



Partecipazione e Conflitto
* *The Open Journal of Sociopolitical Studies*

<http://siba-ese.unisalento.it/index.php/paco>

ISSN: 1972-7623 (print version)

ISSN: 2035-6609 (electronic version)

PACO, Issue 11(1) 2018: 202-224

DOI: 10.1285/i20356609v11i1p202

Published in March 15, 2018

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

POPULISM, CLEAVAGES, AND DEMOCRACY

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ABSTRACT: Since the Eighties populist parties have gained a growing electoral consensus in many countries. The current wave of populism, that can be called as “multifaceted populism”, is the third of three waves that occurred over the years.

Building on Rokkan’s cleavage theory, the present study intends to argue that the three different waves were originated by the same cleavage. Such a cleavage is characterized by the opposition between the elite and the people, and by the opposition between a participatory conception of democracy and two other conceptions of democracy, namely the elitist and the constitutional ones.

In other words, populism emerges to counteract the overly elitist or procedural traits that democracy can develop. But if, on the one hand, populism can help democracy to revitalize itself, on the other hand, it can promote a radical communitarian form of democracy, which is in contrast with the liberal system of checks and balances and may ultimately lead to an erosion of pluralism.

KEYWORDS: Populism, political parties, cleavages, democracy

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1. Introduction

Populism currently represents one of the most debated issues in the social and political sciences. The scholarly production on populism is increasingly flourishing, and the research is opening to “new” areas and methods. Some interesting studies, for instance, have focused on populism in world regions that until recently had never been taken into consideration: India (Subramanian, 2007) and Australia and New Zealand (Denemark and Bowler, 2002); others have taken into account the demand for populism, analysing populist attitudes and sentiments at the mass level (Oliver and Rahn, 2016; Akkerman, Zaslove and Spruyt, 2017); and others have examined peculiar and overlooked aspects of the phenomenon, such as the link between populism and foreign policy (Verbeek and Zaslove, 2015) or the relationship between populism and gender (de Lange and Mügge, 2015).

The attention of the scholars has also often focused on the causes from which both the populist parties and, more generally, the phenomenon of populism are derived or of which they would take advantage. In this respect, recent studies have attempted to analyse the surge of populism that started in the late eighties and early nineties by using the concept of cleavage. Among these, one cannot avoid mentioning, given their importance, the studies carried out by Kriesi (2008; see also Kriesi and Pappas 2015), Bornschier (2008), and Inglehart and Norris (2016).

The common starting point of these studies is Kriesi’s acknowledgement that the four classic cleavages can be reduced to two. Indeed, the first two cleavages that are linked to the national revolution – the centre/periphery and state/church cleavages – are essentially cultural divides that are dominated by religious issues; the latter two cleavages – the rural/urban and owner/worker cleavages – represent socio-economic class divisions (Kriesi, 1994). Furthermore, all the aforementioned authors agree that the meaning of these two dimensions – especially the cultural dimension – has been transformed over the years, particularly during two critical events or junctures: the cultural revolution of the 1960s, and the processes of globalization and denationalization that occurred in the 1990s.

Indeed, during the late 1960s, new conflicts – as those for instance between managers and socio-cultural professionals – and new social movements emerged. The latter, in addition to fostering the birth of new parties – the New Left and the Green Party – on the one hand strengthened the traditional class cleavage and on the other altered the meaning of the cultural dimension, thus weakening traditional moral and religious issues and emphasizing issues such as environmentalism, peace and gender equality. Bornschier (2008), in this regard, speaks about a rapid spread of universalistic values,

such as the principle of individual autonomy or the free choice of one's lifestyle, and emphasizes that these values constitute the left-libertarian pole of a new cultural dimension of the conflict. Inglehart and Norris (2016), in turn, speak about the development and proliferation of post-materialist values, such as cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism.

In the nineties, the appearance of the immigration flows, the European integration project, and, moreover, the globalization processes transformed the meaning of the cultural dimension once again, emphasizing issues such as European integration and immigration; instead, the traditional class cleavage has evolved into a broader state-market cleavage, and has undergone, in the course of time, a loss of salience.

According to Kriesi, the process of globalization has triggered a new structural conflict, opposing the "winners" and "losers" of globalization. Kriesi has referred to this antagonism as a conflict between *integration* and *demarcation*. In the economic dimension, therefore, a neoliberal, free trade position contrasts with a defensive, protectionist one; in the cultural dimension, a universalist and multiculturalist position is opposed to a position in favour of protecting national identity, culture and values.

In particular, the lack of responsiveness of the established parties to the complaints of the globalization losers gives the populist right parties a chance to mobilize them. Indeed, the new challengers from the populist right tend to take the "losers'" side and to combine a position of economic *integration* (that is, in support of market integration and economic liberalization) with a position of cultural *demarcation*, which is seriously concerned by the threats to national identity caused by the European integration process and, more generally, by the opening of borders (Kriesi et al., 2008).

Bornschier, for his part, notes that during the nineties, the appearance of the globalization processes provided new chances of success to a neo-conservative counter-movement that emerged, in the previous decade, in opposition to the universalistic values and the libertarian left and that emphasized the relevance of tradition, of the established community, and of the social bond; a new cultural conflict based on the opposition between libertarian-universalistic values and traditional-communitarian ones has therefore arisen.

A remarkable part of the constituency, according to Bornschier, is placed on the traditional-communitarian pole; showing common worries regarding immigration flows, the loss of identity, and the erosion of the community, this constituency represents the potential that the populist right parties can mobilize. Indeed, these parties tend to adopt a "cultural-differentialist" discourse that rejects the idea of a multicultural society and universalist values and stresses the people's right to preserve the national cul-

ture's distinctive traditions as well as framing the issues of identity and community in terms of "us" and "they".

Finally, Inglehart and Norris (2016) observe how the "silent revolution" that occurred in the late 1960s has triggered a counter-revolution among those who do not share the post-materialist values and remain instead anchored to traditional familiar rules: the oldest generations, white men, and the lesser educated. These people represent the political potentials that populist parties can mobilize. A new cultural cleavage that opposes populist values to liberal-cosmopolitan values has currently acquired greater salience, this prevailing on the other relevant structuring dimensions and shaping the current political space.

The studies just mentioned represent the unavoidable reference and starting point of this article, which mainly represents an attempt to apply cleavage theory to the analysis of populism. The article, which adopts a prevailing theoretical approach and is largely based on a critical review of the most recent literature, is organized as follows: in the second section, we will show how three different waves of populism – foundational, consolidated or classic, and multifaceted – followed one another, and we will present our principal thesis, according to which there is a unique cleavage from which all the populist parties originate. Since the opposition between the people and the elite, which represents the root of what we can call the "populist cleavage", is, according to our account, strictly bound to the concept of people's sovereignty, a description of the relationship between populism and democracy and of the possible strains that affect the current democracies will be then provided (section 3); subsequently, drawing on the cleavage theory of Rokkan and Lipset, the focus will be placed on an illustration of the main features both of the populist cleavage and of the populist waves and parties that derive from it (section 4); the article will conclude with a presentation of the different outcomes that populism can lead to; in this respect, we use the expression "the two faces of populism" to indicate how populism can foster both a republican and a radical communitarian form of democracy (section 5).

Before going any further, it is necessary to clarify that, despite the richness in its content, research on populism has always shown many difficulties in defining its privileged object of study, thus giving rise to an endless debate on what populism actually is. This study does not claim to supply an ultimate and supposed "right" definition of populism, but we are aware of the need to clarify the approach that we intend to adopt in analysing the phenomenon under investigation. Indeed, as Rovira Kaltwasser et al. have recently highlighted (2017, 12), «part of the problem in the populism scholarship in political science (...) is not much the absence of sharp conceptualizations, but

rather the tendency of scholars to avoid specifying their own understanding of populism».

Three main definitions or conceptual approaches of populism currently dominate the scholarly debate: the political-strategic approach, the socio-cultural approach, and the ideational approach (Rovira Kaltwasser et al., 2017; see also Palano, 2017) – among the other perspectives, because of its interest, that of Anselmi (2018) must be quoted.

In a very concise way, it can be stated that the first approach, which is mostly based on Weyland's works (2001), considers populism as a strategy to win and maintain ruling power based on individual, personalistic leaders who are supported by a large number of followers and on a direct, quasi-personal contact between a leader and his or her followers.

According to the second approach, as proposed in particular by Ostiguy (2009; 2017), populism can be defined on the basis of a high-low axis as the “flaunting of the ‘low’”; it consists of a specific relationship between political leaders and their supporters that is characterized by folksy and coarse manners, tastes and ways of speaking; practices and repertoires that are inspired by cultural nativism; personalistic and unmediated models of authority and forms of leadership.

The third approach is probably the most widespread in the field. Within this approach, it is possible to distinguish between two positions.

The first position shares many affinities with Ostiguy's understanding and defines populism as a political or a political communication style and as a set of rhetorical patterns (Jagers and Walgrave, 2007; Moffitt and Tormey, 2013). Populism, in other words, pertains to specific features of both the form and the content of discourses, expressive aspects and political performances involving simplicity and spontaneity, bluntness and coarseness, antagonism between friends and foes, and the appeal to the people as a source of legitimization.

The second position is largely based on Mudde's work; however, other scholars, such as Albertazzi and McDonnel (2008), share the same point of view. This position defines populism explicitly as an ideology. Populism can thus be defined as “*an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus the ‘corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people*” (Mudde, 2004, 543).

Being based on a small number of core concepts and not being able to provide either a framework for “decoding” and “interpreting” the social world nor answers to the political requests that stem from civil society, populism constitutes a specific type of ideology: a *thin-centred ideology*. Accordingly, it shows an irrepressible tendency to

borrow concepts and ideas from other (thick or full) ideologies or even to be mixed with them.

Clearly, each of the aforementioned approaches has merits and shortcomings. The main limitation of the ideological definition, for instance, is its own excessive minimalism and thinness, which lead it to have too broad of an extension and to the possible inclusion of “false positives”; that is, to consider non-populist political parties as being populist. Although aware of this weakness, we are convinced that the ideological perspective can be extremely useful for tackling the specific object of this study – the relationships among populism, cleavages and democracy – and to demonstrate the thesis about the existence of a unique cleavage from which all populist parties originate and that therefore recurs unchanged over time.

In both the political-strategic approach and the ideational-discursive approach, populism is predominantly seen as something temporary and as linked to the achievement of the most varied objectives and having almost no reference to the content of such objectives. It would seem, accordingly, that a such point of view is not particularly congruent with the purposes of this study; populism, in other words, is something more – and is more long-lasting – than just a political strategy or a style of communication.

The focus on the personalistic leader and on his relationship with a social basis, which is typical of the socio-cultural approach as well as, more generally, other non-ideological approaches appears in the same way as being not particularly fruitful in dealing with populism when trying to link it to the concept of cleavage. Furthermore, it must be taken into account that almost all leaders currently prefer to adopt direct forms of communication that bypass party mediation as an effect of political personalization and mediatization processes. In this sense, it could be argued that the populist political style has become a sort of *koiné* for many leaders of the overall political spectrum. Therefore, as noted by Mudde, even if «charismatic leadership and direct communication between the leader and “the people” are common among populists, these features *facilitate* rather than define populism» (Mudde, 2004, 545).

Thence, in defining populism, we think that it might be more valuable to take into account the set of ideas that it promotes; *i.e.*, to consider populism as an ideology. In this respect, it is important to bear in mind that any ideology has both a cognitive function and a pragmatic-social one; besides, no party or movement has ever defined itself as “populist”.

2. One cleavage, many cleavages?

The phenomenon of populism has, as is known, a long history. It is not surprising, therefore, that the case that some scholars have attempted to distinguish different phases within this history on the basis of geographical area or time period and/or on ideological features (Hermet, 2001; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013; Woods, 2014).

A historical analysis of the real forms of populism that have followed one another over time (that is, of the political parties and movements that are traditionally considered populist) shows how these forces alternate periods of prosperity with period of an almost total absence. On the basis of this analysis and trying to sharpen the previous classifications, it is possible to identify three different waves of populism; essentially, those that have recently been listed by Rovira Kaltwasser et al. (2017).

The first wave, which occurred in the period from the middle to the end of the 19th century, was foundational populism (Hermet, 2001; 2013). Although there is no doubt that the word “populism” arose in Russia around 1870, doubt can be cast on whether the Russian *Narodnik* movement can be considered populist, as will be discussed below, in contrast to what has been argued by many authors. This movement may at least be considered a precursor of populism¹. This first wave includes, on the contrary, the agrarian populism of the American People’s Party and , accepting the suggestions of Hermet, the nationalist French Boulangism.

The second wave extends approximately from 1930 to 1960 and represents consolidated or classic populism. Spreading in many Latin American states through the political action of leaders such as Péron and Vargas, this kind of populism no longer represented something negative or marginal but transformed itself into the State’s power and ideology (ivi; see also Taggart, 2000); however, some Latin American populist leaders, such as Yrigoyen and Alessandri, had begun to make themselves heard already in the twenties. A different kind of populism emerged during this period in France: Poujadism.

The third wave started in the eighties and continues today and can be labelled the wave of multifaceted populism. Indeed, at least four different types of populism have come to the fore during this period: xenophobic populism, embodied by parties such as the Scandinavian Progress Parties, the French and the Belgian National Fronts, and the

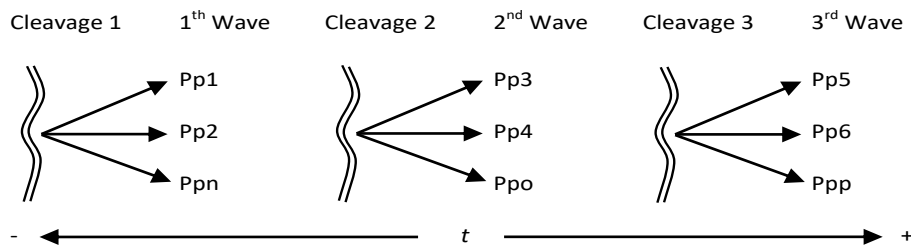
¹ The same Hermet admits that «Although justifiable in chronological terms, this option was indeed unique in the sense that it inaugurated the use of the word “populism”, but applied it to a historical manifestation that was barely representative of the forms of expression that this phenomenon would later acquire» (Hermet, 2013, 84).

Austrian Freedom Party; the Latin American populism of Chávez and Morales, which was preceded by the neoliberal populism of leaders such as Collor de Mello, Fujimori and Menem; the progressive populism of some radical left parties such as the Spanish Podemos and the Greek Syriza; and the populism expressed by political parties which locate themselves outside the left-right dimension, such as the Italian Five Star Movement.

The studies mentioned in the first section, which have analysed the possible connections between the surge of populism and the cleavages, have focused only on the third wave, which occurred only over a specific period of time and only in the specific geographical area of Western Europe. Even if this kind of approach is undoubtedly correct, it leaves open a number of questions. What about the previous populist phenomena? And what about those of different geographical areas?

One possible answer may be that neo-populism differs from previous forms of populism and therefore requires specific explanations. In this sense and referring once again to the cleavage approach, it may be speculated, in an incomprehensible way, that only the third wave originates from a cleavage. A possible alternative and a more convincing hypothesis is to suppose that the three waves of populism derive from three different cleavages (fig. 1).

Figure 1 Three different cleavages for three different waves of populism



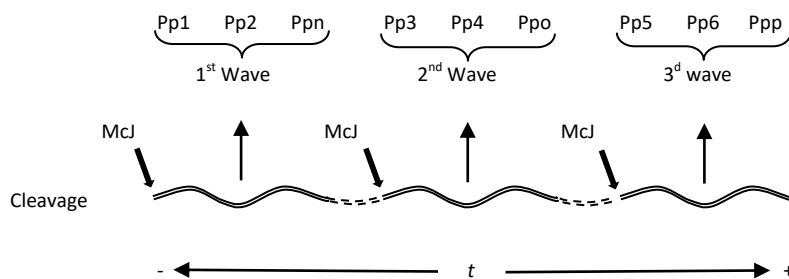
Pp=Populist party

This type of explanation, which focuses on the specific causes of populism within each individual state or within different time spans, risks considering every simple social conflict as a cleavage; indeed, as will be better seen later, to be considered as such, a cleavage must embody the toughest and most lasting of social conflicts. Accordingly, this explanation risks multiplying the number of cleavages, especially if one aims to take into account not only the populist parties; that is, to analyse the entire political

party spectrum. Is it indeed possible that even non-populist parties are in turn generated by other cleavages? Moreover, it is impossible to identify some origins that the third waves might have in common.

In opposition to this answer, another thesis could be expressed: that there is a unique cleavage from which all the populist parties originate. This cleavage is not constantly active; that is, it is able to produce its effects only under certain circumstances, when certain critical junctures occur. The manifestations of this cleavage differ in time and space; hence, populist parties with opposite features can emerge from it (fig. 2).

Figure 2 The populist cleavage and the three waves of populism



Pp=Populist party; McJ=Macro critical juncture

This different type of explanation does not exclude the intervention of specific national causes or a snowball effect because a populist party in a given country can induce the birth of similar parties in other countries.

To demonstrate this thesis, this study will first attempt to shed light on the features of the structural division that produces populist parties; then, it will try to show why this division can be considered a cleavage. Finally, it will try to demonstrate how this same cleavage recurs unchanged over time and how it reactivated itself under certain circumstances in the course of the three different populist waves.

3. Populism and democracy

As previously argued, the concept of populism is based on two specific drivers: the opposition between the (pure) people and the (corrupt) elite and the demand that pol-

itics constitutes the expression of the people's general will. This means that the thin-centred ideology of populism and populist parties emerge only when the following conditions are met: the people acquire a pivotal role in the political arena and the elite rules with no reference to the people such that a division between the people and the elite must therefore occur. Both of these conditions are strictly bound to the idea of the people's sovereignty and to the consequent development of democracy, as this study will attempt to demonstrate. As, indeed, Anselmi supports in one of his latest books, «Populism today is, to all intents and purposes, a highly probable option of democracy (...) populism must be considered as a complex phenomenon deeply connected with democracy (...). Populism is a modality of social expression of popular sovereignty» (Anselmi, 2018, 1-2).

Regarding the first condition, it is remembered that the people became a relevant political actor during the course of the glorious English revolution – in an imperfect and incomplete way –, of the American revolution – in a triumphant but doubtful way –, and of the French revolution – in a radical but chaotic and inconsistent way (Mény and Surel, 2000). As Barrington Moore observed many years ago, these revolutionary episodes have to be included among the factors that triggered the democratization process; the first because it helped to limit royal absolutism and the others because they helped to curb, in different ways, the power of a rural aristocracy that hindered the achievement of the democratic political system (Moore, 1966).

Indeed – and here we come to the second condition –, the debate on the actual role of the people arose as soon as democracy began to consolidate; that is, when the principle of popular sovereignty was broadly accepted. The awareness of the distance between the real and the ideal democracy as well as the awareness of the existence of different conceptions of democracy brought out a set of questions regarding the exercise of power by the people, the relationship between the citizens and their elected representatives in Parliament, and the institutions called upon to express the people's will (Mény and Surel, 2000). However, it must be clarified that the requests for a broader participation of the people in political life can arise not only in democratic states but also in autocratic regimes.

Generally, three main distinct concepts and practices of democracy can be distinguished: elitist, constitutional, and participatory². In conceiving democracy as a method

² These three different concepts derive from three general views of politics showing opposite characteristics: elitism, pluralism and, certainly, populism. Elitism argues, in the same way of populism, that society is divided into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, the people and the elite. But, differently, it considers the elite as virtuous, gifted, and endowed with the highest qualities, while the people are considered ignorant, coarse, and inferior both from a moral and intellectual point of view. Pluralism, on the con-

through which individuals acquire the power of decision by means of a competitive struggle for the popular vote, the first approach takes inspiration from Shumpeter's works; citizens' participation in democratic life would be exercised only during elections, and politics should continue to be an elite affair. The second perspective considers as democratic that form of government that is characterized by a plurality of centres of power, none of which prevails over the others; a strong separation of powers and the development of a set of checks and balances are deemed necessary conditions for enhancing the quality of democracy. In contrast with the aforementioned conceptions of democracy, the latter is based on the active, strong, and continuous participation of the citizens in decision-making processes; the institutions of the referendum, the recall election, the citizens' initiative, and majority rule are firmly fostered; politics should consist in the immediate expression of the general will of the people (Abts and Rummens, 2007).

This last form of democracy shows two different faces: the republican and the communitarian. The first conceives political participation as a duty of the citizens; this consists in incessant deliberations on relevant issues, especially those concerning the common good, taken within the existing rules. The second is actually a family of conceptions. Generally, it considers participation as the main right of the citizens, who are given the ability to control the rules and to decide upon them. It also emphasizes the relevance of the inclusion of all the members of the social community into the political community; in this way, participation is seen as a tool through which the common good is defined, or even as the same common good. Moreover, participation is often deemed more important than the maintenance of the main representative institutions (Eisenstadt, 1999).

This second conception is not internally consistent. On the one hand, it promotes participation at every level of social life and accordingly sympathizes with associations; on the other, in supporting a direct and non-mediated form of participation, it sometimes looks with suspicion at the formal features of these associations, conceiving them as no more than representatives of specific interests. In a radical approach, this conception reaches as far as to not giving any value to the representative institutions (*ibidem*).

Ultimately, a strain among different ideas and practices of democracy has affected Western countries since the democratic revolutions and has subsequently spread to those countries where democratic ideals have seeped in. The aforementioned three

trary, does not share such a dichotomous and Manichean perspective; indeed, it maintains that society is cross-cut by a plurality of groups with different ideas, values, and interests (Mudde, 2004; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013).

main different forms of democracy are therefore in friction one with each other; that is, any imbalance towards one and its radicalization induces the appearance of opposite forces that tend to rebalance the situation. Populism, in other words, arises when the gap between the people and the governing leaders has become too wide, when the political establishment merely complies with formal rules and procedures, and when the general will of the people is not taken into account as much as it deserves to be (Canovan, 1981; Mény and Surel, 2000; Taguieff, 2002).

To this extent, a relevant question arises spontaneously: do the opposition between the people and the elite and the related strain among the different ideas and practices of democracy really represent a cleavage?

4. The populist cleavage

According to Rokkan and Lipset (1967; 1985), cleavages represent the main oppositions within national communities that stem from the multiplicity of conflicts rooted in the social structure. In other words, only some conflicts, that are the strongest, those that endure over time despite having lost their original salience, and those capable of polarizing politics constitute cleavages.

These permanent, often latent, oppositions between different homogeneous social groups usually break out when certain critical junctures – that is, times of radical change – arise. A juncture, indeed, represents a watershed between new and older forms of both society and political community.

Finally, cleavages cause the birth of specific political parties and specific party systems as well as a long-term alignment between the opposed social groups and those parties. This means that the social conflicts that these cleavages express must be politicized, which occurs when the opposed social groups gain a collective identity and when these identities are politically organized.

Following Bartolini and Mair (1990), it has been therefore stated that to constitute a cleavage, a political divide must include three elements:

- a *socio-structural element*: a class, religious belief, ethnic group, etc.;
- an *element of collective identity* of this social group;
- an *organizational manifestation* in the form of collective action or an enduring organization of the involved social groups.

These components, as will be shown shortly on the basis of a brief analytical examination of the three waves of populism, also seem to characterize the “populist” political divide, which can therefore be considered in all respects a cleavage.

First, this divide includes a *socio-structural element*, represented by the people, that is formed in general terms by all people who are not part of the elite; more precisely, the people can be intended in two main distinct ways: as *demos*, being identified with the common men and with those who live at the bottom, or as *ethnos*, being identified with the nation³. It should be noted that a division between the people and the elite characterizes any social system and that this division can be exacerbated by the appearance of certain critical junctures.

All this involves the appearance of great differences both from a socio-economic viewpoint – different lifestyles, levels of income, and opportunities – and, above all, from a political viewpoint – different levels of power, different possibilities to participate in the decision-making process, and different privileges.

Those who are not part of the elite soon become aware of both the increasingly great distance that separates them from the elite – this latter is seen as an otherness not comparable to themselves, as something totally alien – and their sharing amongst themselves the same living conditions and worries; accordingly, they develop a sense of belonging towards the people, a *collective identity*. This happens when the populist line of division overcomes the other lines of division, such as those based on gender, social class or education, making these latter aspects almost completely ineffective.

Clearly, the elites are largely responsible for the development of this collective identity when they mainly behave and act without considering the needs of the people.

Finally, the *organizational manifestation* in the form of collective action also does not take long to manifest itself; the social conflicts expressed by the “populist” political divide are indeed soon politicized, and populist parties or movements with different features – radical rightists, radical leftists, ethno-regionalists, etc. – do emerge in the political scenario. Occasionally, some political entrepreneurs take advantage of the people’s malaise and malcontent; uttering promises that are in actuality almost impossible to achieve, they try to acquire broader visibility and to obtain better personal electoral results.

As stated above, it can be argued that the populist cleavage is not continually active and that it manifests itself only with the appearance of macro critical junctures – those that demarcate the birth of the three waves –, in addition to which micro critical junctures are also often present. When the populist cleavage is active, the other lines of division and conflict lose their relevance; furthermore, the meaning of the “people” changes from wave to wave.

³ Taggart notes that the populist rhetoric considers “the people” as the occupants of the heartland, i.e., a territory of the imagination, embodying the positive aspects of everyday life, where a virtuous and unified population resides (Taggart, 2000).

Table 1 summarizes the entire process that gives birth to populist parties throughout the three different waves, showing which macro and micro critical junctures activate the populist cleavage and clarifying the different meanings given to the concept of “people” from time to time.

Table 1 - Waves, critical junctures and populist parties

| <i>Waves</i> | <i>Macro critical junctures</i> | <i>Micro critical junctures</i> | <i>Cleavage</i> | <i>Meaning of “People”</i> | <i>Parties or movements</i> |
|--|--|--|------------------|--|---|
| 1 st : middle-end XIX century | 2 nd Industrial Revolution and development of Capitalism | - End of the American Civil War | People vs. Elite | - Who struggle daily by doing a manual job | - People’s Party (Usa) |
| | | - Defeat of the Paris Commune - Economic recession - Political corruption | | - Nation | - Boulangism (Fra) |
| 2 nd : 1930-60 | Collapse of the Wall Street stock exchange; End of the 2 nd world war | - Relevant role of the army - Rise of the State of Rio Grande do Sul (Bra) | | - Demos | - Peronism (Arg) - Estado Novo (Bra) |
| 3 rd : 1980- | Globalisation; economic crisis | - EU integration | | - Ethnos | - Populist radical right parties (Fn; Fpö) |
| | | - Collapse of the communist block - End of North American “anti-socialist” policies | | - Demos | - Chavism (Ven) - Mas (Morales; Bol) |
| | | - Collapse of the communist block - EU integration - Austerity measures | | - Globalisation’s losers | - Populist radical left parties (Syriza; Podemos) |
| | | - EU integration - Political corruption | - Common people | - Fsm (Ita) | |

The first macro critical juncture is represented by the IInd industrial revolution and by the development of capitalism, whose main features were the technological progress and the overwhelming development of communications, European emigration towards the Americas, and the birth of the oil industry, of trusts and cartels, and of large banking concentrations – a set of elements that caused deep contradictions and imbalances.

In the United States, a micro juncture was also added: the end of the civil war. The American farmers soon became aware that the end of the war had not given them any material advantage and that, on the contrary, a plutocratic elite was born from it; moreover, a collective identity began to develop. On the one hand, there were the “people”, comprising those who struggled daily doing a manual job: the craftsmen, the small traders and entrepreneurs, and the farmers; on the other hand, there were the elite, who were enriched in a parasitic and immoral way. These conflicts were first politicized by some farmer’s organizations and alliances and later by the People’s Party, founded in 1892 (Kazin, 1998).

In France, the defeat of the Paris Commune in 1871, the economic crisis caused by the international competition, and scandals involving many officials constituted the roots on which the movement of Boulangism arose. Born from a political-parliamentary strategy orchestrated by the left, which was led by Clemenceau, the movement gained a large echo among the urban masses. The latter began to consider themselves completely different, from both a material and a moral point of view, from their representatives, who were deemed powerless oligarchs, and from the financiers, the capitalists and the politicians. Claiming that sovereignty lies in the people and considering Boulangism as the “party of the people and for the people”, the charismatic general Boulanger had the intention of replacing the parliamentary regime with a strong presidential system (Hermet, 2013).

As stated before, is not completely correct to consider the Russian *Narodniks* a populist movement – if anything, they expressed a form of proto-populism – because of the low number of adherents (only a couple of dozen) and because of the almost total absence of both a popular participation and a people’s collective identity. Indeed, the movement was formed by a small group of romantic and utopian intellectuals of the urban middle class, which considered the peasantry biologically and morally more healthy, and therefore proposed to “go to the people”.

The second macro critical juncture is formed by two events: the collapse of the Wall Street stock market in October 1929 and the end of the Second World War. In Latin America, the collapse of the stock exchange caused a fall in the prices of exported raw materials and a crisis of the liberal age’s oligarchic regimes, which were based on the

primary sector export economic model; these regimes were not able to satisfy the growing demands of democratization – triggered by the victory of the Allies – coming from the humbler strata of the population. As a result, authoritarian forms of government prevailed in certain states, such as Peru and Bolivia, whereas populist ones prevailed in others, such as Argentina and Brazil.

The Latin American populist leaders – Péron and Vargas – were able to mobilize different popular constituencies and to foster a change in the relationship between the State and civil society, embodying social groups that had not been included in the political community until then: the *descamisados*, indigenous tribal peoples, and others. In their discourse, the main distinction between the people and the elite was of socio-economic status; the people were intended as *demos* and were indeed identified with those who live at the bottom and with the exploited working class. The elite, on the contrary, comprised, according to them, the local oligarchy, the foreign investors, and their political representatives (cfr. Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013).

The third macro critical juncture is represented by globalization and includes the broad immigration flows and the economic crisis that broke out in 2008. Many comments have been previously made on this juncture, as seen by analysing the works of Kriesi, Bornschie, and Inglehart and Norris.

The first type of populism generated by this juncture was nationalist populism. Being identified with the nation, the people are here intended as *ethnos*; the elites are perceived as agents of a foreign power, even if not as aliens per se, bowing down to cosmopolitanism and globalism; moreover, specific groups of others (as, for instance, ethnic minorities, immigrants, or undeserving beneficiaries of the welfare state) become the scapegoats of the people's difficult living conditions (Mudde, 2007; Ruzza, 2017).

The second type of populism was the Latin American neo-populism, which has similar characteristics to the populism that spread in the same area approximately fifty years earlier, seeking to mobilize the marginal popular classes and to achieve their social and political inclusion.

The third type of populism is embodied by some radical left parties and therefore represents a progressive form of populism. As pinpointed by March (2011), these political parties are populist in juxtaposing the “moral people” against the “corrupt elite” and in aiming to become the *vox populi* rather than the vanguard of the proletariat. The people are intended here to represent the totality of globalization losers; thus, these parties strive to defend against economic insecurity. Moreover, the populist radical left parties consider the EU as a vanguard of globalization and criticize it for its support of free-market integration at the expense of state-led regulation.

Finally, the fourth type of populism is characterized by how it locates itself outside the classical political right-left axis. The Five Stars Movement probably represents one of the best paradigmatic examples of this form of populism. Founded by the comedian Grillo in 2009, the movement has acquired growing consensus in a short period. Due to the incessant scandals regarding political corruption and, above all, to the privileges of an immovable “caste” of politicians – both on the left and on the right of the political spectrum –, most of the citizens came to share a common identity based on the elite-people dichotomy. The people are interpreted by the movement in two different ways: as the common men, as those who experience the difficulties of everyday life; or as the people of the web, since the movement resorts broadly to online forms of communication and political action⁴.

5. The two faces of populism

We have previously tried to show how, since the democratic revolutions, Western countries have been pervaded by strains among different ideas and practices of democracy – namely, the elitist, constitutional, and participatory conceptions. We have also highlighted how, according to many authors, with whom we agree, populism tends to emerge when the people’s participation in the decision-making processes has been restricted, when democracy has sharpened and radicalized its elitist traits, or when a merely formal and procedural conception of democracy has been achieved. In opposition to these conceptions of democracy, populism would consider the participatory form of democracy as the best.

Based on this conclusions, we consider worthwhile to take into account the possible effects that populism may have on the democratic form of government. In this respect, we have to bear in mind that participatory democracy, as we have previously noted, thereby reconnecting with Eisenstadt’s suggestions (1999), has two types, the republican and the communitarian, and the latter can in turn assume both moderate and radical forms. Regarding the former, participation can reach decisions about the common good by having regard for existing rules, whereas for the latter, participation can come to represent the same common good and to overcome the representative institutions. These two different forms of participatory democracy vie with one another continually, thus pulling populism in opposite directions; the latter can also have two faces.

⁴ Regarding Italian populism, see Biorcio (2015) and Tarchi (2015).

Indeed, in supporting a republican or a moderate communitarian version of democracy, populism may come to represent a sort of antidote that helps democracy to revitalize itself, fostering the appropriate measures to enhance the people's political participation and to reduce the gap between the people and the elite: the institutions of the referendum, the recall election, etc.; populism is, therefore, essentially pro-systemic because it does not strive to go beyond the democratic form of government; rather, it may lead, as has been emphasized by many authors (Canovan 1981; Arditì, 2003), to a sort of hyper or radical democratism.

However, some integral features – both defining and facilitating – of populism as well as the specific characteristics of the ideologies with which populism merges itself may push it towards the radical communitarian version of democracy and towards an anti-liberal, sometimes also anti-systemic, configuration. The political conflict, indeed, may come to focus on the different conceptions both of the constitution and of the national political system's organization; the democratic system of decision-making and control may come to be at stake, and the populist political forces may finally implement authoritarian forms of government on behalf of the nation as a whole.

The monolithic conception of the people as a homogeneous unity, for instance, may imply not only, as previously highlighted, the marginalization of specific groups but also the rejection of the opinions of those who disagree with the majority; this entails, accordingly, the erosion of pluralism and deliberation. Furthermore, conceiving that verbatim the "peoples' government" means, as highlighted by many scholars including Kriesi (2015), to discard the liberal system of checks and balances.

Moreover, perceiving the people as a homogeneous entity entails that the people's will can be considered as something of a transparent nature, immediately accessible to charismatic leaders who aim to hear the people's voice. These latter are usually outsiders who are able to embody the people's demands; they have a direct, unmediated ability to discern the complaints of the people and to act as spokespersons of the people's voice. Most of the time, these leaders tend to overcome the political parties' role – as that of other organizations or agencies – and to reduce their power; indeed, in their opinion, the parties bring about artificial divisions within the homogeneous people and corrupt the bond between the leaders and the supporters. It is not by chance that the populist parties are usually personal parties, meaning that the charismatic leader dominates his party, that the length of the party life depends on the length of the leader's political life, and that the political communication is focused on the leader (Mudde, 2004; Abts and Rummens, 2007; Kriesi, 2015).

Finally, when the thin-centred ideology of populism merges with ethno-nationalism, it suddenly acquires authoritarian traits, and anti-immigrant xenophobia prevails in the

anti-elitist discourse; accordingly, the democratization requests become secondary, if not even decorative, whereas the appeal to defend the group identity obtains greater relevance (Taguieff, 2002).

If we look at the three populist waves, we can note how some populist parties or experiences have tended to realize a republican or, at least, a moderate communitarian form of democracy, whereas others have been more in favour of the radical communitarian version, regardless of which wave these parties belong to.

The People's Party, for instance, represents the perfect example of a protest movement that tried to enhance the functioning of democracy. Indeed, as highlighted by Hermet (2013), it did not question the core values of American democracy and the Constitution; the party was substantially reformist because it aimed to stifle the abuses committed by the political elite and powerful businessmen. In addition, it strived to gain power through electoral means and did not intend to overthrow existing institutions.

Just over a century later, the Five Star movement was also founded with the goal of restoring the normal functioning of Italian democracy. For instance, in the course of the final meeting of the 2013 electoral campaign, Grillo declared the intention to further a «democratic and non-violent revolution that raises the powers and overthrows the pyramids. The citizen becomes the State and enters Parliament». Moreover, the protest collective action of V-Day organized by Grillo a few years before had promoted three law initiatives: prohibiting convicts from being candidates for Parliament; establishing a maximum of two legislatures for the members of Parliament; and introducing direct preference in the political elections.

Let us now consider the parties and experiences that followed a different path from that just described, fostering a radical communitarian form of democracy and sometimes coming to establish authoritarian forms of government.

For instance, the deep ambiguities of populism are certainly well exemplified by Boulangism. Indeed, although «the nationalist orientation of Boulangism revealed, without a doubt, an authoritarian and militaristic approach, it nonetheless pursued a heterodox democratic project» (Hermet, 2013, 96). Actually, the project of Boulangism was to modify the 1875 Constitution, to overthrow the parliamentary system, and to implement a unifying plebiscitary and Caesaristic form of democracy based on the sovereignty of the people embodied by a leader and on the binding mandate.

In a different geographical and temporal context, the Latin American consolidated populism also arrived at results that are in some ways at odds with the republican participatory democracy. As has well pinpointed by Zanatta (2017), this kind of populism represented an anti-liberal reaction that drew on the organicist and corporatist tradi-

tion that spread in the region through the colonial expansion of the Christian empires of Spain and Portugal⁵. Due to deep social inequalities based on both economic and ethnic differences, the groups of people that fostered social and political inclusion considered liberal democracy as strange and hostile; on the contrary, these groups were in most cases in favour of the archaic communitarian democracy that was invoked by the populist leaders, intolerant towards the mediations and the institutions of representative democracy, and striving to unify the people against its internal and external enemies.

Therefore, according to the Latin American populist forces of the mid-twentieth century, an authoritarian but popular regime devoted to “social justice” seemed to be the most authentic form of democracy.

Finally, looking at the Europe of the eighties and nineties, it is possible to observe that the conception of democracy promoted by the populist radical right parties was also at odds with liberal democracy. In an empirical study, Mudde (2007) maintains that although these parties are not antidemocratic in a procedural sense, they oppose some fundamental values of liberal democracy, most notably, political pluralism and the constitutional protection of minorities. Indeed, in interpreting societies as homogeneous collectives, the radical right populist discourse promotes a monist and communitarian version of democracy that is most strongly expressed in its nativism (monoculturalism or ethnocracy), authoritarianism (pushing the limits of the rule of law in favour of a state of security), and populism (the “general will” of the people cannot be limited by anything). Therefore, the preference of populist radical right parties is towards an ethnocratic regime with strong authoritarian and plebiscitary elements. Consequently, as stated by Mudde (2007, 156), «the more liberal a democracy is, the more antisystem the populist radical right will be. Similarly, we can posit that the more ethnic and plebiscitary a democracy, the more pro-system the populist radical right».

⁵ The Latin American societies of that time were corporatist societies in the sense that individual rights and duties depended on the social groups that individuals belonged to. Those societies were also organicist and were conceived as a reflection of a revealed divine order: individuals were subordinated to the whole society, and the latter had a hierarchical conformation (Zanatta, 2017).

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