around two million doors in 150 marginal constituencies, which required 5, 000 volunteers to commit to eight days of canvassing (field notes, 2019). Third, volunteers were urged to ‘step up’ and organise key aspects of the campaign: phonebank parties, carpool campaigns, voter registration stalls, and so forth.

Connecting the movement online is a requisite part of a collective mobilisation based on distributed organising principles. Momentum doubled their social media video views from 51 million in 2017 to 106 million in 2010 – with 1 in 2 British Facebook users viewing their videos (up from 1 in 3 in 2017). Additionally, approximately 201, 000 people in marginal constituencies saw an advertisement by Momentum encouraging them to vote, and 7 million out of 12 million voters in marginal constituencies ‘saw a video designed to persuade them to vote Labour’ (Momentum, 2020: 4). Overall, they had much more of an outreach on social media in 2019, although it is hard to quantify the tangible effect that this had:

> ‘Our reach was way better than in 2017 we reached loads more people. And for the first time we put loads of money into Facebook advertising which seemed to be working but it’s very very hard to measure. You can measure the number of activists who turn up to something and the number of times a video is viewed. It's hard to use that to measure success’ (24).

Moreover, existing digital tools were enhanced and new tools were launched, which aimed to funnel activists from online interactions on social media into the collective ground campaign, which for all intents and purposes worked as smoothly as could have been hoped, with some caveats[25]. The most notable of these tools was the MyCampaignMap (MCM) – a revamped version of the MNM app used in 2017 – which frequently updated information on canvassing sessions, phonebanking parties, training events, leafleting sessions and so forth. Members

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[25] Most of Momentum’s innovations with digital platforms have mobilised their base in internal party selections or election campaigns, rather than their internal democratic processes.

could upload their own events to the map, including contact details and Whatsapp groups, which bypassed the party's traditional structures to provide real-time updates. 21,000 sessions were uploaded by election day; 3, 000 users per day visited the app at the beginning of the campaign and 9, 000 by the end; and 170, 000 unique users visited the site, with around 15% of those using it 10 times or more (see Momentum, 2020).

Participants who worked on the campaign (Momentum had 56 paid staff on the books during the campaign compared to only around a dozen in 2017) were again overwhelmingly positive about the performance of MCM. It was an important transmission belt for funnelling activists that may have few contacts into the campaign. However, they did point out that the party's overaggressive targeting of marginal constitutes reduced its efficacy:

> 'The downside of it was the targeting. We basically got the targeting from the party with a few modifications. Maybe it was naive of us to get targeting from the party but I think we would have been criticised had we not followed targeting from the party. That was a problem - we mobilised a lot of people but in hindsight we didn't mobilise people to the right places' (24)

Volunteers were mobilised to seats which they realistically had little chance of winning, contributing to the broader imbalance of Labour's campaign. They adjusted their target seats with two weeks to go, with some success, but it was too late to make any substantial impact. This imbalance was compounded by Momentum's collaboration with Owen Jones in an 'Unseat' campaign which saw the celebrity journalist lead canvassing sessions in the constituencies of prominent Conservative MPs, including Iain Duncan Smith and Boris Johnson. The numbers involved in the campaign were again impressive: they ran over 35 sessions across the country with an average turnout of 200 (Momentum, 2020: 4). However, whilst the Unseat campaign generated media coverage and mobilised hundreds of activists, in hindsight Momentum (2020: 10) have concluded that they were 'guilty of being over-optimistic', along with the rest of the party, and speculated that 16 seats might have been saved had Labour targeted constituencies that they had a more sizeable majority in.

Another innovation in their ground campaign was 'Labour Legends', which saw 500 activists dispatched to 59 priority marginal constituencies for up to two weeks. Labour's membership tends to be concentrated in metropolitan safe seats but Labour Legends helped to remedy this imbalance by sending volunteers to constituencies where they could be more useful:

> 'A huge problem that you have is the geographical spread of activists and if people are willing to travel and stay over at places which aren't where they live. These little rural CLPs that they have - Truro and Falmouth for example - the amount of Labour Legends we sent there doubled the canvassing capacity they had. It is really good for building links in the labour movement' (24)

On the day of the election Momentum (2020: 4) also launched a GTVO mobilisation in which 6, 370 activists were allocated to local constituencies and distributed via 15 coaches. This again boosted the size of the campaign in key marginal constituencies by ensuring that campaigners could reach important constituencies, in some cases multiplying the number of contacts between voters and party members.

Summary: what effect did Momentum's campaign have?

Momentum's 2019 election campaign mobilised better trained and more effectively coordinated volunteers than in 2017, had more of an outreach on social media, made several new innovations, particularly with digital tools, and raised around £1million, approximately fourfold 2017. This was seen by participants as a success:

> 'We use platform technology to enable activists to do stuff with ourselves but also engage with centrally planned campaigns through distributed organising techniques. We had a lot of success with that in the election at least in the deployment of those techniques. Our 2019 campaign was one of the biggest distributing organising efforts in British history. We didn't win but in terms of the deployment of the campaign it was very successful' (24)

Combining a highly visible online campaign with a range of tools designed to encourage participation in the ground campaign, alongside a centralised but widely circulated plan, was an effective way of appealing to the new joiners that were unaccustomed to the more routinised methods of a party campaign. Volunteers were expected to take on as much

responsibility as possible to 'scale' the campaign and so were made to feel welcome and wanted:

> 'How do you go from a capacity of 50 to a capacity of 10, 000 in a week and then get that 10, 000 to self-manage? That is the jump you are talking about. So, I think it is a real step forward for the left in terms of how we talk about short term electoral mobilisations' (25).

Momentum (2020: 2) asserted that their campaign contrasted with Labour's bureaucratic inertia and hostility to organisational innovations, low levels of trust and internal communication, poor hiring procedures, and inappropriate factionalism amongst Party staff'. A senior staff member in Momentum asserted that the contrast between the two campaigns was stark:

> 'There is a constant battle of cultures between how the party functions and how Momentum functions. The difference between being in Southside and being in Momentum's offices is wild in terms of bureaucratic culture. The difference between TWT and Conference is huge (…) It's one of the things that just hasn't changed for various reasons. And I think it's just because it is very hard to change a very old, unwieldy institution like the Labour Party and we haven't quite managed to change the culture as much as we want so far (24)'

However, Momentum are a relatively small appendage to the Labour campaign and so were never in a position to push back against the tide. If anything, they sometimes fell victim to Labour's tactical and strategic shortcomings. A poor Brexit strategy and poor campaign in comparison to the Conservatives meant the party and its satellites were always playing catch-up:

> 'The problem is that campaigning is never ever a substitute for political strategy. You need the right political strategy and the right messengers and you need the right message to win. If you don't have those things then the campaigning is much more challenging. And looking back to 2019 if we are really honest it was never winnable. It was a Brexit election, and there was only one party who wanted to get Brexit done and they ran their campaign really really really effectively, both before the campaign started and during the campaign. They were brilliant. And also Jeremy's approval ratings were terrible because he had been trashed for two years but also his indecisiveness around Brexit and the Brexit position he adopted completely destroyed his reputation. People saw him as weak' (24)

In addition, participants lamented that the party had not been able to improve its digital tools or manage its membership more effectively during campaigns:

> 'But obviously the party massively lags behind on all of this stuff, fundamentally how the party operates vis-à-vis its memberships, how it conceives of its membership, the technologies it uses to interact with its membership or indeed the technologies it allows its membership to use to interact with each other and campaign locally haven't significantly advanced in the last four years' (24).

Momentum's co-founder bemoaned Labour's organisational model for still being structured around the Post Office:

> 'The Labour Party still operates in a 20th century structure. It's structured around the technology of the Post Office. You get directions down a pyramid chain to get people to come to a pre-appointed place once a month. And that was the most effective way of doing it then it's absolutely not now and we are hugely stifling the dynamism of the membership' (19)

Many of these criticisms have since been supported by the existing inquiries into Labour's campaign. The Labour Together report has criticised the absence of an overall strategic message meaning that satellites, including Momentum, did not have a 'core message to reinforce' their social media channels and knit the whole campaign together (Labour Together, 2020: 94). The daily policy announcements were poorly communicated and few outside of leadership circles knew them in advance. When John McDonnell told the BBC that Labour would nationalise BT's infrastructure division to supply free broadband across the country – a policy which tanked among the voters[26] – it was news to the Shadow Cabinet (Pogrund and Maguire, 2020: 315). Moreover, Labour was outperformed in the digital sphere despite dedicating sizable resources to their online campaign as part of an attempt to bypass the mainstream media. The report describes Labour's digital infrastructure as 'underfunded and inadequate' and criticised the lack of training and consultations for online tools, meaning that they were not optimally used if they were used at all (Labour Together, 2020: 14).

[26] Johnson described the policy as a 'crazed communist scheme'.

Another clear strategic mistake was the overaggressive targeting of key marginals which Momentum (2020) conceded was a mistake in their post-election analysis. Some local organisers I spoke to complained that Momentum did not take the initiative in directing activists to key constituencies, with a lot of support coming too late. In all likelihood, however, this was more likely to do with Labour's overoptimistic strategy which Momentum broadly attempted to support.

The 2019 campaign might transpire to be the zenith of Momentum's role as an appendage to the main Labour campaign. It is improbable that Momentum would seek to offer the same level of support to a Starmer-led Labour campaign and even if they did it is unlikely that they would marshal the number of volunteers that they did in 2017 and 2019 – many volunteers were specifically enthused by the prospects of a Corbyn-led Labour government. In terms of understanding the broader legacy of Corbynism, the campaign cannot explain the scale of the decline witnessed in the aftermath of the defeat (other than the obvious point that the election defeat forced Corbyn to resign and discredited their programme) or why 'Corbynism without Corbyn' did not materialise. To understand why the Labour right have been able to reassert control so quickly, it is important to go back to the foundations of Corbyn's leadership, which will form the basis of the next section.

7.3. The defeat of 'Corbynism beyond Corbyn'

John McDonnell's (2015) assessment following the 2015 election that British socialism was facing its 'darkest hour' was not mistaken: Labour had just been annihilated, the left had rarely been so marginalised, the unions had faced an onslaught since the Falkirk selection scandal in 2013, and the social movements which followed the financial crisis were slowly withering away. Yet, just four months later, Corbyn was crowned as leader in the left's finest hour for at least a generation, if not more. The rise continued to the point where Corbyn was seemingly untouchable, with some critics lamenting his 'complete control over the party machine' after Jennie Formby was hired as general secretary in early 2018 (Stewart, 2018).

Despite the assertion of total control, the findings outlined in this section illustrate that the sudden nature of Corbyn's rise in fact papered over the left's institutional vulnerability. Corbyn may have taken control of the 'commanding heights' of the parliamentary system but he and his allies remained 'incredibly weak' in all aspects of organised politics beneath that:

> 'So we fluked our way into the leadership and by chance gained control of the opposition party. And gaining control of the opposition party is like the height of power. In a way institutionally it is the most powerful the left has ever been. However, on the shop floor, in communities, in terms of actual organised politics we were incredibly weak but for want of a better word we controlled the commanding heights of the parliamentary system' (25).

It was clear to participants that he lacked vital allies in the PLP or the party bureaucracy. Existing accounts have documented the hostility by large sections of the PLP throughout his tenure (see Pogrund and Maguire, 2020). A notorious list drawn up by Corbyn's allies was leaked which ranked MPs by hostility and named a 'core group' of only 19 supportive MPs compared to 85 that were either 'core group negative' or 'hostile group', and although the uptake marginally improved at the 2017 election and again in 2019, only 34 of Labour's 202 elected MPs were in the left-wing SCG as of 2020 (see Pine, 2016). Additionally, with a general election seemingly imminent, the leadership were unwilling to press for controversial reforms that might amplify divisions, a threat which seemed all too real to some figures close to the leadership after the resignation of seven MPs that formed Change UK in early 2019 (19). A LOTO aide gives a flavour of the atmosphere when the PLP moved a motion of no confidence against Corbyn in the second leadership contest:

> 'I thought he was the democratically elected leader, the PLP want to win elections, they're not going to damage the party. They would have to hold their noses and if they don't like it wait it out. That was obviously not how it played out. Every day was a massive challenge and we felt like we were drowning. It was constant negative attacks, negative briefings, and then after the referendum we had the leadership challenge and they were resigning one day after the next coordinated one morning, one afternoon, one evening. Resignation letters would go up on the news for 30 days or whatever it was. So you had the shadow cabinet, the frontbench, and the Parliamentary Private Secretary's, they all resigned systematically. They couldn't even wait a year and that whole time they were planning to do the leadership challenge and it was a very well executed plan' (26).

Corbyn fared little better with the party bureaucracy (see Pogrund and Maguire, 2020; Jones, 2020). The leadership had a better grip on proceedings after Jennie Formby replaced Iain McNicol as general secretary in early 2018, but not enough to put an end to factionalism. The same LOTO aide describes the party HQ in Southside as a 'wrecking operation' (a phrase which I regularly heard when in the company of participants in Momentum):

> 'Yeah so my appointment leaked. And then I met with Seamus on the first day I started and I said I didn't tell anyone - and he said no, no, no, no, no if it leaked then it leaked from Southside. It was just like "oh it leaked from Southside". It leaked like a sieve. There was one moment where Andrew Fisher as director of policy went over to Southside which is like a 5 minute walk from the leaders office and he was going over to discuss with them about being executive director of policy. This would have given him more influence and that was important. And when he came back I said to him congratulations on getting promoted. And he said how did you know? And I said I've just seen James Lyons from the Sunday Times tweet about it. In the time he took him to walk back someone had leaked it - so that was the operation that we were up against. Things were leaking all the time (…) they were doing everything they could - they were doing a wrecking operation' (26)

The trade unions, meanwhile, particularly Unite, were Corbyn's most important ballast inside the party. However, some trade union leaders had legitimate concerns that the plebiscitary and individualistic nature of members-led democratisation – with a considerable emphasis on OMOV – threated to undermine their leverage. This occasionally led to clashes between supporters that wanted a members-led party, through amendments such as open selections, and the unions that saw this as a distraction from the urgent task of winning an election. Participants on the NEC reported that the union bloc played a pivotal role in diverting the party away from some of the proposals in the Democracy Review. From the leadership's perspective, this created a tension between their dependency on the unions (most importantly Unite) as a political ballast, and the support for more direct forms of party democracy among large sections of the pro-Corbyn membership.

Corbyn's lack of allies in the PLP, party bureaucracy and some sections of the unions, was one of the primary reasons Corbynism started out and continued to be a heavily personality-driven project. His personal successes were the most important factor in the left's ascent, which discouraged supporters, including Momentum, from making the necessary reforms that

might have established a more stable footing in the long-term but potentially threatened Corbyn in the short or medium-term. Corbyn's allies, including Momentum, were expected to show allegiance and loyalty above all else, as Jon Lansman explains:

> 'We were all expected to show loyalty to Jeremy, those of us who were elected supporting Jeremy, rather than influencing the direction of the party and overseeing the party's administration, which is what our job was under the rules' (in Rodgers, 2020a)

The overreliance on Corbyn's victories created several problems. Not least of all that he remained deeply unpopular among the electorate. In one poll three months before the 2019 election campaign 76% of the public described themselves as 'dissatisfied' with Corbyn as leader of the opposition, 77% believed he was doing a bad job at handling Brexit, and only 21% thought that he was a capable leader (Ipsos Mori, 2019). Additionally, the inability to maintain the momentum of Corbyn's initial rise exposed the fragility of politicising fandom. Without other incentives to remain active, supporters are likely to move away from political involvement as soon as the leader that prompted their interest moves on. Orientation around the pop-star leader, in that regard, can be a recipe for demobilisation as rapid as the mobilisation which first gave rise to Corbynism.

But most importantly for the purposes of this thesis, the personality-driven nature of Corbynism established a range of strategic dilemmas for Momentum. The HLPG has established a framework to analyse Momentum's hybrid combination of 'insider' and 'outsider' strategies through which they attempted to influence the direction of the Labour Party. Despite the semi-successes of this strategy, the findings also indicate that there was a sequence of clashes between 'insiders' and 'outsiders' stemming from the unstable foundations of Corbyn's leadership. Three recurring and related tensions can be identified: (1) the need for internal party control vs. the demand for internal party democracy; (2) strains between party-based objectives and movement-based objectives; and (3) the constraints of representative

democracy vs. the appeals of direct democracy. The inability to find agreeable solutions to these dilemmas ultimately meant that the party changed very little during the period in question. In the absence of significant reform the window of opportunity opened by Corbyn was firmly closed once he resigned.

The pursuit of internal party democracy vs. the need for internal party control

Corbyn's unstable foundations in the three most important faces of the party – the PLP, the trade unions, and the party in central office – meant that he was under a lot of pressure to sacrifice internal party democracy (IPD) at the altar of internal party control (IPC). Chapter Five explored how the tension between these two objectives contributed to the defeat of party reform at the 2018 party conference. On the one hand, insiders were more inclined to believe that Momentum should form Corbyn's Praetorian Guard in factional disputes inside the party to try to consolidate and increase his (and therefore the left's) control. They prioritised loyalty to the leadership, at the expense of substantial party reform, if they thought the latter risked amplifying party splits and undermining Corbyn's authority. Outsiders, on the other hand, were more inclined to pursue radically democratic demands in Momentum or the Labour Party because they thought that redistributing power to the grassroots would benefit the left in the long-run by fulfilling supporters popular-democratic aspirations for a 'members-led' party.

Momentum initially pursued party reform in an attempt to secure both objectives, but they gradually resorted to conventional intra-party factionalism, to the chagrin of outsiders who felt that the party was in desperate need of reform. Some of the most prominent party insiders have conceded that they served little purpose other than being a factional battering ram for the leadership. Jon Lansman expressed his disappointment at being co-opted into a wrestle for bureaucratic control during his time on the NEC:

> '[the Corbyn leadership] chose to focus on a battle for bureaucratic control rather than the democratisation of the party that I was seeking (…) that was a very difficult situation to manage. I absolutely supported the transformative policies that Jeremy

> was standing for. But I also wanted to refashion the party in a way that made it fit for the 21st century, and I don't think we've achieved that' (in Rodgers, 2020a)

The vulnerable position of the leadership compelled Momentum insiders to resort to hyper-factionalism rather than pursue the democratisation that they normatively advocated for. This is again evidenced by Lansman who, citing opposition from the PLP, opined that they were not intentionally 'factional by choice from the start. But I think there was lots of necessity about it, at certain times' (in Rodgers, 2020a).

Resorting to conventional factionalism had the knock-on effect of reinforcing the personality-driven nature of Corbynism by making insiders ever more reliant on the leadership's personal successes, putting insiders in a difficult position. Lansman conveys this point when commenting that the current Momentum leadership might have an easier time now that Corbyn had moved on:

> 'One of the things that goes with supporting the leader is pressure to support whatever the leader does and decides. There was plenty of that (…) I do think that meant decision-making [by the party leadership] was too much in the bubble (…) the new Momentum leadership are relieved of that problem.'

The tension between IPC and IPD was never more transparent than during the evolution of Labour's Brexit policy. Before the 2018 party conference a survey found that 75% of Labour members supported the idea of a second referendum, and 88% would have voted to remain in the EU if given a second opportunity (Bale et al, 2018). Some leadership circles, however, believed there were powerful arguments against a second referendum: 45 of Labour's 64 target seats in 2019 voted to Leave, and 80% of the marginals with majorities of under 2, 000 in England and Wales were in Leave voting constituencies (see Dunin-Wasowicz, 2019). As senior Corbyn adviser Andrew Murray stated: 'it was fucking mad to go in a Remain direction given where the votes are. You have to win under a first-past-the-post system, and we could

see from 2017 where we were vulnerable' (in Jones, 2020: 183). In their attempt to ride two horses at once, Labour landed on their indecisive Brexit policy at the 2019 party conference.

The Brexit crisis established a powerful deterrent against the pursuit of IPD because a genuinely members-led party would have pushed the leadership towards undeviating support for a second referendum and Remain. Their unwillingness to go down that path disillusioned pro-Remain and pro-Corbyn members: Labour's Brexit policy was the litmus test of members-led democratisation, and as far as Remainers were concerned, the test had been failed. Some Corbyn supporters, meanwhile, were quick to portray the Remainers as disloyal to the Corbyn leadership.

As a result of these immediate obstacles very few tangible party reforms were achieved as Corbynism instead collapsed into intra-party factionalism in a deeply polarised party. The need to preserve IPC and prevent internal rebellions superseded the calls for members-led democratisation. Whilst no serious account could claim this caused the 2019 election defeat, it was a key factor in the failure of 'Corbynism beyond Corbyn' in its aftermath. The absence of IPD gave Starmer the space to sweep aside the grassroots left with very few repercussions despite visible protestations. If purposeful grassroots control was introduced there may have been ramifications that the parliamentary leadership could not ignore in the form of, for example, reselections[27]. Some insiders have conceded that the failure to introduce party reform was a significant missed opportunity (whilst also pointing out that it would have been extremely challenging because of the resistance they would have faced from the party machine):

> 'A lot of people who supported Jeremy became despondent at the lack of progress with regards to party democracy and I think many others only now are realising that there were mistakes made that we didn't capitalise on the opportunity that we had with the majority on the NEC and all this kind of stuff (…) It was a big, big, missed opportunity - the biggest missed opportunity is changing the way the Labour Party operates. It would have involved taking on Southside, it would have involved letting a lot of people shouldn't go who frankly should have been there, who weren't interested in winning, the project, or doing anything constructive. It

[27] Lansman's biggest regret was the failure to introduce open selections (Rodgers, 2020a)

> would have been necessary and would have actually paid off in the longer term' (26)

More broadly, this raises the important question over if, and how, IPD is possible within the Labour Party. Many scholars of political parties have poured scorn on the prospects of members led IPD in social democratic parties, whether due to the supposed 'iron law of oligarchy' (Michels, 1962) or because grassroots democracy is seen as a contradiction with the representative basis of parliamentary democracy (McKenzie, 2010). Taking the leadership of the party perhaps presented an opportunity to introduce reform from the top-down, but this was complicated by the leaders' weak position in a polarised party, which compelled insiders into conventional factionalism in place of members-led democratisation. These are important obstacles that proponents of IPD must take seriously moving forward.

The tension between movement-based and party-based groups

Momentum was launched in an attempt to influence the direction of the Labour Party. They opted to do so by pursing an outsider strategy which aimed to tap into the power of social movements, in conjunction with an insider strategy that sought to democratise the party and consolidate the left's control (Klug et al, 2016; see Gilbert, 2017). In Corbynism's initial rise the benefits of this dual strategy were clear: the 'movement provides the party with fresh energy and new members, while the party provides structure for the movement to make further political advances' (Muldoon and Rye, 2020: 11).

Although different strands broadly agreed on this strategy, outsiders demanded innovative and movement-like forms of organisation to pursue transformative goals beyond the Labour Party, whereas insiders were acutely aware of the need to tailor Momentum to the hierarchical demands of the party and the needs of the internal party left. This intersected with the previous dilemma around whether Momentum should form Corbyn's Praetorian Guard or prioritise participatory democracy.

Corbyn's institutional weakness meant there were strong demands to scaffold Momentum into the reinforcement of the internal left across the different party faces. Some participants on Momentum's volunteer wing initially wanted the organisation to be structured around movementist aims, but increasingly came to accept the need to defend Corbyn inside a party that was dominated by competing factions:

> 'I was of the view that the factional organising internally within Labour shouldn't be done by Momentum, it should be more about movement-building, but they should be working together as part of a broad strategy. However, it became increasingly clear the left of Labour had become increasingly small after decades of a lack of success. Some small gains, but overall had been defeated for a long time. So, there wasn't really the personnel or the infrastructure or resources for anyone else to properly lead on the overall transformation of Labour. Also, you're trying to transform it into a members-led organisation, and I don't think they are two different things. You're trying to bring people, train people, find a range of people who can be councillors or MPs' (5)

However, they were also aware of the need for more fundamental transformation that would deepen the linkages between trade unions, members, and social movements, without which the 'hollowing out' of the party observed in previous decades could not be reversed. Participants saw the party as little more than an electoral machine in desperate need of the 'movementisation' that Corbynism called for in its initial mobilisation:

> 'you are trying to take something that is an electoral machine and retroactively turn it into a proper socialist party. You need something like the PCI or something like that would be an excellent example of what we are trying to create. But we are starting with a party that is so ossified as an electoral machine' (25)

These two goals are not mutually exclusive (as participant 5 points out), but the immediate demands of electoral politics in a sharply polarised party meant that the former gradually took the priority (as the insiders wanted). Momentum was therefore gradually co-opted into internal factional struggles whilst movementist aspirations gradually wilted away:

> 'Lots of that I think is to do with basically the need to have a party focused rear-guard action organisation to support the gains of Jeremy's victory in September 2015 and that was clearly necessary. This is an organisation with not masses of resources, so there had to be some decisions that were made. The areas where it was most developed are in organising the core, some national elections within the

> party, comms and social media, and in political education through The World Transformed, then also its quite dramatically changed the way the party campaigns I think, not enough but rather a lot' (19)

Such institutionalisation has been repeatedly observed in other left parties that have sought to have sought to identify with and represent the protests groups that emerged during the anti-austerity movement (della Porta et al 2017). Podemos have 'become even more absorbed in parliamentary politics to the detriment of street politics; it has been increasingly incorporated into established institutions; and it has converged with forces of the casta, such as the PSOE, in order to accede to power' (Kioupkiolis and Perez, 2019: 31). Syriza were unable to undertake the party transformation that was hoped for in the transition 'from protest to politics' (Panitch and Gindin, 2018). Their infamous capitulation into the Troika's austerity demands shortly after winning the election was because they failed to build the infrastructure necessary to follow through with a radical anti-austerity programme in the face of a prolonged economic crisis (Panitch and Gindin, 2018).

In the case at hand, the entrenched nature of the two-party system meant the HLPG crystallised with one foot in and one foot out the party. Because Corbynism was an *outsider* to the mainstream traditions of the Labour Party the pressure to form an *internal* rear-guard was immense. However, the fact that they were on unstable foundations was also an incentive to pursue outsider strategies that would 'movementise' the party by pressuring it to move in a more left-wing direction. The prioritisation of the former goal may have benefitted the internal party left in the short-term by increasing its representation in the NEC, PLP, and in the party bureaucracy, but it weakened the incentive for movement-like transformation in the long-run.

<u>The constraints of representative democracy vs. the appeals of direct democracy</u>

One final related dilemma was between the popular-democratic appeals of pop-socialism and its orientation around an electoral party committed to parliamentary democracy. Corbynism needed to adjust its advocacy for more direct forms of participatory democracy – embodied by the campaign for members-led democratisation – with the top-down hierarchy of a party

organised around the representative traditions of Westminster. There is a tension between popular-democratic demands and their delivery within representative democracy similar to that identified by scholars of populism:

> 'Its maximalist interpretation of democracy without limitations means that it is potentially illiberal, even extremist, and intolerant of constitutional limits that frustrate the unmediated will of the people. It is potentially profoundly destabilizing, because such democratic aspirations raise expectations which both the political elite and the "tamed" populist actors are often simply unable to fulfil, engendering a vicious cycle of populist mobilization and demobilization (March, 2007: 72)'.

Both insiders and outsiders were normatively committed to a grassroots vision of democracy, but they tended to clash over the extent to which this should be tailored towards factional realities in the three faces of the Labour Party. Insiders tended to be more acutely aware of the need to accommodate democratic demands with the practical goal of achieving a Corbyn-led Labour government, whereas outsiders were determined to pursue more direct forms of democracy 'even if democracy doesn't agree with me' (2), leading to frustration when the democratic mandate of the membership was obstructed.

Moreover, the institutionalisation of democratic reforms also prompted disagreement. Historically, the left and the trade unions have endorsed a deliberative form of IPD in which discussion took place in local branches, which mandated delegates to represent them at the next level of the layer cake (Minkin, 1991). In the Corbyn period, however, this was replaced by support for OMOV among much of the Corbyn supporting membership in Momentum and Labour. Inside the party this sometimes consolidated Corbyn's leadership by redistributing power towards the membership where he had the most support, but at other times it brought them into tension with a trade union leadership that wanted to maximise their leverage. In Momentum, meanwhile, OMOV allowed the centre to steer its direction, but sowed the seeds of discontent by closing down deliberative spaces where activists might be able to hold the

leaders to account. The roots of this tension lay with the constitution that was controversially ratified in 2017 despite the preceding national conference majority for an assembly based model:

> 'The OMOV online activism system fundamentally took power away from the people who were offering a counter-balance of power from the centre of Momentum and it basically meant that so much more control was passed to the centre of Momentum which then gave ordinary members a limited role in decision-making (...) and the other system based on local groups had much more of a chance of debates, of people coming up with their own ideas, of having people who were going to be held properly accountable by people who were properly active. I just felt the second system was far less likely to be manipulated by people in the centre who had a lot more power' (2)

Momentum's decision to adopt an OMOV structure was established amidst concerns about the influence of a highly active cadre of far-left activists. In practice, OMOV often serves to buttress the leadership during moments of severe institutional crisis by forging what Gerbaudo (2019) has defined as a 'reactive' democracy, rather than the 'proactive' deliberation of assembly based structures. It is easier to manage individualised structures than deliberative structures where delegates might exercise collective restraints on the preferences of the leadership (see Gerbaudo, 2018). The OMOV structure enabled the institutionalist wing (the 'insiders') of Momentum to maintain control at the expense of other left groups, and this ensured that they remained an effective Praetorian Guard for democratising the party, mobilising members for internal elections, organising slates, and running campaigns.

There was further frustration at a lack of deliberation over Brexit, which was seen as betrayal of the popular-democratic ethos of Corbynism. The membership were overwhelmingly pro-remain but Momentum were reticent to go down this path because it threatened to undermine the leadership. The consultations that they did take on the subject tended to reinforce decisions that were already made by the centre of Momentum[28]. Perhaps more divisively, Momentum attempted to whip delegates into supporting the compromise on open selection in

[28] It would be reasonable to assert that many members had sympathy for the challenges that Brexit presented for the leadership, and so the lack of consultation over Brexit did not create a full blown legitimacy crisis.

2018 – without any consultation – which was seen as a betrayal of the campaign. Finally, controversy was stoked during the 2020 leadership contest when Momentum carried out a 'confirmatory ballot' on which candidate to support. After the NCG unanimously backed Rebecca Long-Bailey for leader and Angela Rayner for deputy leader, they asked members for a 'yes' or 'no' on whether to endorse Long-Bailey without mentioning the other candidates. Large swathes of the membership saw this as a cynical attempt to ratify a decision already made by the leadership by using a plebiscite with no genuine choice.

For 'insiders', this was an unfortunate but necessary consequence of the need to avoid undermining an already fragile leadership and focus Momentum on its factional goals inside the Labour Party. For 'outsiders', it was further evidence that, for all the talk of 'movementisation' and 'democratisation', Momentum were not the democratic organisation they claimed to be:

> 'I'm basically just incredibly depressed about the way in which Momentum is constituted and lacks any meaningful form of democracy and has become a top-down organisation which gives pronouncements to its base for them to knock-on doors, to vote for the right person, but doesn't actually let them form political policy and stand up to the leadership in many cases' (2).

The personality-driven support across much of the Corbynite left meant that Momentum was able to stave off a full-blown legitimation crisis despite the discontent over the lack of transparency and accountability. However, on Corbyn's resignation there was nothing to stop these divisions from becoming more manifest. In Momentum's internal elections in mid-2020 a new leadership was instilled after candidates from the Forward Momentum slate, who campaigned on a message of change and democratisation, beat the Momentum Renewal slate, who campaigned on the basis of 'unity' and continuation (Momentum, 2020b). This was the end-result of frustration that had seeped in over the election defeat, Momentum's apparent lack of democracy and transparency, and the reality that Corbyn's resignation had weakened Momentum insiders and therefore opened the space for the pursuit of a more 'outsider' strategy.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined some of the contours of Corbynism's decline. The first part of the chapter explored Momentum's 2019 election campaign in order to continue addressing the main research aim. The final section investigated some of the tensions witnessed in Momentum which stemmed from the unstable foundations of Corbyn's personality-driven leadership. The findings indicate that the occupation of the leadership instigated clashes between insiders and outsiders over how the left should capitalise on the window of opportunity presented by Corbyn. These tensions contributed to the fragility, atrophy, and ultimately the failure of 'Corbynism beyond Corbyn' in the aftermath of the election defeat.

The result of the 2019 election and the subsequent marginalisation of the left will mean that Corbynism will be judged harshly in the history books. However, the instability of Corbyn's leadership meant that every decision forced them to choose, to use a well-known proverb, between Scylla and Charybdis. In their attempt to navigate between equally treacherous choices, Corbyn and his supporters were forced down a pathway which failed to deliver an election victory or more long-term foundations in the party.

Conclusion

This thesis set out to provide the first detailed empirical account of Momentum. The aim of the thesis was to define and understand Momentum and Corbynism and explore the relationship between the two. Ethnographic methods, including twenty-six semi-structured interviews, were utilised to answer four research questions:

1) How should Momentum be defined in relation to the current scholarship on political parties and social movements?
2) How should Momentum's relationship to Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour Party be understood?
3) How do participants in Momentum understand Corbynism?
4) How can Momentum help to explain Corbynism's rise and fall?

As the thesis progressed, to new conceptualisations were developed to achieve the main research aim. The hybrid left pressure group is defined as an organisation that utilises 'insider' and 'outsider' strategies – drawn from party and movement traditions – to influence the direction of a left party: This conceptualisation enabled the thesis to frame and understand how Momentum combined experimental social movement and electoral methods alongside conventional internal party organising in order to shift the direction of the Labour Party.

The notion of 'pop-socialism', meanwhile, established as a way to unpack how and Corbynism gathered the support of its main protagonists in Momentum. It has three key dimensions: (1) the emergence of a 'pop-star' leader forges a space for the convergence of a plurality of ideological traditions from movements and parties; (2) appeals to a 'people' unite these traditions together and provide a justification for the pursuit of popular-democratic reforms; and (3) the appeals form the basis of an attempt to renew a conventional vision of democratic socialism. This framing elicited several key insights into why participants in Momentum supported Corbynism and it helped to develop a more thorough understanding of its rise between 2015 and 2017 and its decline after that.

Chapter One discussed the multitude of ambiguous ways in which Momentum and Corbynism have been understood in the existing literature. Much of the ambivalence stems from the fact that existing accounts have paid little attention to the views of his most enthusiastic supporters. As a result, the literature has not defined Momentum consistently or developed a rounded account of Corbynism. Unpacking Momentum's multi-layered relationship to the Labour Party and the wider network of groups that converged on Corbyn's leadership would help to resolve some of these ambiguities and enhance scholarly understanding of this important period in Labour history.

Chapter Two introduced the conceptualisations that would be used to investigate Corbynism and Momentum. The idea of 'pop-socialism' was inspired by the post-Gramscian approach of Stuart Hall: his insights provided a basis to analyse how Corbynism appealed to conventional class-based socialist traditions in the labour movement and new 'popular' currents emanating from the anti-austerity movement. The HLPG, meanwhile, is more suitable for studying the organisation and practice of Momentum. It seeks to explain how Corbyn supporters sought to establish an organisation that would pursue a multitude of strategies in an attempt to pressure the Labour Party into adopting a more left-wing policy programme.

Chapter Three described the methodology and research design used to investigate Momentum. It was determined that ethnographic methods were the optimal means of revealing the dynamics of Momentum's organisation and practice that remain hidden from conventional political science accounts, including their internal and external relations to the network of left groups that converged on Corbyn's leadership, and their relationship to the Labour Party. In addition, ethnographic methods would help to uncover the basis of Corbynism's appeals to its main supporters. The primary source of data was semi-structured interviews combined with participant observation at multiple levels and the use of documentary analysis to corroborate the findings.

The empirical account began in Chapter Four. The chapter traced the genesis and evolution of Momentum from the leadership contest in the summer of 2015 up until the controversial imposition of a new constitution in early 2017. By exploring this period from the perspective of participants the chapter was able to provide a rich description of their relationship to the leadership campaign and the influence of the different groups drawn from movements and parties. Furthermore, the concept of the HLPG enabled the final section to provide an in-depth analysis of their organisation – which it described as 'centralised pluralist' – and analyse Momentum's relationship to the Labour Party after the new constitution was introduced.

Chapter Five was then able to use the notion of the HLPG to map out the 'insider' and 'outsider' strategies that Momentum deployed in relation to the Labour Party and the Corbyn leadership during the research window. The chapter bracketed their external relations into three dimensions: (1) internal party organising *in and against* the party; (2) extra-parliamentary organising *outside* the party; and (3) campaigning as an *appendage* to the party.

Chapter Six uses 'pop-socialism' to delve into how participants viewed Corbynism and elicit some insights into why it made such headway between the 2015 leadership contest and the 2017 general election. In particular, the chapter was interested in how it gathered the support of left-wing groups within the labour movement alongside activists from the anti-austerity movement less accustomed to party politics. 'Pop-socialism' provided a framework to investigate the narratives that sustained Corbyn's (the pop-star leader) popularity among participants, and explore how popular-democratic appeals to a 'people' sought to restore a conventional vision of democratic socialism which participants hoped would see the introduction of more radical reforms in the future.

Chapter Seven used the findings on Momentum to consider why Corbynism made such a rapid decline despite its initial successes. It provided an overview of Momentum's 2019 election campaign, but also, just as importantly for the purposes of this research, discussed some reasons for the defeat of 'Corbynism without Corbyn' in the aftermath of the election

defeat. Exploring the decline through the lens of Momentum enabled the thesis to identify a sequence of dilemmas that stemmed from the unstable foundations of Corbyn's personality-driven leadership. The three dilemmas the chapter discussed were: (1) the need for internal party control vs. the demand for internal party democracy; (2) strains between party-based objectives and movement-based objectives; and (3) the constraints of representative democracy vs. the appeals of direct democracy. The dilemmas provoked clashes between insiders and outsiders in Momentum that put the future of 'Corbynism beyond Corbyn' in doubt. This does not provide a comprehensive explanation of Corbynism's decline; however, it does establish one way of explaining the failure to introduce tangible reforms that might have secured a more stable footing after Corbyn resigned.

Contributions

The primary contribution of the thesis has been to provide a detailed empirical account of Momentum's evolution during the period of Corbyn's leadership. They have introduced novel forms of organisation and practice which have left a substantial mark on British politics and yet scant attention has been paid to them in the literature. By providing an empirical account paired with some key conceptualisations the thesis was able to map out the dimensions of their relationship to the Corbyn leadership, Corbynism, and the Labour Party – a second contribution.

A third key contribution was methodological. Political science scholarship has struggled to elicit insight into key aspects of extra-parliamentary left politics because of its orientation around Westminster and its relatively unified normative opposition to Corbynism (see Allen, 2019; Dean, 2019). The current literature's failure to interrogate the internal evolution of Momentum, the relationship between Momentum and the Labour Party, or the perspective of Corbynism's main proponents, are a consequence of these limitations. Ethnographic methods were deployed in an attempt to reconsider how left politics should be studied – this has proved

a productive approach for the purposes of this thesis and can establish a model for future investigations into extra-parliamentary political phenomena.

A fourth contribution has been to concisely define where Momentum should be positioned in relation to the literature on social movements and political parties. The HLPG helped to conceptualise how Momentum synthesised an ecology of traditions from the institutional left and the extra-parliamentary left within their internal organisation. This led Momentum's leading figures to fuse conventional 'insider' (party-based) strategies drawn from the traditional Labour left with more experimental 'outsider' (movement-based) methods in an attempt to transform relations inside the Labour Party. Chapter Five showed that the scale of their mobilisation inside the party and their innovations outside the party exceeded anything the Labour left had achieved in the past. The enthusiasm for Corbyn, the prospects of a left-led Labour government, and the invention of digital and social media driven organising, enabled Momentum to go far beyond previous groups in internal selections and elections, electoral campaigning and, to a lesser extent, social movement campaigns.

A fifth contribution has been to develop a more detailed picture of how participants viewed Corbynism. 'Pop-socialism' established an analytical foundation to explore how it drew on the support of conventional left groups orbiting the Labour Party and more recently emerging sections of the left that had swelled in the anti-austerity movement. This offers an alternative to the overstretched label of populism for considering how conventional class politics can be combined with appeals to a 'people'. Moreover, the dimensions of 'pop-socialism' shed light on the unity and coherence of Corbynism's support beneath the 'catch-all' element which enabled it to gather the support of a plural coalition of supporters (see Ward and Kerr, 2021).

A sixth contribution was to elicit some insight into why Corbynism gathered such support among participants in its initial rise but was susceptible to decline in the second part of Corbyn's leadership. Existing political science scholarship did not foresee the emergence and success of Corbynism or its imminent collapse. By identifying supporters' internal motivations

and the tensions that persisted throughout Corbyn's tenure the thesis has developed a better understanding of its rise and fall.

Further avenues for research

A number of avenues for further research have been opened. First, 'pop-socialism' could be more widely applied to the analysis of other left-wing political ideologies. This could include, for example, cases which might be considered pop-socialist, or the investigation of cases in which concepts such as 'class', 'people' and 'democracy' are combined in different ways. Is a discourse of the 'people' present or absent in an existing left ideology? Are appeals to the people a 'threat' or a 'corrective' to democracy (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2012)? Do they aim to restore or replace class politics?

The concept of the pop-leader, meanwhile, establishes a new way to research the changing role of leadership. Corbynism was from the outset a heavily personality-driven project. His leadership assembled a broad movement of left-wing groups that were then deployed to radically alter the landscape of the Labour Party and British politics. But the overreliance on Corbyn also meant the gains were rapidly reversed as soon as he resigned. Questions remain over the extent to which this will lead to an enduring integration of movement and party strands, or whether these groups will fracture now that Corbyn has resigned. Answering this could be crucial to understanding the left's fortunes in the immediate future.

Both conceptualisations that have been introduced in the thesis might be applicable to cases outside of British politics. Ward and Guglielmo (2021) have already deployed 'pop-socialism' to compare Momentum and Nichi's Factories in Italy. Furthermore, several leading figures in the global anti-austerity left have mobilised 'fans' in the style of a celebrity and often with a 'people' vs 'elite' discourse: Pablo Iglesias, Alexis Tsipras, Nichi Vendola, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, and Bernie Sanders are some of the names that spring to mind. Pop-socialism could provide a framework to consider how these leaders gathered support from a multitude of supportive groups to launch a sustained electoral challenge, and how this effects political

strategy in the age of social medmedia-drivenardom. Will the transformation of communications technology and the increasing integration between popular culture and political leadership lead to a permanent transformation in the interactions between supporters and leaders?

There are other cases that the HLPG can help to analyse. The Bernie Sanders' supporting 'Our Revolution', for example, has some clear parallels with Momentum: They were launched by a coalition of groups from the conventional left and the extra-parliamentary left in support of a left-wing leader in a centre-left party (Muldoon and Rye, 2020). The HLPG could establish a basis to analyse how methods from these different traditions have been synthesised in an attempt to influence the direction of the Democratic Party.

The thesis also raises several important questions in the field of British politics. In particular, Corbyn instilled the hope among many left-wing political actors that the Labour Party might play a positive role in the future of left politics. However, Corbyn's resignation and the rise of Starmer has triggered a wave of calls from left-wing commentators to reduce the reliance on the Labour Party, whether via a 'progressive alliance' with other left parties or the replacement of FPTP with a form of PR (e.g., see Gilbert, 2020a). It remains to be seen how the left will recalibrate its long-term relationship with the Labour Party in the aftermath of the Corbyn experience.

Finally, important questions remain about the extent to which the Corbyn years will influence the future direction of the Labour Party. Many commentators have laid the blame for the 2019 election squarely at Corbyn's feet, leading Keir Starmer to take the party down a radically different path. However, Corbyn supporters point to several reasons to persist with the broad direction of Corbynism: the 2017 election arrested a decline that has been in place since 1997, the membership grew to its highest level in decades, and the policies that were advocated are viewed as popular and normatively preferable. They call for the current Labour leadership to

take inspiration from what went right in Corbyn's first two years, as well as learn the lessons from what went wrong.

What now for Momentum?

Much of Momentum's evolution during the period in question was intrinsically connected to the ebbs and flows of the Corbyn leadership. The personality-driven nature of Corbynism contributed to the crystallisation of Momentum in the aftermath of the 2015 leadership campaign and their subsequent successes inside the party were closely linked to Corbyn's victories. The leader provided the institutional space for Momentum to make a sustained effort to strengthen the links between extra-parliamentary activists and the internal party left, with the eventual ambition of permanently reconfiguring how the party relates to its membership and to the broader left-wing ecosystem which exists outside of that.

Corbyn's resignation has already instigated a period of renewal in Momentum. The commanding victory of the FM slate in their internal elections in mid-2020 has seen the introduction of policy primaries to revitalise Momentum's internal democracy, attempts to improve transparency and openness, and a refocus on grassroots campaigns outside the party, such as the recently launched eviction resistance campaign. This does not constitute a clean break from the HLPGs orientation, but it is something of a reprioritisation. The early signs would be that Momentum is more likely to focus on 'outsider' (movement-based) strategies in place of 'insider' strategies that were given priority during the Corbyn years. They still have a prominent role inside the party but have been less successful in internal factional struggles and are becoming an increasingly marginal force.

Corbyn's resignation has also resulted in the dissipation of pop-socialism in British politics. This does not necessarily mean that it will be doomed to the dustbin of history: its personality-driven nature implies that it may reappear once more if a charismatic leadership figure emerges to assemble a diversity of left-wing traditions. This comes with several potential challenges – not least of all a risk of hypercentalisation when the leader consolidates their

position and a rapid demobilisation once they move on – but until a leadership figure emerges it is likely the left will remain on the fringes of British politics.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – table of interviews

Participant no.	Interview number (used for in-text references)	Position(s) held whilst Corbyn was leader	Dates of interview
1	1 17	Member of Momentum NCG	September 2018 September 2019
2	2	Activist in Momentum (asked to remain anonymous)	October 2018
3	3	Activist in Birmingham Momentum	September 2018
4	4	Member of Momentum NCG Activist in Birmingham Momentum	November 2018
5	5	Founder of Momentum	November 2018
6	6	Former member of Momentum Steering Committee	November 2018
7	7	Staff member at Momentum	January 2019
8	8	Senior Organiser of TWT	October 2018
9	9	Member of Momentum NCG Member of Labour Party NEC MP from December 2019 onwards	November 2018
10	10	Staff member at Momentum	October 2018
11	11	Senior Activist in Birmingham Momentum	March 2019

12	12	Member of Labour Party NEC	May 2019
13	13	Labour MP	May 2019
14	14	National Coordinator of Momentum	June 2019
15	15	Activist in Birmingham Momentum	August 2019
16	16	Activist in Brighton Momentum	November 2019
17	18	Member of Momentum NCG Member of Labour Party NEC	October 2019
18	19	Founder of Momentum LOTO Director of Strategic Communications	February 2020
19	20	Founder and chair of Momentum Member of Labour Party NEC Member of NCG	August 2019
20	21	Senior member of Labour Party staff	February 2020
21	22	Senior Organiser in Manchester Momentum	November 2019
22	23 24	Senior staff member at Momentum	March 2020
23	25	Staff member at Momentum	March 2020
24	26	LOTO aide	June 2020

Appendix 2 - Momentum Documents

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Appendix 3 – a page from my field notes at a workshop at TWT

Monday 1pm – an internationalist GND worskhop

- Interesting how this one was done. It was a policy-based workshop which was very interactive and participative

- The audience was split into groups and wach group was given a subject area: our table was given corporate accountability. We had to develop two policy ideas which are apparently going to be handed to John McDonnell tomorrow. It was interactive. All groups put their suggestions up and there was a poll on the best policies – the winner was sent in the document to McDonnell.

- The Shadow Minister for Climate Justice spoke at the end.

- Although there was a genuine attempt to encourage participation, there was a pre-defined scope led by experts. The areas our groups were discussing were pre-defined, as were the possible proposals. To some extent this is inevitable - complex policy proposals require expertise - but on some occasions it felt more passive than participatory. This may have been different in other groups.

- Takeaway points:

  How do we provide finance for the global south as well as ourselves?

  Growth causes climate catastrophe – redistribution on grounds of equality rather than growth is the most sensible option.

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