

Department of Political Science

Course in Comparative History of Political Systems

**THE EVOLUTION OF
THE INTERPRETATION OF POPULISM
FROM THE 1950S TO PRESENT**

AN HISTORICAL EXCURSUS

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Academic Year 2017-2018

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Introduction

The objective of this work is to make a comparative historical analysis of the concept of populism and its interpretation. Following the course of history and of main literature and authors, this *excursus* will illustrate how the interpretation of populism has been changing during the XX century in different regions, such as the United States, Europe and Latin America.

“*What is populism?*”. As most of the authors confirmed answering to the question, there is no clear definition of populism. Populism is a concept that, differently from mainstream parties’ ideologies, does not have real principles; the only things that count are the sovereignty of the people and the protest against the establishment rules. Given its main characteristics, populism becomes a quite vague concept; a populist movement does not have a well-defined structure and it is not well organized. In fact, history tells us that very often populist movements did not have strong and clear programmes. The concept of populism, as Paul Taggart, one of the major authors on the subject, affirms, is *chameleonic*; this means that populism can assume different faces and can be defined from different perspectives, such as an ideology, a political strategy, some *forma mentis*, a communication style or strategy, or even a cultural ideology. Within its different interpretations, populism can include political, economic, social and cultural elements. Populism usually raises in a context of crisis of the mainstream political system and when the need of protest becomes more and more evident. It is crucial to highlight that populism is different from totalitarianism; differently from authoritarian regimes, populism needs a democratic context to develop, due to the importance that the ideology gives to main democratic principles including citizens’ involvement in the public and political context. Populism is seen as a point of crisis of the democratic system and it can be useful to understand which are the issues to be fixed within such a system.

It is very important to underline and make clear who are the *protagonists* of populism. The populist ideology provides a clear description of the different *roles* of who is involved: in a standard populist overview, the movement constitutes the opposition to the establishment. Therefore, on the one side there is the establishment – which is ruled by the *corrupted elites* of the mainstream parties; on the other side, the populist (charismatic) leader, which found support and delegation of powers from *the people*. The

people are usually composed by the middle-class average working class who are feeling excluded and abandoned by public institutions and who are willing to protest against the status quo. The composition of the *populist society* is a point in common of quite every case of populism across continents.

The difference between populist movements around the globe stands in whether populism is left or right wing. This difference is visible in some of the ideologies concerning immigration, economic issues and foreign relationships. Left-wing populism was born in South America after WWII; this was the period in which a big populist wave embraced most of the countries of the region. The most famous example of populism in Latin America is given by Argentinian Peronism. Left-wing populism can also be founded in the recent cases of Greece and Spain. Concerning right-wing populism, first cases can be dated to the United States during the 1960s with George Wallace fighting against minorities' rights and multicultural policies and to France with Jean Marie Le Pen far right movement *Front National*. However, the biggest right-wing populist wave finds its collocation at the end of the 1980s in Europe; this wave of populism is known as *neo-populism* or *new populism* and comprehends the rise of many movements that had quite a success, such as the *Lega Nord* in Italy, the *Front National* in France, the *Austrian Freedom Party*, and all the populist movements in the Scandinavian region. A second wave of right-wing populism is dated to more recent cases, such as Donald Trump, Marine Le Pen, Matteo Salvini and Geert Wilders. The populist upsurge of the 1980s and 1990s includes the development of communication technology (mass media channels); the populist movements born during this period used very smart communication strategies during their electoral campaigns (i.e. Lega Nord in Italy) and reached unexpected high support, gaining seats in Parliaments and weakening mainstream parties. Literature dedicates a window to the approach to populism according to its relationship with the media, the so-called *media-populism* in a very important volume edited by Gianpietro Mazzoleni, Julianne Stewart and Bruce Horsfield – the argument will be briefly discussed during this work.

As mentioned earlier, there is not one single definition of populism: therefore, literature has approached this concept from different perspectives; the most common approach is the ideological one. This is very well discussed in the volume *Populism: it's meanings and national characteristics* edited by Gellner and Ionescu in 1969 after a very important international conference – the first one – building up the populist debate. In

this case, populism has been discussed since its very first roots during the XIX century with Russian agrarian populism and American working-class populism. As it will be mentioned later, populism is a concept that, ideologically, has been associated to much more traditional concepts as *primitivism* and *nativism* (the strict connection between the people and the land, and the consequent refuse of outsiders or immigrants), as well as to religious contexts.

The political-strategic approach to populism clarifies some of the missing points of the ideological one. While the ideological approach highlights the importance of the people's sovereignty, but at the same time missing the concept of the leader, the political strategic approach clarifies that this sovereignty implicitly gives power to a leader. The attitude of the leader is often negative, meaning personalistic, individualistic and opportunistic (sometimes charismatic). However, the leader acquires political legitimacy from the supporters (the people), meaning that he or she act in the name of them. The strategic approach as well highlights the vagueness of the populist structure, including its high volatility, its low organization and its capacity to shift from one political aim to another in a quite opportunistic an inhomogeneous way.

Resuming, the *structure* of populism is composed by two synchronized entities: the legitimate leader and the people – usually composed by the disappointed native working class. The communication strategy of the populist leader focus on attractive phrases and facts – today transmitted through mass media instruments of propaganda – to be used against the establishment and to compromise the status quo; main arguments concern taxes, political parties and immigrants. The populist consideration of immigrants denotes how the mentality is against them. Intellectual principles such as pluralism and multiculturalism are definitely not at the heart of the populist conception. Focus is given more to national and regional identity, native people rights, family and religion.

This following elaborate is structured in four different sections and follow an historical chronology. The first section is an introductive mirror on the populist general debate on ideology, collocation and structure; this will take into consideration the major authors on this literature, from the 1960s onwards. Some of the authors are Ernesto Laclau, Gino Germani, Yves Mény, Sebastian Edwards, Margaret Canovan, Pierre Rosanvallon, Jan Werner-Muller, Cas Mudde, Rovira Kaltwasser and many others. Literature on populism is today very wide; I thought that a good way to face the argument is through the comparative historical approach. This first section will start with some

thoughts about populism and an introduction to its main approaches; then, the analysis will become more schematic with the illustration of populism around the world. The geographic analysis will take into consideration three main areas (which are not all the areas which have been affected by populism): Europe, United States of America and Latin America. The cases of populism of these region will go into further details in the next sessions. If one wish to collocate the three region on a chronological line, the order should be United States, Latin America and Europe. The very first waves of concrete populism are dated at the end of the XIX century in the United States rust-belt states through agrarian and working class revolts against the federal *elitarian* government. At the same time, Russia was facing the issue of *Narodnichestvo*, the agrarian populist ideology developing revolts against the centralized power. Populism in Latin America exploded in Argentina in the period between the two World Wars and came into real effect with the election of Juan Domingo Peron after WWII. The so-called *Peronist* movement lasted quite a few years and has been an inspiration for many other populist developments in the neighbours' countries (such as Brazil, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela).

The second section of this work, as the following ones, will stick to a defined structure: first, an introduction on the historical and conceptual background of the conceived historical period (1969-1989); then, the key approaches and concepts concerning populism during that time. The post-war period has been a fertile terrain for the development of populism. After the war, after totalitarianism, most of democracies were leading to very liberal futures; among many policies, governments were highlighting foreign relations policies, sometimes omitting internal issues concerning the working class. The orientation to multiculturalism (and immigration) of that political class has been one of the causes of protests against the establishment. New populist leaders were coming up with fervent and charismatic speeches, alimenting protest against the political class; especially in Latin America, the consolidation of the populist movements was very much centred on economic and financial issues and reforms, leading to the more recent terminology *macroeconomic populism*. With the development of globalization, the 1950s defined the transition from traditional to new and industrialized society; the populist ideology was against the globalization wave, because it was against the strength of the establishment and the international institutions. In fact, international organizations were considered sources of supranational power – the power of the establishment – against national sovereignty. Populist movements born during this time

were attempting to block the structural change that was going on. Among all the populist cases, the one that deserves more attention is Argentina. The post-war Peronist movement achieved a great success using democratic, socialist and liberal principles at the same time. Peron was using a very sophisticated communication strategy, gaining a lot of consensus from the people living in the suburbs and rural areas. The leaders, Peron in this case, had very precise language strategies; many times they have been exploiting others' disgraces caused by the incapacity of the mainstream government, in order to foster anger and protest against the status quo policies. At the same time Peron showed the importance of inclusiveness of its supporters in the promised activities and *revolutions*. Latin American populism, especially Peronism, has been object of many misunderstandings and confusion; using many approaches from different ideologies, Peronism has been labelled as diverse types of populism through the years.

The third section will focus on the subsequent twenty-year period, meaning until 2009. As mentioned, the first part is characterized by an historical background; the second part will focus on the analysis of some of the main cases of new populism. Given the importance of the new communication and mass-media developments, a section will be dedicated to the media approach to populism, meaning the relationship between populism and mass-media channels – a special in-depth analysis will be given to the Lega Nord case. Following the liberal-democratic decades of social mobilization, modernization, globalization and multiculturalism, many electors were disappointed with the mainstream political trend. Starting from the second half of the 1980s, many populist and extreme right movements and voices came up, especially in Europe. Most of them were against immigration, consolidation of supranational powers of the European Community, economic and financial issues and many social aspects of the post-Woodstock era. In some countries, ideologies such as fascism, independentism and regionalism were starting to be evident; groups of people with their legitimized leaders were unified together in order to create new protest parties against the mainstream left and right wings. The wave of *new* or *neo populism* characterized by right and far right ideologies was starting its path across Europe; some movements (or parties) gained unexpected success (i.e. Lega Nord, FPO, Front National). The mentioned populist wave aroused along with anti-immigration and xenophobia. With the big immigration flows between European countries and from non-EU countries, part of the native people (mainly those who were feeling marginalized, meaning the rural and the working class) was suffering of

unemployment conditions; most of them were developing xenophobe attitudes, accusing immigrants to steal their possibility to have a job. Despite the tragedies of WWII, from North to South Europe, anti-Semitic and xenophobe resentment was wide spreading among the people. It is not a case that anti-immigration and populism happen at the same time; this already happened in the 1960s and 1970s in Latin America (along with Peronism), in the United States during the revolutionary 1960s (along with George Wallace far right populism) and will happen again in the course of the 1990s until nowadays.

At the beginning of the 2000s, Yves Mény and Yves Surel published a fundamental work on the relationship between Populism and Democracy – *Par le peuple, pour le peuple: le populisme et les démocraties*. After decades of populist cases, the authors wanted to clarify both the terms and their relation. Even if further analysis will be discussed later on, it is important to underline that populism cannot survive – and even born – without democracy. Populism can be a threat or a benefit to it (however it can be a worst threat in cases of liberal democracies); after the clarification of both the terms *populism* and *democracy*, one can understand how populism can have impact on authoritarianism leading to liberal democracy (democratization process) and vice-versa (de-democratization process).

The third section will end with a brief overview on *media-populism*, meaning the media and communication approach to populism. The famous book edited by Gianpietro Mazzoleni, Julianne Stewart and Bruce Horsfield focus on a very detailed comparative analysis of populism and the media. The book has been published in the mid-1990s, when mass media communication channels were strongly developing and through which most of the populist political movements were making their propaganda through very smart strategies. An in-depth analysis will focus on the communication strategies of the Lega Nord party in Italy, which acquired unexpected support to the extent of obtaining majorities in the Northern regions of Italy and seats in the National Parliament.

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CHAPTER I

Understanding populism: a general idea of the populist debate

1. Thinking about populism

The development of modern society implied an increasing need of citizens' democracy; incompleteness of democracy can be warned strongly, since the intervention forms of the citizens are wider and more developed; moreover, phenomena of inequality and separatism are becoming more common, mining society. Therefore, the most urgent issue is to understand the representation of the people within democratic societies; populism is highly connected with the matter of representation and mobilization of people.

In order to discuss about populism and fully comprehend its dynamics, it is important to clarify which is the idea of *people* in this context. The idea of people in the populist ideology refers to the very high importance of the principle of popular sovereignty; the people should be considered as a pivot in the political life of a country and at the basis of the populist mentality; for this reason, populism cannot arise outside a democratic state, where the real importance is given just to an autocratic leader. Again, for this reason, populism had more space to develop in the XX century, due to the expansion of democratic regimes. Jan Werner Muller, a great theorist on the populist concept, as well as many other scholars, while developing Margaret Canovan's research, defines populism as "the permanent shadow of representative democracy"¹.

The rise of populism has its origin within a crisis context; it clearly represents an *intrinsic evil*; "it is the merging point between political dissatisfaction – generated by bad political administration and representation – and a feeling of impotence and the consequent absence of alternatives"². So, if one thinks about populism in this way, it can be intended as a very simple answer or reaction to such difficulties; this is why we cannot think about populism only as a 'political style', reducing it just to a form of demagoguery. Populism can be thought as 'ideology', 'political strategy' or 'communication strategy' and many other approaches.

Populism and democracy are obviously strictly correlated. If one wants to better understand democracy, it should better understand what is populism, as one of its distortions. Populism is an internal fact of one society – it is not an extrinsic phenomenon – and its presence obliges to think a better way to implement democracy. At this point, as political theorist Pierre Rosanvallon argues, one can make a comparison with a

¹ Müller, Jan-Werner. 2016. *What is populism?*, University of Pennsylvania Press, p. 101

² Rosanvallon, Pierre (2017), *Pensare il Populismo*, Castelvecchi, p.16

totalitarian phenomenon: in both cases, populism and totalitarianism, there is a distorted conception of the representative ideal and of the democratic forms; at the same time, there is the same way to idealize the conception of social division through the exaltation of the ‘One’ – the charismatic leader – and of the ‘homogeneous’ – the group of people. However, the difference among them remains that on the one side totalitarianism is constructed on a real form of power and institutions; on the other side, populism is built on a vague and non-organized structure, based on an illiberal democratic reaction – or on a reaction of democracy to itself.

Populism is an ambiguous form of politics, which developed in different ways; this is why one should not globalize and absolutize it. Here is when the duty of the historian comes out: populism has been classified more according to history, rather than principles and ideologies. In the historical study of populism, one should begin from very long time ago: from the roots of the ancient Greek *demos*, through the XIX century exaltation of agrarian people of American People’s Party and the Russian *Narodničestvo*, the XX century south American regimes, to the more recent European populist waves.

As an ambiguous form of politics, it is necessary to think about populism in a differentiated way; however common points do exist, such as its language and practice. All these points can be resumed in the content of what populists want to represent; they usually want to determine who belongs to the people, but they also need to define what the people really want, suggesting “that there is a singular common good”³. The ‘reduction’ of populist thought to a common good lead to an idea of “oversimplification of policy challenges”⁴. The oversimplification theory has been carried out by Pierre Rosanvallon and it is based on three main points: the first one concerns a political-sociological simplification along the lines of homogeneous people versus corrupt elites⁵; the second is a procedural and institutional simplification, against the political corruption

³ Müller, Jan-Werner (2016), *What is populism?*, University of Pennsylvania Press, p. 25

⁴ Ibidem, p.26. The original text of Pierre Rosanvallon is available at <http://www.laviedesidees.fr/Penser-le-populisme.html>, September 27, 2011. An Italian translation is also provided: Rosanvallon, Pierre. 2017. *Pensare il populismo*, Lit Edizioni Srl.

⁵ This first simplification formulated by political theorist Pierre Rosanvallon implies that ‘the people’ becomes the real and healthy part of society once the cosmopolitan and oligarchic groups are removed. Therefore, obviously, one can think about populism as anti-pluralist and against every form of multiculturalism.

of institutions, justice⁶ and democracy; the only form of democracy is the people, meaning the referendum⁷. The third and last simplification regards the social bond; populism argues that social cohesion is determined by its identity, which has to be simply homogenous. This implies the rejection of immigrants and people who practice different religions and traditions, breaking unity and culture of the ‘real’ group of people.

Once populists are in power, they usually claim to represent the popular will, but in reality “they actually rely on a symbolic representation of the real people”⁸ on the basis of a “true identity” (*volonte generale*). So, the people are considered beyond every political form; such a consideration was very well supported by right-wing theorists Carl Schmitt and Giovanni Gentile – they were claiming that such a definition of people along with the fascist regime could better implement democratic ideals than democracy itself. On the other hand, jurist theorist Hans Kelsen⁹ argued that “the will of parliament was not the popular will”. The only things that matter in democracy are the election outcome and political parties, everything else is a “metapolitical illusion”¹⁰. In fact, most of political scientists argued in the last decades that a single popular will is quite impossible.

Referring to Ernesto Laclau¹¹’s literature, populism is a term that has been used in an allusive and imprecise way. Laclau has been a great political theorist, particularly in the populist context. Together with political scientist David Apter, Laclau approached the populist theory from different perspectives: “is populism a type of movement or a type of ideology? What are its boundaries?”¹² In some cases, populism could be thought

⁶ About justice, one a clear example can be founded in Hungary; one of the first provisions implemented by Orban’s government was to resize the power of the constitutional court, which was considered too “aristocratic” (or elitist).

⁷ One must be careful to what the populists intend with referendum; the referendum isn’t meant to begin a process of deliberation among citizens, rather, it serves to implement what the leader already decided that it is the most genuine popular interest.

⁸ Müller, Jan-Werner. 2016. *What is populism?*, University of Pennsylvania Press, p. 27

⁹ Hans Kelsen was an Austrian jurist, legal philosopher and political philosopher. He is author of the 1920 Austrian Constitution.

¹⁰ Kelsen, Hans (1929), *Vom Wesen und Wert der Demokratie*, p. 22

¹¹ Laclau's early work was influenced by Althusserian Marxism and focused on issues debated within Neo-Marxist circles in the 1970s, such as the role of the state, the dynamics of capitalism, the importance of building popular movements, and the possibility of revolution. All these subjects brought him to try to find a new, or maybe first, definition of populism. He is considered as one of the greatest theorists on populism; his first literature on totalitarianism and populism has been edited in the 1970s.

¹² Laclau, Ernesto (1979), *Politics and Ideology in Marxist theory*, Verso, p. 143

as part of a social attitude, in others, could be part of a common political phenomenon. The inexistence of a unique definition leads to vagueness; as it will be argued in the next paragraphs, the only way to get close to the populist theory is to analyse it from different perspectives, such as ideological, political-strategic and social approaches, following a geographic comparative perspective.

2. Approaching populism

2.1. Populism as *Forma Mentis*

The definitions of the populist phenomenon proposed during the years and decades by political scientists, sociologists and philosophers are several; still, literature did not find unanimity in the identification of populism's nature. One of the first steps in order to define populism consists in the identification of its nature; many scholars consider its nature as an ideology, a system of thought, a syndrome; on the other hand, consider it as just a way to speak or a moral style, due to the lack of contents and structure. Nature of populism could also consist in a particular *forma mentis* (Tarchi, 2003) that is dependent from a vision of the social order at the basis of which stands the innate virtues, the *volonté generale* of the people (Cas Mudde, 2016), which is mainly against the “corrupt elites” (Cas Mudde, 2016) and the Establishment. This *forma mentis* could assume a multiplicity of expressions and can be at the basis of an ideological scheme of interpretation of society, of the individual or collective political behaviour, of a typology of legitimacy that can be used as the basis of a regime. The *forma mentis* includes the existence of two homogeneous units – the people and the elites, and the high distinction between them – but “although populism is regularly assumed to portray both the people and the elite as homogeneous entities (...) authors have most often focused on populism's monolithic conception of the people”¹³. Populists speak of and to the people but without taking into consideration the differences among them, leading to high target uncertainty and profiting “from an elusive characterisation of their target constituency, as it enables them to appeal to a broad, disgruntled audience”¹⁴.

¹³ Van Kessel, Stijn (2015), *Populist Parties in Europe*, Palgrave MacMillan

¹⁴ Ibidem.

Vagueness on targeting makes populism be a very “flexible” mentality, which can adapt to political ideologies far away from each other, highlighting the confirmation of the populism’s transversality in respect to the left-right dividing line (Tarchi, 2015). As I will analyse later on, populism could also be an instrument for a political style and could be studied and explored through an historical approach. Professor Tarchi strongly supports the definition of populism as *forma mentis* that describes the people as an organic entity divided by hostile forces, characterized by natural ethic qualities, and opposed to the inefficiency and the corruption of political, economic, social and cultural elites.

The populist people cannot be grouped in a unique ensemble; since the core of the populist conception is the heartland, it is possible to identify many different characteristics according to local political, sociologic and economic circumstances. In fact, in the course of history, populist movements have differed across countries, mainly through a transatlantic transformation starting from the post-fascist period, from Peronism to Trumpism. As political theorist Federico Finchelstein argues, “the field of populist studies has produced many comparisons and little transnational research (...) for instance, how different transatlantic examples think and act in terms of their synchronic (no consideration of history) and diachronic (consideration of historical circumstances) convergences”¹⁵.

The conception of populism as *forma mentis* assumes that the people are the only owners of every virtue and dignity in contrast with the vicious elite – the contrast between the marginalized working class and the elites. The people represent the real and the “pure people”¹⁶ and its unicity, and cannot be separated by internal conflicts; this is why the concept of pluralism is not well-accepted by the populist, which its “disrespect [of pluralism] is explained by their view of the people as a subject with a unitary will and consciousness, and of rivals as enemies of the virtuous people”¹⁷. In the populist context, the negation of pluralism is given concerning immigration and cosmopolitan policies, but still a pluralist aspect can be founded in contestation. Literature agrees that populist

¹⁵ Finchelstein, Federico (2017), *From Fascism to Populism in History*, University of California Press, p. 127

¹⁶ Mudde, Cas. Kaltwasser, Cristobal Rovira (2017). *Populism. A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, p.57

¹⁷ De la Torre, C. “The People, Democracy, and Authoritarianism in Rafael Correa’s Ecuador”, *Constellations* 21, no. 4 [2014], 463, found in Federico Finchelstein p. 131

contestation is clearly a symptom of negative effects of the current political tendency and highlights, as theorists such as Müller, Taggart and Arditì, “the lack of the true citizen participation”¹⁸. In line with contestation, one can agree with Jan-Werner Müller that populism can be viewed as “an exclusionary form of identity politics that always poses a danger to democracy”¹⁹ and, moreover, he insists that “populism is not a path to more participation in politics”²⁰. Contestation comes when part of the society – mostly the *blue-collar*s – feels marginalized and not included in the development of the Establishment’s policies; in turn, their reaction is constituted by anger and frustration against their major antagonists, meaning the *white-collar*s, the elites, who they consider to be more familiar with groups of people that don’t really belong to the “real and simple” people representing one country. The political class is just the most visible one among the antagonists of populists, such as finance billionaires, Establishment’s bureaucracy, intellectuals and international organizations, the European Union in particular. Therefore, the logic at the basis of this *forma mentis* is the contraposition between low – marginalized – and high society, between governors and governed.

The reasoning of Professor Tarchi and the conception of populism as *forma mentis* could be one of the starting points for an analysis on the populist phenomenon. This could be sufficient for distinguish populism from other phenomena and, at the same time, to be sufficiently elastic to contain the heterogeneity of its different manifestations.

2.2. Ideological Approach

In order to understand the ideological approach to populism, one should first clarify what is an ideology in the common debate. The term *ideology* is used to indicate a general political conception. Many characteristics are ad hoc attributed by authors in a particular context. An ideology can be considered real and possible, when it is in some way connected to facts and history; an ideology which is just the result of imagination cannot

¹⁸ Finchelstein, Federico (2017), *From Fascism to Populism in History*, University of California Press

¹⁹ Ibidem, p.132-133

²⁰ Jan-Werner Müller, “*Populists and Technocrats in Europe’s Fragmented Democracies*”, World Politics Review, March 31, 2016

be considered real, but rather utopic²¹(Altan, 1989). However, a utopia is not sufficient to create an ideology or a political equilibrium; therefore, in order to attempt the realization of a conception – in this case, a political program – ideology must be strictly connected to a logical-empirical coherence²². A political ideology must keep into consideration the real actual political, economic and social conditions. Moreover, it happened that utopic ideologies – due to their weak and unorganized structure – have fallen into extremist and fanatic ideologies. An ideology with a utopic character had a relevant function in history, because of the strong stimulation that gives to the people. From this analysis, the rather utopic ideology of populism can emerge. The populist leader, with charismatic power and speeches, alludes to utopic realizations with very weak structures.

The major and one of the very first literature concerning populism as an ideology is given by the famous authors Gellner and Ionescu in the late 1960s. The following is a brief introduction to it, as more details will be exposed in the following chapter, in the context of populism during the 1960s.

Thinking of populism as an ideology means giving a sense to it. When we try to define populism, we can start by thinking to the English Peasants' Revolt and the French Jacqueries in Europe during the XIV century. History tells us that populism is a phenomenon which is best exemplified in the imperial Russia and the late XIX century in the United States, however “compelled by elements which are part of the European classical history”²³. Ideologically, in trying to find the roots of populism, the above-mentioned authors focus on Rousseau's concept of primitivism. Primitivism leads this analysis to think about populism as an agrarian and religious concept; populism is endowed by the idea of sacred farm with a religious intensity and fervour: “Under the divine sky one lives in a holy, ritual, cyclical time, immune in its revolutions from the corruption, change and decay. The farmer lives in with the threat of the vagaries of the seasons and disease, and more specifically by the movements of his markets, of armies

²¹ Tommaso Moro defines the representation of perfect society impossible and in any place. Examples of utopic ideologies can be: the *Città del Sole* of Campanella, or the *Society of Equals* of Babeuf.

²² A logical-empirical dimension is here intended as a sort of possibility to create a political project, meaning that one could be actually able to create something.

²³ Gellner, E., Ionescu, G. (1969), “*Populism: its meanings and national characteristics*”, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, p.154

and growth of the cities”.²⁴ Thinking about populism as an ideology can lead to connect cultural tradition to it; according to Prof. Berlin, populism can simply be defined as the *belief in the value of belonging to a group or culture*.

2.3. Political-Strategic Approach

A political strategy defines the principal “methods and instruments of winning and exercising power (Wayland, 2001); in the case of populism, the political strategic approach has been one of the most influential and schematic. In order to define a strategy, it is compulsory to define the type of ruler (who is in power and who governs on the other citizens), the power capability and some other core elements.

When we think of populism as a political approach, we might refer to an *individualist* typology of ruler (or politician). Consequently, as will be mentioned later in this analysis, the populist ruler is a *personalistic* leader²⁵ which seeks for autonomy, power and representation of the people in the fight against the establishment.

How will the ruler acquire power capability in order to be influent and to implement its own authority? Understanding power capabilities is one of the cornerstones of the political strategy definition; in the context of a populist movement or a populist government, usually “the people” are constantly mobilized: by *mobilization* “we mean the engagement of a wide range of individuals to raise awareness of a particular problem, leading them to act collectively to support their cause”²⁶. The mobilization of the people has as the main objective to “sweep [the populist] leader into office with massive victories

²⁴ Gellner, E., Ionescu, G. (1969), “*Populism: its meaning and national characteristics*”, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, p.156

²⁵ A clear example of *personalistic leader* can be former Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori. Fujimori started his political career in the 1980s, when Peru was in a very serious economic crisis. He developed a populist campaign accusing the establishment for the concerned crisis. Given his Japanese origins, Fujimori defined himself as a real outsider without any connections with the political and economic elites. He was elected president in 1990, but without a real supporting party. As he couldn’t secure a majority party even in the 2000 elections, Fujimori started to bribe the opposition; this was the beginning of his decline, which brought him to hide in Japan to avoid prison in Peru. Fujimori’s daughter continued to pursue a political career, being able to construct a common and unified identity, even if accused to still sympathize for the *Fujimorista* government.

²⁶ Mudde, Cas. Kaltwasser, Cristobal Rovira (2017). *Populism. A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, p.42

at the polls”²⁷. Populist attitude aims at strong approval and at impressing the people in order to be as strong as possible against the adversary and in order to delegitimize it. Mobilization can be conceived from a top-down approach (defining the leader and its capabilities) but also from a bottom-up approach (e.g. a social movement): a clear example of the latter case concerns the massive people’s demonstrations in Argentina who forced the liberation of Juan Peron from jail. The huge mobilization of the people characterizes one of the major political power capabilities of populism.

Populist movements do not have a quite organized structure and are very informal. Due to this issue, communication and mobilization of the people has constantly to be re-organized. In modern and contemporary populism, the main way to promote and to reach the people is mass public media and social communication media. Communication is fundamental in order to identify the leader with the people and vice versa, in order to create a personal connection with them.

This conceptualization of populism differs from the older ideological approach, sometimes better clarifying the subject; while the ideology approach highlights the sovereignty of the people missing the concept of the leader, the political strategic approach clarifies that this sovereignty of the people implicitly gives power to a personalistic, individualistic and opportunistic (sometimes charismatic) leader. The strategic approach highlights the high volatility and low organization of the populist structure and its capacity to shift from one political aim to another in a quite opportunistic way.

3. Populism around the world

A great amount of literature of the last decades suggests that there is no real definition of populism. The study of the populist phenomenon has been conducted in more than one way; one can attempt to define populism as an ideology, as a syndrome, as an historical fact or as a political movement.

The very first roots of populism can be dated in the United States at the end of the XIX century, with the foundation of the People’s Party as a first working class “revolution”. After World Wars and the dictatorship era of fascism and Nazism, in the

²⁷ Kaltwasser, C., Taggart, P., Espejo, P., & Ostiguy, P.(2017). *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, Oxford University Press, p. 56

late 1960s, “populism appeared in debates about decolonization, speculations concerning the future of *peasantism*, and, perhaps most surprising from our vantage point at the beginning of the XXI century, discussions about the origins and likely developments of Communism in general and Maoism in particular”²⁸. Populism develops in the 1960s and 1970s in Europe, the United States and especially Latin America – during the so-called *peronist era* – in a period of economic breakdown due to the international disorder and the financial and oil crisis; however, it starts to be a major concern in the 1990s, in particular for European states. Schematically, on the other side, the political scenario was seeing the liberals, which “seem to be worried about what they see as increasingly illiberal masses falling prey to populism, nationalism, and even outright xenophobia”²⁹.

The high amount of literature can facilitate one to make a sort of classification of populist phases in the post-1945 period. Dwayne Woods³⁰ propose a classification divided in three populist *waves*: the first one, at the end of the XIX century, characterized by the *agrarian populism* in Russia and Eastern Europe; the second one concerning populism in Latin America in the 1940s-1960s; and the third one characterized by European populisms in the 1990s. However, this distinction could be considered incomplete because it does not take into consideration the most recent progressive populist form in South America and Europe (i.e. *Podemos* in Spain), better known as *neopopulisms*. A quite complete classification is provided by political theorist Federico Finchelstein³¹; classical populism, which has developed in South America between the late 1940s and the late 1970s, saw as a key figure Argentinian president Juan Domingo Peròn; neoliberal populism developed between the late 1980s and the late 2000s in South America (Abdalà Bucaram in Ecuador, Alberto Fujimori in Peru and Silvio Berlusconi in Italy); quite contemporarily, neoclassical populism of the left developed from the 2000s to nowadays, i.e. on the one hand Hugo Chavez in Nicolas Maduro in Venezuela, Rafael Correa in Ecuador and Evo Morales in Bolivia, and on the other, the left-wing populist parties in Greece and Spain. Finally, and gradually rising, the neoclassical populism of

²⁸ Müller, Jan-Werner (2016), *What is Populism*, University of Pennsylvania, p.7

²⁹ Ibidem, p.8

³⁰ Woods, Dwayne, *The Many Faces of Populism: Diverse but not Disparate*, in Woods, Dwayne – Wejnert, Barbara, *Many Faces of Populism: Current Perspectives*, in “Research in Political Sociology”, Volume 22, 2014, pp. 1-26

³¹ Finchelstein, Federico (2017), *From Fascism to Populism in History*, University of California Press

the rights and extreme rights, including the United States, the Philippines, Turkey, Hungary, the UKIP in the United Kingdom, the Front National, and others.

The above classification is part of *modern populism*, which starts during the early Cold War as the new challenge to liberal democracy. Populism, according to some literature, has been the “unintended result of fascism”, a new way to contest the post-dictatorships new liberal era. Transformation of fascism into populism has been a process characterizing Latin America, wide-spreading later on in Europe. As mentioned above, General Perón was one of the main representative of this result, arguing that fascism was now part of the past. According to him, peronism was “free from the charge of fascism, and the result was a post fascist, authoritarian, and anti-liberal version of democracy. Such version of democracy approached (decades later) also in Italy, with the Gianfranco Fini’s Movimento Sociale Italiano – “like all Italians, we are not neo-fascists, but post-fascists”³². Modern populism is an historical process, still ongoing, that regards the problems of democracy which began in the post-war period.

According to history, it is clear that there is a deep relation between populisms and democratic systems. The transformation of the former is proportional to the transformation of the latter: populism changes with democracy. Recent cases of Venezuela, Russia and Turkey underlined a new interrelation, which is the one between populism and democracy degeneration processes. Recently we assisted to many situations of democratic crisis in regimes deeply affected by populist forms, which took them to reach forms of authoritarianism, well-known as *soft-authoritarianisms*. A final but important observation is provided by Manuel Anselmi³³: the spread of neopopulisms on a global scale, both in Western advanced and developing democracies, destroyed every prejudice that this kind of phenomena can take place only in less developed political contexts.

In its development, populism has been oscillating, attaching itself to main left and right ideologies, which obviously foresee some different futures. However, populism *per se* creates some common futures. Populism rejects dictatorship, considering itself as a post-fascist movement, however being an “attachment to an authoritarian, electoral and

³² Roger Griffin, “Interregnum or Endgame? The Radical Right in the ‘Post-Fascist’ Era, in *The Populist Radical Right*, ed. Cas Mudde (London: Routledge, 2017), 15

³³ Anselmi, Manuel (2018), *Populismo, Teorie e Problemi*, Mondadori Education, p. 45

anti-liberal democracy³⁴; in this context, the leader is the representative of the “real” people and its role is given a very high importance. The populists have a very low understanding of law and they do not truly respect the fundamental principle of democracy, such as the separation of powers. Nationalism is part of the populist ideology, which create a rejection of pluralism, multiculturalism and political tolerance. Populist movements and reactions are very often a symptom of political crisis. Populists are active when the existing establishment defends norms and rules expressing fears and concerns from the people. Indeed, populists come in action by “express these neglected concerns and frame them in a politics that pits the people against intransigent elite. By doing so, they become catalysts for political change”³⁵ (Judis, 2016).

3.1. Europe

The European continent faced a marginal evolution of populism. The first waves of populism came as a consequence of Russian agrarian populism, known as *narodnichestvo*³⁶. The Russian *narodniki* never grew enough and failed, however leaving inspiration for the future generations. As one of the consequence of Russian populist action, agrarian movements started to take place in some Eastern European regions, which also joined some of the inspirations of North America populism.

Populist ideologies were used by authoritarian regimes in the first half of the XX century in order to create mass support. However, both main authoritarian regimes fascism and communism cannot be considered as populist; contrary, they were more elitist: fascism and Nazism were aiming to the exaltation of the state, the leader and the race rather than people. Communist elitism was underlining the Communist Party as the

³⁴ Finchelstein, Federico (2017), *From Fascism to Populism in History*, University of California Press, p.103

³⁵ Judis, John B. (2016), *The populist explosion: How the Great Recession Transformed American and European Politics*, Columbia Global Reports

³⁶ Russian populism was born in the first half of the XIX century, thank to the action of intellectuals and young students who were aware of the actual Russian society condition. The main objective was to emancipate the *working class* society (mainly agrarian) and to put an end to the zarist society. The action of the protagonists of this movement gave an input for the creation of new economic and political reforms, in order to attempt to push Russia to a new etic and politic level.

“vanguard of the people, which leads rather than following them”³⁷. Most of the literature supports the idea that populism was quite absent in Europe during the years of WWII and later on; on the one side, Eastern European states were under communist control and Western states were passing through a democracy rebuilding period.

During the recent decades, following the Treaty of Maastricht in 1992, most of the main parties around the Atlantic have been developing a very neoliberal agenda towards free movement of capital, labour and people, and therefore increasing European and extra-European immigration and illegal immigration. This is nowadays one of the core event that has been generating the angry populist reaction, such as immigration as a threat to national labour and security, terrorism as a consequence of illegal immigration, stolen jobs by immigrants, and more. To better understand, populist parties were starting to combine populism with authoritarianism and nativism; concerning the former, populist parties (most with right-wing ideology) aimed to a strictly ordered and structured society; the latter alludes to a state exclusively inhabited by people from the land and not by immigrants or *aliens*, who were considered just a threat to society and to the value of the nation-state. In that period, after the creation of the European Community in 1957, the powers of the nation-state were slightly declining and aiming to more integrated supranational institutions (which were and are nowadays considered the *enemies* of the populists, the apex of the establishment). Exactly as happened with the American populism at the end of the XIX century, European parties “championed the people against an establishment and an elite”; people are described by the populist movements (left or right) as the “forgotten members against the *caste*” (FN, Marine Le Pen) or the “*gente* against the *casta*” (Podemos), and, as the Movimento Cinque Stelle claims, the rail against “the three destroyers” – journalists, entrepreneurs and politicians. First populist parties and movements in Europe were right-wing; in fact, they were born after WWII, in the Cold War period, accusing the establishment to be “cuddling communists, welfare recipients, or immigrants”³⁸. Known in literature as the *neoclassical populism of the right and extreme right*, its excursus begins with the post-fascist Peronist era until the predominance of current right-wing “movements and leaders that are generally in the

³⁷ Mudde, Cas. Kaltwasser, Cristobal Rovira (2017). *Populism. A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, p.33

³⁸ Judis, John B. (2016), *The populist explosion: How the Great Recession Transformed American and European Politics*, Columbia Global Reports

European opposition but can also be in power in countries like the United States, the Philippines and Guatemala (...), Turkey and (...) Hungary”³⁹ and of course including also UKIP and the National Front. Although the rise of populism of the XX century has been in major part right-oriented, in the last decade, left wing movements raised in Greece and Spain, mainly against the EU institutions in Brussels.

With the end of communism in 1989 and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, few states such as Poland and East Germany were attracted by the populist revolution that was taking its first real wave around Europe. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, right-wing populist parties and movements started their period of glory and rapid development around continental Europe. The 2008 Great Recession has given the path for the rise of left-wing populist movements, such as Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain. Left wing populists tend to be as Eurosceptic as right-wing populists, but more in a socialist rather than nationalist way.

3.2 United States

As mentioned, North America and the United States in particular, has a quite long and important history concerning populist mobilizations. The roots of populism go back to the first agrarian revolts at the end of the XIX century to the very recent Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street movements. The People’s Party, the first populist movement in the United States, was born in 1891, after a national farmers convention in Cincinnati Wallace. The farmer alliances merged with the Knights of Labour in order to form the Party together. The Party did not have long life, but it established the basis for further populist development in the United States. Meanwhile the agrarians and the average American working class were struggling due to the fall of farm prices and feeling excluded and abandoned by the establishment, Washington was developing the industry and finance in the major cities, especially in the East Coast. Neoliberal approaches were starting to be part of new economic policies concerning the market. The farmers’ revolts – including their attempts to control prices through the institution of cooperatives – and the labour alliances were morally and actually fighting against the establishment; the

³⁹ Finchelstein, Federico (2017), *From Fascism to Populism in History*, University of California Press, p.102-103

populist leaders at that time were giving voice to the farmers. Producerism⁴⁰ moral concept was perfectly in line with populism: for the first time, populist leaders were stressing the importance of the people and the affiliation with their lands – farmers were represented as the pure people and the producers of goods within society.

In the case of the American farmers, we can notice a moral, geographical and occupational aspect of populism, rather than racism and anti-Semitism. The morality of this wave of populism wants to underline the high gap between the corrupt elites, the urban industry and the politicians on one side and the good farmers on the other.

The new wave of populism came along with the uprising of the anti-communist action starting in the Cold War period. With the influence of the rejection of left-wing and communist ideas, a right-wing mass movement transformed American populism from progressive to reactionary, although the self-definition of the people remained quite the same. This reactionary movement quite disappeared with McCarthyism⁴¹. Right-wing populism brought George Wallace of Alabama to take over ten million votes in the third-party presidential campaign in 1968. Wallace has been an extreme right populist, targeting minorities, with racist ideologies; his aim was the exaltation of producerism and the link of the man with his land. Multiculturalism and attention to foreign affairs were considered as part of the liber elites' policy.

History of American populism continues with the winning of almost twenty million votes by Ross Perot with his United We Stand, America campaign, merging right-wing reforms with low producerism and strong populism. More recently, at the beginning of the XXI century, new populist movements were born as a consequence of the 2007 Great Recession and against Wall Street establishments. Occupy Wall Street was born as a left-wing populist movement against the George W. Bush administration and the very close collaboration between Washington and Wall Street; Occupy Wall Street provided a socialist agenda, an inclusive interpretation of the people and a low consideration of producerism. The Tea Party movement, on the other side, has a very high consideration of producerism and a more radical consideration of the people.

⁴⁰ *Producerism* is a moral concept which gives value and importance to the producers; this term is often used to emphasize the moral connection of the producers with their land.

⁴¹ McCarthyism – from Senator Joseph McCarthy – is known as a policy that wanted to underline the US superiority vis-à-vis the Soviet Union.

3.3 Latin America

Most of Latin American countries have the highest populist tradition; this populist strength derives from a long-term combination between democratic governance and wide socioeconomic inequality, in parallel with the detention of power from a small-elite group. The marginalization and the high divergence concerning access to power created “the populist discourse particularly appealing”⁴².

The first populist wave in Latin America started during the 1929 crisis until the end of the 1960s’ *bureaucratic authoritarian* regimes. The first wave of Latin American populism was characterized by mobilization of people: one of the crucial events of this period has been the migration of the rural people to urban spaces and the creation of new economic reforms which were aiming to modernization, urbanization and industrialization. Left-wing populism was developing through social reforms connected with socialism and communism.

The second and shorter wave of populism in this region started in the 1990s; in countries such as Argentina, Brazil and Peru, the economic situation was quite dramatic; populist leaders were able to win the elections by blaming the corrupted elite and by accusing them to be robbing to the people. However, most of the populist movement of this period were not that strong, due to the lack of a real programme for fighting the economic situation and, “once in power, they opted to cooperate with the International Monetary Fund to implement harsh neoliberal reforms”⁴³. This act has obviously been against populist principles, meaning the cooperation with the establishment.

The most recent and actual wave of populism started with the election of Hugo Chavez in 1998; his populist movement spread to neighbour countries such as Bolivia, Ecuador and Nicaragua. Chavez’ rhetoric was characterized by anti-imperialist ideas and was much more similar to the first wave of populism. The difference with the first wave can be founded in the left-right burden braking of the current wave (the ideology in the first wave was not to be part of one of the two sides); most of the leaders were defining themselves as radical leftists fighting for free markets and progress. Macroeconomic stability has been improved, but still microeconomic and financial inequalities have not.

⁴² Mudde, Cas. Kaltwasser, Cristobal Rovira (2017). *Populism. A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, p. 28

⁴³ Ibidem, p.30

4. The Protagonists of Populism

One of the core concepts of populism is *the people*. As mentioned in literature, “the people do not really exist and are a mere construction of the populists (...); core concepts of main ideologies are based on imagined communities (Anderson, 1983)”⁴⁴. Paul Taggart suggested that the people is a concept which is defined individually according to one’s self-perception of the targeted people. The populist’s perception is an added value to the *general principle* according to which the people are *pure* and *right*. A quite comprehensible example of the *pure and right people* is given by the US working class – the Mid-West white-working class man, who rejects all the outcome of the establishment elites and their multicultural attitudes. Ethnic minorities and immigrants are immediately excluded from this kind of people “on the basis of ethnic rather moral criteria – a consequence of nativism rather than populism”⁴⁵. At the same time, the elite is excluded from the people from a moral (social, cultural, political and economic) point of view.

The rise of populism was based on the higher conflict between “the people” and the “non-working elite”⁴⁶, characterized by a group of experts and intellectuals not representing the “real” and “simple” people. Populism emerges as a social and political movement which is not precisely structured and organized as a traditional party. If we consider populism from a social perspective, it is interesting how populist social movements “are examples of bottom-up mobilization”⁴⁷. Most of times, these social movements are leaderless and they don’t have a precise organization; the capacity of these movements is to widespread anger and fear with the elites and the establishment and to enhance the strength of sovereign people. As mentioned before, populism emerges as a social and political response to many issues generated by the traditional ‘elitarian’ parties and their inclination to modernization (or globalization) and its consequences. The issue of modernization is crucial because underlines populism as a “phenomenon of tension between metropolis and province”, as political theorist Edward Shils argue, in particular

⁴⁴ Kaltwasser, C., Taggart, P., Espejo, P., & Ostiguy, P.(2017). *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*. Oxford University Press, p. 32

⁴⁵ Kaltwasser, C., Taggart, P., Espejo, P., & Ostiguy, P. (2017). *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*. Oxford University Press, p. 32

⁴⁶ Although the elite is the real antagonist of the people, it has gained less theoretical attention in literature.

⁴⁷ Mudde, Cas. Kaltwasser, Cristobal Rovira (2017). *Populism. A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, p.47

concerning the United States. Shils provides a new kind of approach to populism: it does not focus on strictly political terms, rather it identifies populism as a social and cultural issue. In his words, populism is represented by the supreme will of the people, which is even higher than traditional institutions and any other form of will. Populism identifies the people's will with justice and morality⁴⁸. Populism is therefore a tendency that delegitimizes every social and institutional order that provide a pyramidal structure of society. At the same time, populism is consequently against separation of powers (which is one of the fundamental principles of democracy) and pluralistic manifestations. The debate between populism and pluralism is still on fire in a more and more globalized and modernized world. As Gellner and Ionescu argue in their famous publication in 1969, populism is a form of nationalism, being the equation of the nation and the people.

One of the most diffused question in literature is if populism can be considered right wing or left wing? One can immediately argue that “populism is conceptually neither”⁴⁹ and, moreover, “a characteristic of modern populism is the fluidity of its transitions from right to left and vice versa”⁵⁰, a sort of “pendulum watch” that, however, keeps tight some central features, which fundamentally characterize the concept of populism and differentiate it from other major ideologies. Flexibility of populism in the last decades gives us the possibility to attempt to an analysis of its transformation and its transnational evolution. However, a rational distinction between left-wing and right-wing populism can be achieved: the former “champion the people against an elite or an establishment”⁵¹ – upsurges the rise of the “marginalized” part of society; the latter still concerns a battle against the elite, but with the accuse to foster policies regarding a third group – such as immigrants, asylum seekers, Islamists etc. Left and right populisms are different from the main ideologies; left wing populism does not seek the abolition of capitalism (as socialist and social democratic movements) and aims to a ‘vertical’ politics, which starts from the protest of the middle society against the elite (bottom-up politics); right wing populism, “in its American and Western European versions, it is also different

⁴⁸ Shils, Edward (1996). *The Torment of Secrecy: The Background and Consequences of American Security Policies*, Ivan R. Dee, Chicago, p. 98.

⁴⁹ Finchelstein, Federico (2017), *From Fascism to Populism in History*, University of California Press, p.20

⁵⁰ Ibidem, p.20

⁵¹ Judis, John B. (2016), *The populist explosion: How the Great Recession Transformed American and European Politics*, Columbia Global Reports, p. 15

from authoritarian conservatism that aims to subvert democracy – it operates within a democratic context”⁵². Populism heart concerns clash between society – intending the people on the one hand, the establishment on the other.

In understanding populism, one should be sure to make a distinction on the regional interpretation: American populism is somehow considered as a ‘progressive’ phenomenon, while in Western Europe, populism is connected to “irresponsible policies or various forms of political pandering”⁵³. Very often, in the European region, populism is associated to demagoguery, in particular when referring to right-wing populist parties.

4.1 Populism in power

From a more sociological perspective, populism can be identified in a particular class, “especially the petty bourgeoisie and (...) those cultivating the land”⁵⁴, which reacts on the one hand with different fears concerning the development and modernization of the system in a day-by-day newer and globalized world, and on the other with feelings – mainly anger and frustration. The identification of this class represents the moralistic conception of populist politics as “a way of perceiving the political world that sets a morally pure and fully unified people against elites who are deemed corrupt or in some other way morally inferior”⁵⁵. Anti-elitism is at the core of populism – “only some of the people are really the people”⁵⁶ – but we should also take into consideration anti-pluralism and anti-multiculturalism. Cultural and social diversity are not ‘allowed’ in a populist moral ideology, since just a group of equal and unified people can be the ‘representatives’ of such a movement. As political theorist Nancy Rosenblum argued, populism can be associated to “holism: the notion that the polity should no longer be split and the idea that it’s possible for the people to be one and – all of them – to have one true representative. Consequently, populist representation leads to a particular consideration of leadership. Populism supporters aim to an outstanding leader which identifies itself as the general will of the people. There is a particular and quasi-direct relationship between the populist leader and the people: the leader reaches the people in the shortest possible way, in order

⁵² Ibidem, p.15

⁵³ Müller, Jan-Werner (2016), *What is Populism*, University of Pennsylvania, p.11

⁵⁴ Ibidem, p.12

⁵⁵ Ibidem, p.20

⁵⁶ Ibidem, p.21

to impress and to acquire more charisma. A clear example could be a *fight* with the traditional parties or some other actions that might have impressive outcomes among the supporters. Most of the times, a populist leader could act through an opportunistic leadership.

A leader is someone who speaks in the name of the people; Alabama's governor George Wallace can be an example of (extreme-right) populist leader representing a 'group' of people:

“In the name of the greatest people that have ever trod this earth, I draw a line in the dust and toss the gauntlet before the feet of tyranny (...) and I say (...) segregation now (...) segregation tomorrow (...) segregation forever. And *you* native sons and daughters of old New England's rock-ribbed patriotism (...) and *you* sturdy natives of the great mid-West (...) and *you* descendants of the far West flaming spirit of pioneer freedom (...) we invite *you* to come and be with us (...) for *you* are of the Southern mind (...) *you* are Southerners too and brothers with us in our fight”.⁵⁷

With these words, George Wallace referred to the people (*you*) he was representing arguing against the “tyranny” (the elite) represented by the J.F. Kennedy administration, which was working and fighting against Southern segregation and racism. As political theorist Margaret Canovan points out, ‘the people’ has been used as a term to identify the “body of politics”, the “common people of the res publica” or, to say it in modern terms “the excluded, the downtrodden, and the forgotten”, and finally to identify the nation as a whole in a “cultural sense”⁵⁸. What Canovan argues in her analysis, is that ‘the people’ can be used besides populism; or, within populism, it can be used both from the bottom – meaning ‘agrarian populism’ – and from the top – ‘politician populism’. However, “for a political actor or movement to be populist, it must claim that a *part* of the people *is* the people”⁵⁹. It is interesting, as theorists Müller and Canovan do, to refer to ancient Rome

⁵⁷ George Wallace, in Müller, Jan-Werner (2016), *What is Populism*, University of Pennsylvania, p.21

⁵⁸ Margaret Canovan, *The People*, (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2005)

⁵⁹ Müller, Jan-Werner (2016), *What is Populism*, University of Pennsylvania, p.22

or to the Florentine Renaissance: concerning the former, “fighting for the interest of the plebs, the common people, is not populism, but saying that only the plebs in the *populus Romanus* is populism”⁶⁰. Moreover, regarding the latter, saying that “fighting for the *popolo* against the *grandi*” it’s not populism, but saying that “the *grandi* do not belong in Florence, would be populism”⁶¹.

As mentioned before, the ‘populist society’ is usually composed by a leadership and representative figure, a group of people and its antagonists, the elites. Populism emerges as a consequence of bad political representation, economic development and modernization. In most regional contexts, the main ‘battleship’ is between the cities’ elites and the working-class society leaving outside – and feeling peripheral from the central power of the cities; this could be outlined as a phenomenon of “tension between metropolis and province”⁶². Populism is the result of international tensions “between backward countries and more advanced ones” and internal tensions “between developed and backward parts of the same country”⁶³ reacting differently to the modernization of society and the decision to industrialize as a first priority – the so called ‘crises of development’. Concerning the international (or ‘external’) tensions, one can refer to the example of the populist reaction of the USSR to the development of modern democracies and socialist movements in Western Europe.

The figure of the populist leader is usually a charismatic personality, which identifies itself as man of the people, “just like us”. Very often some leaders don’t fit this description; a clear example could be Donald Trump. The electorate choose to vote for a populist leader because of its “superior capacity to discern the common good, as judged by the people”⁶⁴. The leader must have a direct connection and identification with the people, acting as an intermediary with the establishment. In the general debate, the populist leader is classified as a charismatic *strongman*⁶⁵. However, the populist is not

⁶⁰ Ibidem, p.23

⁶¹ Ibidem, p.23

⁶² Edward Shils, ‘The intellectuals in the political development of the new states’, *World Politics*, XII, No. 3 (April 1960), pp. 329-68, in Gellner, E. & Ionescu, G., *Populism, Its meanings and national characteristics*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1969, p. 180

⁶³ Gellner, E. & Ionescu, G., *Populism, Its meanings and national characteristics*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1969, p. 181

⁶⁴ Müller, Jan-Werner. 2016. *What is populism?*, University of Pennsylvania Press, p. 32

⁶⁵ In Latin America, the strongman is defined as a *caudillo*, alluding to a strong leader, who exercises its power in an independent way. The origin of the caudillo can be found in Juan

always a strongman and vice versa; the strongman is usually the leader of an extreme right or left democracy or an authoritarian regime; “as populism maintains an ambivalent relationship with democracy, the authoritarian characteristic of the strongman is not always inherent to populism”⁶⁶. The real populist and non-violent leader defines itself as a man that carries on actions, rather than just words, in order to enhance its own virility; the concept of virility has been noticed from few populists in former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, “who used the media attention to emphasize his virility”⁶⁷, following the sex scandals in the recent years. Use of popular language and banal topics is typical of the populist leader who wants to totally identify with the common man – a clear example could be the former Northern League leader Umberto Bossi. Charisma is given by complete devotion, personal confidence⁶⁸ and popularity – and comes out mostly in times of crisis, exactly when most of populist movements begin to widespread. Even if it is a rare case, in a well-organized populist movement or party, which has a strong and well-defined party, it could be hard to distinguish if the followers’ (the people) support “is based on loyalty to the party, support for the program, or a charismatic bond with the leader. The populist leader, the strongman, struggles to defend the people from the corrupt elite and the establishment, acting as a *vox populi* based on a construction composed by the separation from the elite and the connection with its followers. The leader has to convince the people that they are not part of the corrupt elites but are part of the *pure* people, underlining essential cultural stereotypes, common sense and tradition. A populist leader usually aims to be a political outsider (an *elite outsider*), indeed going against the establishment; a clear example of political outsider in the populist history can be the one of female populist leader: women in chief of populist movements and parties – i.e. Marine Le Pen in France, Pauline Hanson in Australia, Pia Kjørsegaard in Denmark

Domingo Perón and in the more recent Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez. Both of them were part of the military world; obviously, this gave them a stronger charisma.

⁶⁶ Mudde, Cas. Kaltwasser, Cristobal Rovira (2017). *Populism. A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, p. 64

⁶⁷ Ibidem, p.64

⁶⁸ One of the definitions of charismatic leadership comes from sociologist Max Weber (1864-1920), who has strongly influenced future literature on populism. In a Weberian understanding of charisma, this is about a real bond between the people and the leader.

– are considered strong political outsiders and authentic characters fighting against the majorly male corrupted elites and having a vox populi based on family and patriotism⁶⁹.

Another important, but rather “not so easy to sell”⁷⁰, figure of populist leader is the entrepreneur (of which Berlusconi in Italy and Ross Perot in the US could be examples). The entrepreneur usually belongs to the rich part of the people, therefore to a sort of elite belonging to the establishment; however, since the populists are not distinguished on socioeconomic criteria, but on morality, the entrepreneurs can benefit from their position classifying themselves as political outsiders and self-made strongmen⁷¹. The connection between the entrepreneur and the ‘common people’ is given by authenticity and respect for traditions.

Therefore, in practice, to make a very simple distinction, populist leaders can be outsiders, insiders-outsiders or insiders. The outsider populist is very rare to find because means that is a personality that does not have any link with the elite or the current political actors⁷²; the major part of successful populists are defined as insiders-outsiders, meaning that they never have been politicians or part of that elite, but have a close connection with the establishment – again, Silvio Berlusconi can be considered an example, building his campaign using his own media empire on the one hand, and his own connections with Bettino Craxi and other political protagonists on the other hand. The insider populist leader is obviously in close connection with the ongoing political actors – many of the populist political leaders in the course of history have been insiders; usually, they had high ranking positions within main parties or served as ministers. An outsider actor can transform the government: if the populist government is successful for several years, it will have, as a result, a totally new type of elite and the outsider will be

⁶⁹ Pauline Hanson, founder of the One Nation Party (ONP) in Australia stated: “I care so passionately about this country, it’s like I’m its mother, Australia is my home and the Australian people are my children”.

⁷⁰ Mudde, Cas. Kaltwasser, Cristobal Rovira (2017). *Populism. A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, p. 71

⁷¹ As Silvio Berlusconi argued, “I don’t need to go into office for the power. I have houses all over the world, stupendous boats...beautiful airplanes, a beautiful wife, a beautiful family...I am making a sacrifice (...)”. This citation was found in Mudde, Cas. Kaltwasser, Cristobal Rovira (2017). *Populism. A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, p. 71.

⁷² Hugo Chavez and Alberto Fujimori can be considered as outsiders, due to their origins and previous positions within society.

part of the establishment, transforming itself in an insider actor⁷³. This is the case in which the boundaries between insiders and outsiders brakes down.

⁷³ The main example concerns the *Chavismo* in Venezuela: after fifteen years of government, the Bolivarian revolution led to a totally new ruling class, the *Boliburguesía*. Chavez transformed himself from an outsider in 1999 to a true insider in the 2013 political elections.

CHAPTER II

The interpretation of populism in the 1969-1989 period

1. Historical and Conceptual Background

The twenty years analysed in this chapter are considered as one of the most important periods concerning the development and study of populism. After World War II, with the consolidation of most of the liberal democracies, populism and anti-liberalism found their field to start. With the development of globalization, most of the countries were experiencing a transitional period moving from traditional to modern and industrialized societies. Liberal democracies were focusing on foreign policies and external relations, fostering pluralist and multicultural policies, due to the big migration flows between Europe, North America and Latin America.

Populism started to develop regionally; Latin America experienced a widespread effect in most of its countries, in particular Argentina, Brazil and Peru. Literature and scholars begun to seriously analyse the populist phenomenon through different ways and approaches. Was populism simply an ideology? Was it a political strategy? Or a communicational strategy? Moreover, was populism a left or right-wing phenomenon? On this latter question, history tells us that populism is both a left and right-wing concept; one can think about left wing populism in Latin America (i.e. Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela), Europe (Germany, United Kingdom, Greece and Spain) and the Soviet Union, and about right-wing populism in the United States and among the more recent extreme right political parties in Europe (i.e. Italy, France, the Netherlands and Austria). Left wing populist ideologies are mainly speaking for the common people and are against globalization, capitalism and most of American policies; moreover, left populism supports minority rights – sometimes, left wing populism has been underlined as the *inclusive populism*. Concerning right wing populism, there are some similarities with the left wing – such as anti-elitism and speaking for the common people; the difference stands in the basic ideology, which combines populism with right and extreme right politics. Right wing waves of populism arrived at their apex later than left populism; right wing populism has mainly developed in the United States in George Wallace's 1960s, in Ronald Reagan's 1980s and today; in Europe, starting with Jean Marie Le Pen and going deeper from the 1990s through the first big populist wave. Most of right wing populist movements or parties have a common point, which is immigration and, in the European

context, Euroscepticism. Besides, nativism, primitivism⁷⁴ and protectionism are all basic concepts of right wing populism. Right wing populism aims at giving more importance to domestic rather than foreign and multicultural policies.

The first wave of populism in the after-war period underlined some fundamental ideas: populism developed through important concepts such as *social mobilisation* and *social integration*; the charismatic leader on one side was pushing the people on the other side to a common and strong support against the ruling élites and the establishment. Thus, the people were considered at the beginning as main actors of the populist escalation – however, we will see how in later stages the people were *declassified* as only spectators of the leader's actions, leading to quite totalitarian thoughts.

Concerning the main literature of the period, this analysis took into consideration some of the most important scholars, such as Ernesto Laclau, Gino Germani, Torquato di Tella, Ernest Gellner and Ghita Ionescu, Rudiger Dornbush and Sebastian Edwards. The years of consideration in this chapter are fundamental for the beginning of the idea and (vague) definition of populism. The historical context and the literature helped the future generation to have a basic understanding of the first populist explosion. However, still today there is no clear definition of populism. Through an historical analysis of the main authors and concepts, this chapter aims at describing the vagueness and the lack of sense and reality of populism. As mentioned, populism can find its roots in a moment of social and/or political crises; through a first stage of fast growth which foresees both the people and the leader as protagonists, it develops through a non-organized path dominated by communicational strategy and utopic promises, leading to an ideological and social defeat.

⁷⁴ Meaning the high relationship between the people and their own land; this traditional concept underlines the principle of nationalism and the anti-immigration attitude.

2. A first ideological approach to populism

The major, or one of the very first, literature concerning populism *as an ideology* is given by the famous authors Ernest Gellner and Ghita Ionescu in the late 1960s. The volume *Populism: It's meanings and national characteristics* was created by a group of scholars with different backgrounds and is well-known as a first attempt to enclose populism as a concept of study within political science. After the creation of this massive and fundamental work, most of scholars started to think about populism as a set of ideas and topics. However, at the same time, other scholars were approaching populism in a different way – such as political discourse, language, style et cetera.

Thinking of populism with an ideological approach means giving a sense to it and it is nowadays “the most broadly used in the field”⁷⁵. The traditional ideological approach to populism presents some protagonists and key concepts – the people, the elite and the *volonté générale*. As Cas Mudde argues, populism is “an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* of the people”⁷⁶. When we try to define populism through an ideological approach, we should firstly think about the concept of *morality*. Differently from socialism and nationalism, populism foresees socio-cultural differences not because of one’s class, but because of morality. With the morality of populism, we can refer to the authenticity of the *right* people – it is not a matter of racial separation, but a matter of who does the right thing for everyone.

From an historical point of view, we can start by thinking about populism from the English Peasants’ Revolt and the French Jacqueries in Europe during the XIV century. History tells us that populism is a phenomenon which is best exemplified in the imperial Russia⁷⁷ and the late XIX century in the United States. Ideologically, in trying to find the

⁷⁵ (2017-10-26). Kaltwasser, C., Taggart, P., Espejo, P., & Ostiguy, P.(Eds.), The Oxford Handbook of Populism. : Oxford University Press. Retrieved 29 May. 2018, from <http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com.ezproxy.eui.eu/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198803560.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780198803560>

⁷⁶ Mudde, Cas. 2004. “The populist zeitgeist,” *Government and Opposition*, 39(3): 541–63.

⁷⁷ There is a very deep connection between rural life and populism: both aim to underline the roots – “populism is against rootlessness”. Solidarity and fraternity are based on territorial origins and belonging.

roots of populism, the above-mentioned authors focus on Rousseau's concept of *primitivism*⁷⁸. Primitivism leads this analysis to think about populism as an agrarian and religious concept; populism is endowed by the idea of sacred farm with a religious intensity and fervour: "Under the divine sky one lives in a holy, ritual, cyclical time, immune in its revolutions from the corruption, change and decay. The farmer lives in with the threat of the vagaries of the seasons and disease, and more specifically by the movements of his markets, of armies and growth of the cities".⁷⁹ Thinking about populism as an ideology, can lead to connect cultural tradition to it; according to Prof. Berlin, populism can simply be defined as the "belief in the value of belonging to a group or culture"⁸⁰. Merging cultural tradition and morality could explain the *right way* of doing things on behalf of all the *right* people, homogeneously unified against the corrupt elite and the establishment.

Populism has been producing political movements "rather than constructing highly-structured parties and one reason of this is that populism is so social, so convinced that the political does not really, fundamentally matter as compared with the community"⁸¹. The populist ideology marks up another way to run away from the burden of history. The very first roots of populism were coming out when in the XVIII century, the American and Russian societies were moving toward progress. Rural areas were starting to be less populated and consequently less involved in national politics. The new average businessman, the "townsman, the unpredictable, untraditional, impermanent stranger"⁸², was moving to town and beginning to control the market, undermining real origins and becoming a *conspirator*. From this, we might understand the close connection between populism, racialism and isolationism.

Going further with research on populist ideology, it emerges that this concept can lead also to a sociological theory; the latter is described by Rousseau, but also by N.K. Mikhailovsky, a serious figure in history of sociology. Populism is also a matter of personality; societies are dominated by personalities and "individuals in such societies

⁷⁸ In this context, the concept of primitivism has to be modified, "a healing of the breach between men and their nature by simplicity, spontaneity, and elementary, ascetic, and largely agrarian virtue.

⁷⁹ Gellner, E., Ionescu, G. (1969), "*Populism: its meaning and national characteristics*", Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, p. 155

⁸⁰ Ibidem, p. 156

⁸¹ Ibidem, p. 157

⁸² Ibidem, p. 157

are competent to fill many roles (...) [and] their personalities are dominated by their dominant occupational role”⁸³ that are quite often unsatisfied and incomplete. Populism is about personality *in a moral sense*, meaning that an individual should be complete “living ideally in independent agrarian virtue”⁸⁴ in order to create and be part of a *uniform and consensual society*.

Populism, as a consequence of an angry and unsatisfied society, aims ideologically to the restoration of a uniform society and of “the varieties of the soil”, leading to Rousseau’s primitivism theory and to agrarianism. In trying to make a conclusion on these mid-XX century theories, populism can be quite understood as a *utopic* and *anti-intellectual* form of politics leading to stronger forms of politics such as nationalism and protectionism.

3. The New and Differentiated Approaches to Populism: Social Mobilization, Integration and Structural Changes

The first new approaches to the populist phenomenon started to be more rational and systematic. Populism began to be a real fact with founded analysis and research behind. However, the vagueness and ambiguity of its structure didn’t produce a clear definition yet. Therefore, different approaches have been defined during the course of time: populism as an ideology – as argued by Gellner and Ionescu – populism as a social fact or matter, populism as a cultural mentality, populism as a political movement.

The first is a social approach, which aims to an analysis of populism as the “typical expression of a determinate social class”, and “characterizes, therefore, both the movement and its ideology”⁸⁵. Laclau found its own new conception of populism that emphasizes social mobilization of externalized social classes; social mobilization is seen by Laclau as an emancipatory force for the excluded part of the population. Since social classes are different – and even same social classes could be different among regions or states – one should focus its analysis and its approach to populism taking into

⁸³ Ibidem, p.159-160

⁸⁴ Ibidem, p. 160

⁸⁵ Laclau, Ernesto (1979), *Politics and Ideology in Marxist theory*, Verso, p. 144

consideration the region and context of study; in fact, the outcomes of an approach to populism between Northern America, Russian *Narodnichestvo* and Argentinian *Peronism* can vary. These three examples reflect different conceptions of ideology, objectives and movements. Latin America is the greatest example of social mobilisation of urban masses through an ideological expression against the local oligarchies and the imperialist protagonists; the 19th century agrarian revolts in the United States and Russia had a different nature that is the expression of the value of the land against modernization and urban increasing. Different contexts, different protagonists, but one element in common: the *social bases* of the movement.

A second conception of populism led to a sort of *theoretical nihilism*, due to the difficulties in finding a definition of it. Since there is no definition of populism, the word *populism* should be totally deleted from the language in the social science context. In this eventuality, the concept of populism would be “replaced by a direct analysis of the movements which up to now have been called populist – according to their class nature”⁸⁶. But would an analysis of the movements be enough to satisfy the objective definition of populism? Can populism be considered as not even an abstract part of a political movement? Agreeing with Laclau, nihilism will not find an answer to this and therefore the inadequate kind of approach.

A third approach consists in the restriction of the term ‘populism’ to an ideology, and not to a movement. As mentioned before⁸⁷, common features of such an ideology can be the anger against the establishment, the mistrust of the status quo and politicians, the hostility against intellectuals and multicultural environments.

A final approach to populism is given by its functionalist conception. This conception is produced by the high asymmetries of *the transition from the traditional to a modern and industrialized society*. The functionalist approach involves also the

⁸⁶ Laclau, Ernesto (1979), *Politics and Ideology in Marxist theory*, Verso, p. 146

⁸⁷ The greatest analysis of the populist ideology has been theorized (and mentioned here before) by E. Gellner and G. Ionescu in 1969, during the first multilateral conference on populism held in London. The outcomes of that conference have been united in their famous publication, *Populism: its meanings and national characteristics*.

economic aspect of populism⁸⁸. Gino Germani⁸⁹ conceived the process from traditional to modern society through three different changes: (a) modification of the typology of social action; (b) transformation of institutional actions from traditional to modern policies; (c) differentiation and specialization of institutions. Of course, social relations' modification is part of this modernization process. The passage from traditional to modern society gives a much higher importance to the establishment, the institutional role and the supranational power.

In Gino Germani's analysis, there are three key concepts that are *mobilization*, *structural change* and *integration*. By *mobilisation* he means "the process whereby formerly passive groups acquire deliberative behaviour (i.e. intervention in national life)"⁹⁰. *Structural change* is a term used to indicate the transitional period which involved the passage from traditional to modern society⁹¹. Unfortunately, in the 1960s there was insufficient data to make a numerical and quantitative analysis. However, it is possible to make a clear periodical separation of the different phases of structural change: the first period⁹² of structural change refers to 1890-93 (with the great political mobilization, through revolutions, political crises and the organization of national states); the second period refers to 1914-1930 and the third one, much more intensive, to the half of the 1930s, when the industrial development and internal migration took place. The concept of *integration* is a way to clarify the types of mobilization and structural change, which can be supported legally from the regime in power or "in which the regime's framework of legitimacy is implicitly or explicitly accepted by the mobilized groups, that the rules of the game of the existing legality are accepted"⁹³. But was integration reached under populist regimes – in this context, under Peronism? The Peronist movement has been a period of crisis together with the post-Great Recession crisis; both crises were born

⁸⁸ In the last paragraph, the concept of *macroeconomic populism* in Latin America has been mentioned, together with an economic and financial excursus of a typical populist government. Gino Germani, Rudiger Dornbush and Sebastian Edwards are main scholars of macroeconomic populism in Latin America.

⁸⁹ Germani, G. (1965). *Política y Sociedad en una época de transición*, Buenos Aires

⁹⁰ Laclau, Ernesto (1979), *Politics and Ideology in Marxist theory*, Verso, p. 148

⁹¹ The structural change is part of a series of changes in the rise of liberal and national populism, which involves also political, economic and cultural changes. Structural change refers to the transformation of fundamental rules and structure of society.

⁹² This analysis will take into consideration Latin America, as it is the region on which Gino Germani focused more.

⁹³ Laclau, Ernesto (1979), *Politics and Ideology in Marxist theory*, Verso, p.149

demanding more political integration for at least one third of the population, which has been marginalized. In many countries, national populism developed during the path for the creation of a new nation-state, with new structural changes. The integration process towards modernization, industrialization and for the creation of the nation-state has been often interrupted by crises and demobilization periods, “often achieved by means of violent repression”⁹⁴, in Latin America as well as in the Western countries. As mentioned, most of the integration processes left out a massive part of the population, leading to political crisis, thus to populist upsurging.

Through a quite conceptual theory, Germani develops a way of understanding the populist explosion. First of all, he compares the cases of Latin America and Europe in a separate way: “in Europe a clear distinction can be registered between two stages: democracy with limited participation and democracy with total participation”⁹⁵. Thus, at the beginning a liberal and rational State is built up with democratic rights, but however with political powers which are reserved for the *bourgeoisie*, leaving the working middle class out of public offices. Anger and protest from the working class will feed the populist environment to the extent that part of this class will be participating to the political life in a second stage. At this stage, the people start to participate to public and urban life through mechanisms of integration, such as trade unions, education, political parties; in this process of modernization, Europe has been characterized by a new capitalism of big multinational corporations enhancing the predominance of consumption and welfare state.

The effects of modernization in Latin America have been quite different; industrialization was not possible with a mobilization through integration process, as in Europe. This led to a unique consequence: a mobilization made through an anti-institutional way. This opened the doors to the formation of national-popular movements both on right and left, the decline of liberal democracy and the rise of authoritarian and totalitarian regimes: the result was authoritarianism on the left, nationalism on the left, socialism of the right and a multiplicity of hybrid, even paradoxical, formulas from the point of view of the right-left dichotomy (Laclau, 1979).

⁹⁴ Germani, Gino (1978). *Authoritarianism, fascism and national populism*. Transaction Inc, New Jersey, p. 126

⁹⁵ Ibidem, p.149

In Latin America, the attempt to include the masses into political life has been quite confused: the people created a pressure to political life that went beyond the capacity of absorption of the structures; this gave rise to riots and consequently mass integration could not be done in an integrated way, as in the 19th century European model. As a result, the elites manipulated the masses in order to reach their own scopes. Germani highlights how the masses were influenced by both traditional and modern features –here, one of the explanations of the weak and confused structure of the populist movement.

Ernesto Laclau’s research on populism also includes the famous analysis of Torquato di Tella⁹⁶, where populism is defined “as a political movement which enjoys the support of the mass of the urban working class/or peasantry, but which does not result from the autonomous organizational power of either of these two sectors. It is also supported by non-working-class sectors upholding an anti-status quo ideology”⁹⁷. Thus, in this conception, social classes are not considered as classes. Both Di Tella and Germani argue that what is clear is the ‘revolution of rising expectations’ of the audience through the media channels – such as radio, cinema and television. Propaganda through mass media seemed to have much more effect in Latin America than in Europe at that time – we will see that mass media populist propaganda will have a great effect across Europe starting from the 1990s.

However, even with high expectations, the economic development seems to be much unstructured, non-organized and not able to afford such a high demographic explosion. Since expectations from the government is too high and not able to satisfy the mass willingness, this distortion makes it impossible to politics to work as in the European countries, or in *Western style*; “in Western experience democracy was traditionally based on the principle of no taxation without representation; in the developing countries, the revolution of rising expectations generates desire to have representation without ever having been taxed”⁹⁸. Another element in the analysis of Di Tella is the élite; if a populist system wants to work better, it needs an anti-status quo élite that can mediate between high expectations and real satisfaction.

⁹⁶ Di Tella, T. (1970). Populism and Reform in Latin America, in C. Veliz, *Obstacles to Change in Latin America*, London, pp. 47-74

⁹⁷ Ibidem, p.47

⁹⁸ Laclau, Ernesto (1979), *Politics and Ideology in Marxist theory*, Verso, p. 152

The analysis of Di Tella, as well as the one of Germani, is majorly teleological. On the one side of the analysis, there is the traditional society, on the other, the modern and industrialized one. According to his thoughts, in order to comprehend the development of populism, the roots must be found in the transition process from tradition to modernity. Populism is a political form of expression that develops when a popular sector is not able to find its own expression. This gives also an explanation to the unsure structure of a populist political movement.

Ernesto Laclau underlines a main objection to the Germani-Di Tella teleological analysis; the objection is about “whether populism can be assigned to a transitional stage of development”⁹⁹. Populist movements also took place in already developed countries, such as *Qualunquismo* in Italy or *Poujadisme* in France or even Fascism as an expression of unsatisfied working class; to insert populism in a stage of development is like “to make the same mistake as many interpretations in the 1920s which regarded fascism as an expression of Italy’s agrarian underdevelopment, that could not therefore be repeated in advanced industrialized countries such as Germany”¹⁰⁰. The theory does not clearly explain if populism can rise in a different *level of development* context; for sure, populist growth is much lower in big cities and more industrialized environments, but is this sufficient to explain the collocation of early populist stages of development? Even if the teleological and ideological analysis of these two authors is very linear and comprehensible, one of the assumptions could be that a populist phenomenon is a confused mix of traditional and modern elements. A conclusion is quite unavoidable, that is the consideration of populism as a phenomenon that it is not defined itself, but that is *used* as a counter position to other political and social paradigms.

4. The Populist Upsurge in Latin America: *Macroeconomic Populism and Social Modernization*

Latin America is one of the best practical examples of populism during the concerned period (1950s-1980s). Populist leaders have always been present on the land since the 1930s. Juan Peron in Argentina, Getulio Vargas in Brazil, Victor Raul Haya de la Torre in Peru and Jose’ Maria Velasco in Ecuador have been the main populist leaders,

⁹⁹ Ibidem, p. 153

¹⁰⁰ Ibidem, p. 153

struggling for free elections and for more inclusive politics. According to the *populism classification* of political scientists Federico Finchelstein and Dwayne Woods, this is the so-called period of *classical populism*.

The emergence of populism in Latin America started in the 1930s with “the oligarchical social order that combined liberal-inspired constitutions (division of powers and elections) with the patrimonial practices and values in predominantly rural societies”¹⁰¹. The institutional modernization and the starting path to globalization excluded the majority of the population from the public sector, which was entirely dominated by the elites. The so-called *left wing populism*, which characterized Latin America, was emerging against the contested multicultural-oriented elites; first populist leaders such as Peron and Vargas fought against election corruption, fostering national traditions and redistributive social policies; the consolidation of these movements was very much centred on economic and financial issues and reforms, leading to the more recent terminology *macroeconomic populism*¹⁰². The populist explosion was strategically used by many workers to make accusations to the elite, seen as “the symbols of their exclusion from the public sphere”¹⁰³. Populist leaders were using a very new way of speaking to labour, strategically emphasizing the virtues of the traditional people and strengthening their anger against the establishment.

Social inclusiveness in politics and more attention to national rather than foreign issues was assured. More democracy and autonomy have been promised. In a famous speech of 1946, after winning the first democratic elections Peron said: “We have given the people the opportunity to choose, in the cleanest election in the history of Argentina,

¹⁰¹ (2017-10-26). Kaltwasser, C., Taggart, P., Espejo, P., & Ostiguy, P.(Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*. : Oxford University Press. Retrieved 29 May. 2018, from <http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com.ezproxy.eui.eu/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198803560.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780198803560>

¹⁰² Macroeconomic populism is a term that was coined in the 1990s, referring to economic policies in Latin America countries leading to inflation, stagflation and economic collapse; Rudi Dornbusch and Sebastian Edwards edited a book called *The Macroeconomics of populism in Latin America*, which analyse country cases such Argentina, Chile and Peru.

¹⁰³ (2017-10-26). Kaltwasser, C., Taggart, P., Espejo, P., & Ostiguy, P.(Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*. : Oxford University Press. Retrieved 29 May. 2018, from <http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com.ezproxy.eui.eu/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198803560.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780198803560>

between us and our opponents. The people have elected us, so the problem is resolved. What we want is now done in the Republic of Argentina”¹⁰⁴.

The post-war period in Latin America has been characterized by many populist nationalist movements throughout the territory. However, facts have left a different approach to populism, which is not only political, social or cultural, but economic. The so-called macroeconomic approach to populism takes into consideration an economic structure that “emphasizes growth and income redistribution and deemphasizes the risk of inflation and deficit finance, external constraints and the reaction of economic agents to aggressive non-market policies”¹⁰⁵. The final purpose of literature on this approach is to demonstrate how forced economic and financial policies end up into collapse.

In the late 1980s, Dornbush and Edwards redacted a joint study on the economic populist path, from beginning to collapse. The initial condition of the state relies in slow growth, stagnation, stagflation and depression, after the various stabilization reforms of the previous governments; what is more important to the populist ruler, is the income inequality between the elite and the working class – this will be used as a *gun* in public rhetoric. The period of destabilization and stagnation has been creating enough space for an expansionary policy programme mainly composed of three elements (typically used by populist programmes): reactivation, redistribution of income (through real wages increase) and restructuring of the Economy (Dornbush & Edwards, 1989). Redistribution and reconstructions means saving on foreign exchange; at this point, one can understand a basic value of populism that is concentration on national policies and rejection of foreign and international affairs. Therefore, within this first phase, output grows, wages are higher and employment rate increases. Due to a strong increase of domestic products demand and a foreign demand decrease, “the economy runs into bottlenecks”¹⁰⁶. At this point, inflation extremely increases leading to demonetization of the economy, together with subsidy costs; this is followed by massive wages fall, leading to politics crisis. According to some – especially Latin American¹⁰⁷ – state experiences, a period of a new

¹⁰⁴ Peruzzotti, Enrique (2008). “Populismo y representacion democratica”, in Carlos de la Torre and Enrique Peruzzotti (eds), *El Retorno del Pueblo*, Quito:FLACSO, 97-125

¹⁰⁵ Dornbush, R., Edwards, S (1989). “Macroeconomic Populism in Latin America”, Working Paper No. 2986, National Bureau of Economic Research

¹⁰⁶ Ibidem

¹⁰⁷ Macroeconomic populism policies have been experienced mainly in Allende’s Chile and Garcia’s Peru during the 1970s.

government stabilization takes over, assisted by International Monetary Fund (IMF) programs. The result is a lower wage than the one before all this begun! This short *excursus* wants to explain how the populist government wants to initially find the support of the people, implementing short-term, unstable, unstructured, but inevitably attractive, policies.

However, not only economic reasons confirmed the development of Latin American populism. It is perfectly clear that the populist explosion in Latin America between 1930 and 1970 has been a reaction to the previous political system. Taking into consideration the Argentinian case, to better understand the Peronist populist reaction, one should first know about that previous political environment. Before the 1930 crisis, Argentina was ruled by “the landowning oligarchy, [of which] the basic articulating principle of its ideological discourse was liberalism”¹⁰⁸; political and economic powers were both owned by landowners, “who were seeking to maximise their production for the world market and, who, therefore, sought to organise a central State”¹⁰⁹. Therefore, landowners (the elite) interests predominated in a liberal and pro-Legislator context. The government was decentralising power in the hands of the Legislative rather than the Executive; in the case of Argentina, power was less decentralised and so the Executive gathered more independency. However, in Latin America, parliamentary powers were quite everywhere synonymous of landowners’ power.

4.1 The roots of a National Populist Movement: The Case of Argentina

The country of Argentina has been among one of the major economic powers in the XIX century and in the first part of the XX century. Today, Argentina is classified as a Third World belonging country, characterized by warfare and economic and social crisis. The fall of Argentinian welfare started in the 1930s, with the process of modernization and *occidentalization*, which led to several political and social crises. After World War II, Argentine politics started to be peculiar with the election of Juan Domingo Peron¹¹⁰ as the President. The movement known as Peronism “and the regime issued

¹⁰⁸ Laclau, E. (1979). *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory*. Verso, p. 177

¹⁰⁹ Ibidem, p. 178

¹¹⁰ Juan Domingo Peron has been elected as President of Argentina from 1946 to 1955, when he was defeated by a military coup. This period is well known as *Peronism* or *the Peronist era*, which has been taken as a main example of populism from the past and ongoing literature.

from it were deeply confusing and contradictory not only to social scientists, but also to those directly involved in it, Peronists and anti-Peronists alike”¹¹¹ (Germani, 1978); contradictions were born because of general misunderstanding of the movement itself and the relative actors. During the course of history, Peronism has been labelled in many ways: classic populism, left-wing fascism, Bonapartism, distinguishing it from the typical *caudilloisim* present in most of the Latin American neighbours. Contradiction, confusion and diverging interpretations are also provided by the present literature, in which one can in some way understand the lack of information and unreliable research. However, insufficient research and contradictions can reflect the real paradoxes and inconsistencies that characterized “the social structure of the country and in the peculiar circumstances which have conditioned its modernization”¹¹² (Germani, 1978, p.126). The one of Peron has been an attempt to bring back the democracy of the people and economic prosperity through a way in between European and American capitalism on the one hand and socialism on the other. However, attempting to forced *social modernization* and economic development is not a sufficient way to achieve representative democracy. Besides, the ongoing structural change in the 1930s led to social mobilization and demobilization, often interrupting the process of modernization and integration. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Argentina has been characterized by different structural change periods, starting at the end of the XIX century to the mobilization period of the 1930s. Integration is a global process, meaning that has to be political, cultural and social; this objective was reached by the country before Peronism, giving a lot of importance to foreign investments and immigration, leaving a part of the population quite marginalized. The political conflict in Argentina lasted for at least thirty years until the return of the *justicialista* coalition and the strong union of the opposition to the Peronist regime. As Germani argues, “neither political problems nor instability are over for Argentina: history will follow its course, the future appears to be more conflictive than the past. The conflict between Peronism and anti-Peronism, however, is a fact of the past”¹¹³.

¹¹¹Germani, Gino (1978). *Authoritarianism, fascism and national populism*. Transaction Inc, New Jersey, p. 221

¹¹² Argentina went through many different and paradoxical political choices: from democracy to attempted fascism, national populism, bureaucratic military rule, to extreme left guerrilla warfare.

¹¹³ Germani, Gino (1978). *Authoritarianism, fascism and national populism*. Transaction Inc, New Jersey, p. 222

The high level of contradiction between the nature of economic development, social modernization and political and administrative structures' changes, create a lower possibility for a complete analysis. National populism of Peron will indeed leave the country in a worst condition, which will lead to military revolutions and political destabilization for the next decades.

As mentioned in the first chapter, a fundamental aspect of populism is the figure of the leader. Despite the fact that the charismatic leader can be controversial to the populist leader, this does not mean that the two figures are perfectly overlap; the charismatic leader is not always populist, but the populist leader is always charismatic. A leader that wants to be successful aims to be necessarily charismatic; consequently, he/she has to capture the attention of its followers and supporters. Finally, the leader has to find a critical issue for which it is necessary to intervene immediately. These is a part of the speech that Juan Peron gave in occasion of his candidacy on February 12, 1946:

Llego a vosotros para deciros que no estáis solos en vuestros anhelos de redención social, sino que los mismos ideales sostienen a vuestros hermanos de toda la vastedad de nuestra tierra gaucha. [...] Vengo conmovido por el eco resonante de una sola voluntad colectiva; la de que el pueblo sea realmente libre, por qué de una vez por todas quede libre de la esclavitud económica que le agobia. Y aun diría más: que le agobia como antes le ha oprimido y que, si no lograra independizarse ahora, aun le vejaría más en el porvenir. Le oprimiría hasta dejar a la clase obrera sin fuerzas para alcanzar la redención social que vamos a conquistar antes de quince días¹¹⁴.

¹¹⁴ "I am before you to tell you that you are not alone in your yearnings for social redemption, but that the same ideals sustain your brothers from all the vastness of our gaucho land. [...] I came moved by the resounding echo of a single collective will; that the people are really free, because once and for all they are free from the economic slavery that overwhelms them. And even more would say: that it overwhelms him as before has oppressed him and that if he did not manage to become independent now, he would still be more vexed in the future. I would oppress him until

In the above-mentioned speech of Mr. Peron, one can find some of the major aspects of the populist approach. Most of all, the type of language that Peron uses in order to attract the mass of people. Communication strategy in this case is very interesting: he poses himself as *vox populi*, listing all the aspiration of the people and the injustices of which they are victims. This approach is very useful to earn awareness and energy. This gives the idea of regeneration. Besides, Peron, as well as many other populist leaders, wants to underline the anger against the ruling elites and oligarchies, emphasizing the difference between him, the *outsider*, and the status quo, such as institutions and political parties. At a first stage, the populist leader tends to be strongly against politics; in a second moment, once power and support are reached, the leader becomes totally involved into politics. From now on, every action that the leader undertakes is going to be justified exactly from the fact that he or she is the leader and the only one able to represent the people. The people gave to Peron all the support that will be used to act and exploit the people's pain and aspirations. Juan Peron and his wife, Eva, have been extremely able to transform pains in virtues, especially taking as example the poor and injured people, such as the *descamisados* – called by Peron the *cabecitas negras*¹¹⁵.

The movement initiated by Peron, as other authoritarian regimes of the XX century, produced such a high consensus due to his ability to conquest the people wishes, using democratic, socialist and liberal principles at the same time. The power of populism is to include political and social actors, which until that time have been marginalized by the oligarchies. Using this communicational strategy, Peron succeeded in the acquisition of the mass of people's trust and devotion, increasing anger against the liberal élites. At this point, we can understand how this strategy follows a dynamic in which the leader exploits others' disgraces in order to reach the highest consensus and generate widespread redemption. Peron was soon the *unique* and *true* leader to support.

he left the working class without strength to achieve the social redemption that we are going to conquer before fifteen days". J. D. Perón, *El pueblo quiere saber de que se trata. Discursos*, Buenos Aires, in C. Altamirano, *Bajo el signo de las masas (1943-1973)*, Ariel Historia, Buenos Aires 2001, pp. 151 (personal translation)

¹¹⁵ Germani, G. (2013), *El surgimiento del peronismo. El rol de los obreros y de los migrantes internos* in C. de la Torre, *El populismo latinoamericano, entre la democratización y el autoritarismo*, Nueva Sociedad – Democracia y política en América Latina

Esto es pueblo. Esto es el pueblo sufriente que representa el dolor de la tierra madre, que hemos de reivindicar. Es el pueblo de la patria¹¹⁶.

These few words are an example of how convincing Peron was; and also, one can notice how he used the people's weakness. Obviously, he immediately had a huge support from majority of people in quite bad conditions seeing a sort of *light* in his personality.

The definition of 'el pueblo' could be ambiguous; populism does not reflect the real significance of the population. It rather refers to the 'true population', thus not referring to the population as a unique, but just to that percentage of people supporting the leader in context. Anyways, despite controversial on the definition of *population*, 'the people' have a fundamental role in the populist logic, regardless of any criteria which identifies them¹¹⁷.

This general analysis on Juan Peron's attitude helps to underline how important inclusiveness is for a populist leader; an inclusiveness, supported by trust and faith, reached through a specific communication strategy. However, all this positive conception of the people comes down when this stage falls in the creation of a new élite. We can conclude by arguing the populist paradox: at the beginning the supporting population is protagonist and actor of public life, at a later stage it just becomes a spectator of the ongoing actions made by its leader.

Populism, as the Argentinian case highlights, can be analysed as a communication strategy; the communication method is mainly the transmission of the leader's speeches through the media, meaning radio and television. One of the major instruments of propaganda used by Peron has been the radio. In general, populism, in trying to find a close and direct relationship with the people, develops communication strategies and transformations. Obviously, the radio has been chosen, due to the fact that most of the Argentinian families were used to listen daily transmissions. Juan and Eva Peron

¹¹⁶ From Perón's speech in Plaza de Mayo, 17 October 1945 [online]. Founded in: <http://www.peronismoenverdad.com.ar/web/discursos/discursos-de-peron/discurso-2/>

Last consultation: 30 October 2018

¹¹⁷ "Chavez spoke to the people as decent, Grillo as honest, Peron as humble and good" – Zanatta, L. (2008), *Il populismo*, Carocci, Roma, pp. 18-19 (personal translation)

struggled in finding a communication strategy, to the extent that Peron decided to create an *ad hoc* institution (Subsecretaria de Información). The transmission of the President's voice via radio gave the feeling of a nation on its way to liberation. Then, he funded the Secretaria de Prensa e Difusión, which had the role of controlling and coordinating all communication strategies; this aspect of communication has been in some way inspired to the Fascist model.

The aim of this chapter was, through the references of the major literature of that time, to attempt an historical approach of populism in the 1969-1990 period. Certainly, Latin America has been the region at the centre of the debates. Most of the countries in the region were hosting populist movements, some of which have still effects today. A major focus has been given to Argentina and the Peronist era. Argentina is still a very controversial and complicate case for the analysis of politics. Populism in these twenty years has been mainly on a left-wing side; however, first right and extreme right populist movement were starting to upsurge in the European continent and in the United States – George Wallace was one of the major exponents of anti-plural and racial politics during the 1960s.

CHAPTER III

The interpretation of populism in the 1990-2009 period

1. Historical and Conceptual Background

In the last few decades, European democracies started to see new political formations and movements capable to be elected, such as the populist ones. The evolution and the transformation of political trends – during the years of technologic development – gave the possibility to populism to become an ideology of the opposition; an ideology that clearly belongs to governmental parties and that grows through the *mediatisation* of politics.

During these decades, the new Western European political climate was composed by resentment, anger, disenchantment and alienation. A great part of the people did not support anymore the self-centred political institutions and main stream political parties; many voters decided either to be no longer interested in politics or use the vote as a protest. The electorate was decomposed; individualism and social fragmentation started to be the characteristic of the post-industrial modern society. There was a new wave of consensus against the élites; the radical right-wing populist parties were at the top of the list; the populism supporters' one was a vote of discontent and anger. They were fostering the delegation of powers to a charismatic leadership.

The end of the 1980s have constituted an important period in the development of European history that is the fall of the disintegration of the old Soviet Union's borders. The world international relations were about to change and develop, as well as the national political parties and movements. The project for the creation of the European Union was becoming real and was finally realized in 1992 with the Maastricht Treaty. Therefore, on the one side of the Atlantic Ocean, Ross Perot¹¹⁸ was about to make his first candidacy to the 1992 Presidential elections; on the other side, populism was wide

¹¹⁸ Ross Perot is the founder of the *Reform Party*, through which he participated to the 1996 presidential elections; he was not admitted to the presidential debates because the party was not did not obtain the mandatory 15% quorum in the surveys. The Reform Party has been the first attempt to break the US traditional bipartisan system, composed by republicans and democrats. Ross Perot is considered a populist protagonist in the modern US politics. He received quite a bit of support in some states, such as Maine and Utah. In the 1992 presidential elections he received a 19% general support – but no votes from the great electors; however, it has been the most supported third candidate since Theodore Roosevelt in 1912. He then decided to candidate himself with the new Reform Party in the 1996 elections, in which he gathered a lower support of 8.4%. In the 2000 elections, Perot refused to candidate himself, accepting the candidacy of Pat Buchanan (an extreme right wing theorist). Following the slow disintegration of the Reform Party, Perot supported the election of George W. Bush.

spreading in the European continent, through right wing movements, and in many other extra-European states worldwide; the United Kingdom Conservative Party was at its apex under the ten-years government of Margaret Thatcher; Italy was having many problems concerning the ‘mafia-entrepreneur-state’ connections. The emerging entrepreneur Silvio Berlusconi was entering politics with *Forza Italia* party and soon was elected President of the Council of Ministers; Germany was facing the consequences of the re-unification. The consolidation of the European Union supranational power and the new economic and social policies caused an increase of right-wing populist movements and governmental majorities. Since the Great Recession, right wing populist parties were against immigration and supranational power; Eurosceptic parties started to increase in the 1990s such as Lega Nord and the UK Independence Party. The development of media technology (such as television) permitted to leaders to spread and communicate with a populist strategy, using a new typology of propaganda. The recent new European populist trend perfectly coincides with the opposition to the European federalism.

The 1990s have been marked by the upsurge of the so-called populist movements. This label unifies movements such as the Front National, Ross Perot and Buchanan in the US, the Northern League in Italy, Vlaams Blok in Belgium and others in the Scandinavian countries. The term *populism* is now used even in a much larger context, usually underlining actions and attitudes of many political actors, such as Chirac, Thatcher and Blair. It is quite confusing that the same label has been used for Peron or Nasser in the past years. Is the new – and mostly European – populist wave the same as the previous ones? Does it have the same significance? Is it a threat to democracy or is it part of democracy? The heart of the uncertainty of the populist structure is at this point; the term has such an extensive a wide usage that will be lost in its own definitions. In the concerned period, populism will acquire a right or extreme right definition, connected to the Front National and to the Northern League. From here, the creation of *nationalpopulism*, which is branch of populism that will create more confusion on significance. In one of his publications ¹¹⁹ Hans Georg Betz defines populism as a recall to the normal man and to the superior common sense.

The European populist restlessness was born during the fight against political systems’ corruption; some minor leaders found space to advance critics to the actual

¹¹⁹ Betz, H. –G (1994). *Radical Right Wing Populism in Western Europe*, new York, St Martin’s Press, p.4

corrupted democratic system. Critics were made principally through the media channels; condemnations through the media were merged with a new refusal of the corrupted economic and political élites¹²⁰. Populism was born again in Europe. It became the new trend. The difference with precedent periods is that the European populist explosion in the 1990s refers to right and extreme right parties: the new populist parties, perhaps a way to somehow assert a democratic value.

After the post-WWII debates, after the liberal ideology explosion in the 1980s, the term *populism* started to collect a great success in the last decades. The term has been used in many occasions because of its undefined significance and its easy way of use¹²¹. Populism does not constitute a real theory that can provide a real interpretation of rules and norms able to define a political system. As mentioned in the analysis of the previous period, populism is ambiguous and vague. Who is defined a populist, often prefers to define itself as *popular* or *someone appealing to the people*; the word *populism* has also been used to praise or blame – using an actual word for this, means that it will be very difficult to draw a related conceptual theory.

In the 1990s, populism has been used as a pejorative and polemic term; looks like populism identifies itself as antidemocratic (fascist) or pseudo democratic – in the latter case, meaning corrupted democracy or bad use and reference to democracy¹²². Populist ambiguities are mainly the result of democracy's uncertainties from its nature and organizational methods; populism comes out from a sense of frustration about the current democratic system, which is not what expected. There is a continuous debate between the establishment (who blame the populists to be demagogues and dangerous) and the populists (who denounce the way of functioning of democracy). Therefore, democracy is an essential condition for populism.

¹²⁰ In many countries of Europe (France, Belgium, Austria, Italy, and Scandinavian states) many political movements started the process against *particracy* and élites. This class fight was then transformed in a more *personal* fight: on the one side “us”, the people, on the other “them”, the élites.

¹²¹ As Yves Mény underlines in his famous publication *Populism and Democracy*, populism has been defined as *comfortable because undefined*. This gives a high generality to the term and a very easy way to use it and also waste it. Some examples could be: the European sanctions inflicted to Austria after Haider's insediation; the reclamation of Umberto Bossi, leader of the Northern League in Italy, of the independence of the Padania region; 2001, the apex of populist success, the victory of Silvio Berlusconi in Italy has been considered a triumph of populism.

¹²² Taguieff, P.-A. (1997), *Le populisme et la science politique. Du mirage conceptuel aux vrais problèmes*, in “Vingtième Siècle. Revue de l'histoire”, 56.

Trying to define populism and find common aspects to all the different expression of it, would be a never ending and vain attempt. The study of populism from its very beginning should be centred on political systems where sovereignty has been conferred to the people. Populism will start only when the people will constitute one of the actors¹²³; in order to have the action of the people, on the other side the system needs a leadership, possibly a leader through the media. The populist leadership, as Gino Germani affirms, can be right or left wing – “the coexistence of opposite ideologies never has been as pronounced as in populism”¹²⁴.

This chapter will compare some cases of Western democracies that showed the rise of the new right-wing populist wave in the 1990s. Then, the analysis will go through brief consideration of two fundamental themes, which are part of the populist context: the relation between populism and democracy and the relation between populism and immigration. Finally, a brief analysis will be dedicated to the media approach to populism; I thought that this was important, since this chapter will go through the twenty years in which media (and digital technology) started to acquire a crucial role in society.

2. New Populism Cases

The new populism is a modern form of populism that was born around the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, mainly in the Western European region. New populism is a new type of movement that has been embraced by right and extreme right parties “as a reaction against the dominance and the agenda of certain key parties of government in their party systems”¹²⁵. Differently from the previous single populist movements, the new populism raised through a series of political parties in different countries. New populism is much more determined to be against the establishment, making attacks to parties and systems. The populist explosion of the 1990s reflects the critical status of politics of the period and still today is very much active.

¹²³ Here, some contexts where the people entered into the scene: 1) in an imperfect way, during the Great English Revolution; 2) in a glorious way, with the American Revolution in 1787 (*We, the people of the United States*); 3) in a radical and messy way, with the French Revolution in 1789.

¹²⁴ Germani, G. (1978). *Authoritarianism, Fascism and National Populism*, New Brunswick, Transaction, p 88

¹²⁵ Taggart, P. (2000), *Populism*, Open University Press, United Kingdom, p.73

After WWII, the new political consensus embodied many ideals related to the welfare state, mass parties, environment, culture and pluralism. Green parties and the new left parties were spreading around Western Europe; new social issues, such as feminism and students' rights, became fundamental. The political trend and style were changing and the consensus was as high as necessary to let conservative and rigid systems very weak. The power of the nation state has been limited or conferred to the new European federalist project for integration. With no doubt, such a change in the political world created an opposition, which achieved a lot of success in the late 1980s and early 1990s. After more than twenty years of political and cultural change in the Western society, the 1980s have been dominated by disenchantment with most of the political and social institutions. Contemporarily, new political issues came out, "promoted by new social actors outside and often against the established political institutions"¹²⁶. The Left was becoming much more fragmented; the electoral results of new populist and right-wing parties was increasing in many of the European countries, with particular peaks at the end of the 1980s, as showed in the table below.

Table 1.1
Electoral Results for Radical Right-Wing Populist Parties (in %)

	LN	AP	FN	REP	ND	FP(D)	FP(N)	FPÖ	VB
1980									
1981						8.9	4.5		1.1
1982									
1983									
1984			11.0*			3.6			1.3*
						3.5*			
1985							3.7		1.4
1986			9.8					9.7	
1987		2.6				4.8			1.9
1988			14.4**			9.0			
			9.7						
1989	1.8*		11.8*	7.1		5.3*	13.0		4.1*
1990				2.1		6.4		16.6	
1991		5.1			6.7				6.6
1992	8.7								
1993							6.0		
1994	8.4								

* = European elections; ** French Presidential Election
LN (Lega Nord); AP (Autopartei); FN (Front National); REP (Republikaner); ND (Ny Demokrati);
FP(D) (Fremskridtpartiet, Denmark); FP(N) (Fremskrittspartiet, Norway); FPÖ (Freiheitlichen Partei
Österreichs); VB (Vlaams Blok)

Table 1¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Betz, H.-G. (1994), *Radical Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe*, St. Matins Press, New York, NY, p. 2

¹²⁷ Electoral Results for Radical Right-Wing Populist Parties, in Betz, H.-G. (1994), *Radical Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe*, St. Matins Press, New York, NY

These are the results of a deep right-wing revolution against backward politics and represent a new change in advanced Western democracies. Most of the radical right-wing populist parties are radical in the rejection of the establishment concerning socio-cultural systems; they are against fostering marginalized groups and immigration; they aim at the instrumentalization of the diffused sentiment of anger and anxiety; they merge a traditional liberal policy for the economy with *intellectual* extreme right ideas.

During these decades, the support for right and extreme right parties grown very much up to the formation of small neo-fascist groups. “What was really happening was that neo-fascism, which had become an almost perennial and extremely marginal feature of post-war party systems, was coinciding with a new wave of populism”¹²⁸. The raise of new populism in such a homogenous way was not a coincidence indeed. As expected, the populist reaction to politics was an attack to the establishment, the political consensus and the new mixed capitalist economy. However, differently from the far-right parties – aiming at a new authoritarianist system – the new populists wanted to reconstruct the political system with real reforms – such as immigration, regionalism and immigration. The new populist system wanted to create a new party structure, involving the membership and, on the other side, giving the leadership to key individuals. These new political actors wanted to look differently from the main stream; this was a strategy to highlight the need of change and to attract the voters. This was also the period of media and technology development; digital media was used as a propaganda strategy to attract the common sense and the common people. The new populists were transforming politics in a *way of living*; still today, populist leaders use digital strategies to identify themselves as part of the common people.

Europe is a much-differentiated continent, from the cultural and political point of view; and so are some states internally. Due to this reason, populism has been touching different opposition tools, as national political and party settings are quite different. For example, in the Scandinavian states, populism is against liberal and immigration policies; in countries like Italy or Belgium, where regional ethnic diversities are evident, populism has been fighting for regional identity and even independency. In a continent like Europe, populism assumed a wider significance.

¹²⁸ Taggart, P. (2000), *Populism*, Open University Press, United Kingdom, p.75

The French context has been one of the main case of right wing populist evolution, and still goes on today; the Front National founded by Jean Marie Le Pen was born in 1972, a bit more a decade after the end of Poujadism¹²⁹ and the Algerian War. Le Pen brought back the *legacy* of Poujadism and collected an increasing consensus until 1997, when “the party had established itself as an integral part of the French party system and was gaining 15 per cent of the vote in both presidential and parliamentary elections”¹³⁰. The Front National represented the conservative and populist part of the *Ordre Nouveau*¹³¹ party. The essence of the Front National party merged a combination of new populism and neo-fascism – Le Pen acted with a very strong and authoritarian attitude – and has been an input for the expansion of the European right and far right movements and parties. After a period of decline, in the first part of the 1980s, the FN’s support started to increase in many working class areas (including the 20th district of Paris). With the 1984 European elections, the party gained more than two million supporters, gaining an 11 percent vote and becoming the fourth party in France. The FN passed the support of the Communist Party and obtained 35 seats in the National Assembly. In the 1988 presidential election, the FN gained a 14.4 support, right after Chirac and Barre.

Jörg Haider’s Austria during the 1990s is another example of neo-authoritarianism. The Austrian Freedom Party¹³² was not new to the national politics; it

¹²⁹ Poujadism is a term used to refer to the period of the Pierre Poujade’s party *Union de Défense des Commerçants et Artisans (UDCA)*. The party was expressing frustration and anger for the establishment and the dominance of Paris institutions. Pierre Poujade considered himself as one of the people and he was already using communication strategies in order to look like one of *them*. The consensus touched 11.6 per cent and 52 seats, including Le Pen in the 1956 national elections. In the subsequent elections, the party consensus highly decreases, due to the different political environment of the 1960s and the Algerian War.

¹³⁰ Taggart, P. (2000), *Populism*, Open University Press, United Kingdom, p.78

¹³¹ Ordre Nouveau represented the military and revolutionary wing of the deep French nationalism. ON was born in the 1960s to contrast the big student revolts and manifestations.

¹³² The Freedom Party (FPÖ) was founded in 1955 with the intention to create a *third power*, between the Socialist left and the Catholic right; one of the reactions of the Party was to “the clumsy handling of Denazification by the government coalition” (Knight, 1992, p.291). The FPÖ started with highlighting the necessity to go back to the national liberal political culture. Then, in the 1970s the leadership changed and aimed at modernizing the party strengthening its commitment to liberalism. The support for the party and its leader Steger started to decline at the end of the 1980s; behind the revolt to this leadership there was Jorg Haider. Haider fastly climbed the ranks in the party and spectacularly gained a 9.7 percent support in the 1986 national elections. The apex of the electoral support was in the regional elections of Vienna in 1991, were the FPÖ

has been active since the post-war period. Haider reached a 22.4 per cent consensus in 1994 with the Freedom Party with a very new and traditional agenda, including economic freedom, privatization, traditional family values and opposition to immigration (Taggart, 2000). Haider attempted to mobilize against the Austrian EU membership in 1994 through a referendum; it is quite curious that an authoritarian personality made use of the most democratic tool. One can understand how sometimes parties are not enough to reach some objectives. In 2000, the Freedom Party entered into Parliament with a coalition with the more conservative parties. This was the moment in which Haider's voice was heard most.

In the Scandinavian region, the welfare state was much higher than in other European countries, proportionally to the good economic growth. The new populists came into play when taxation was increased. The Danish Progress Party¹³³ under the leadership of Mogens Glistrup obtained a low but not insignificant consensus in the political scene, with lower taxes and anti-immigration policies. At the same time, the Norwegian Progress Party called for a reduction of the immigration rate and for the opposition to enter the European Union. The case of Sweden, even if it reflected an example of new populism, is quite unsuccessful; the New Democracy party gained a maximum of 6.7 per cent in 1991. The consensus decreased during the 1990s until the destruction of the party. Similarly, to their neighbours, the Swedish populists were aiming at bureaucratic minimization and immigration reduction.

The countries characterized by regional ethnic diversities deserve attention: these are Italy, Belgium and Switzerland. The case of Italian right wing populism comes out from the regional diversities between the North and the South and the benefits that the establishment gives to the South. The Northern League (Lega Nord)¹³⁴ party led by

gained 22.6 percent support and became the second largest party in the city. Similar situation was in the city of Graz, which presented a 20 percent support to the FPÖ.

¹³³ The Danish Progress Party was founded in 1972 in Copenhagen; it acquired an initial support of 4 percent in 1973 growing up to 15.9 percent support later on, becoming the second party in Denmark after the Social Democrats.

¹³⁴ The Northern League was born to overtake the establishment parties and to protest against the scandal Roman *partitocrazia*. The historical elections in Mantova in 1990 have been the Northern Leagues' debut; soon after, the League obtained over 40 percent of consensus in Lombardy, but also in other cities such as Turin, Genoa, Venice, Bologna and Florence. The historical roots of the Northern League go back to the 1970s, when regional linguistic associations were created in the North-East part of the country; the associations were promoting cultural and historical courses on the Veneto region. Umberto Bossi appeared in the 1980s, when he started to put in practice his federalist conception of Italy, supporting autonomy and criticizing political centralism. The

Umberto Bossi since the 1980s “argued that parts of Northern Italy constitute an area with real cultural and economic identity and therefore called for the secession from Rome”¹³⁵. The Northern League reached an 8.7 per cent of the vote in 1992. Umberto Bossi stressed his critics and distrust to the main parties’ political élites and the necessity to make the Northern League supporting region sustainable and independent. This happened within a *convenient* context: some of the mainstream Italian politicians were at that time involved in the corruption scandals – the period known as *Tangentopoli*. The party seemed to achieve a great success until 1994, when the new right wing political party Forza Italia led by Silvio Berlusconi attracted most of the consensus. Berlusconi is known as a *great* case of populist leadership; he was involved in different entrepreneurship sectors, such as the media and football clubs – these are two sectors which are very close to the people and the working class. Forza Italia was a real populist threat to the Northern League and to the country. Berlusconi claimed to be the new outsider that will reorder and clean up the actual *elitarian* political system; at this point, Bossi had to go through the dilemma of making a coalition with a party that was reflecting some policies of the Northern League. For the latter, this meant to be part of the establishment, but at the same time acquiring power. The coalition was not finished: the Italian Social Movement (MSI), then called National Alliance (AN), led by Gianfranco Fini, gained a 13.5 per cent support and joined the coalition. The coalition unmerged in 1996 and the left-wing parties joined the government with a new coalition. The inconsistencies between new populist leaders have been difficult to control, generating internal conflicts and breakdowns.

Historically, Belgium is a country that has been characterized by ethnic regionalism¹³⁶; this was a key aspect of new populism, which “played heavily on the

enemies were the immigrants, but also the Italian from the South. The political elections in 1987 gave a 3 percent support to the Lega Lombarda – meaning one seat in the Parliament and one in the Senate (from here the *senatur* nickname of Mr. Bossi). 1990 Regional elections gained a greater 19 per cent. This gave the final input to merge all the small Leagues in Northern Italy in one: the Lega Nord.

¹³⁵ Taggart, P. (2000), *Populism*, Open University Press, United Kingdom, p.81

¹³⁶ Belgium went through ethnic conflicts, which were intense, but peaceful. The roots of this conflict are linguistic: a major part of the population is Dutch, but however the official language in the last century was French. Initially, ethnic conflicts were territorial, but then became socio-economic and political. Two forms of nationalism were developing different demands concerning territorial settlement. Political actors had to deal for a long time with ethnic issues; the populists from 1970s used ethnic issues to give a voice to their politics (Hooghe, 2007)

ethnic and linguistic divide that runs through the country”¹³⁷. Nationalism feeling was born in the 1970s from the Flemish side of the country; some of the main policies were regarding anti-immigration, independence of the Flemish territories and anti-establishment. All these elements combined resulted in a 12.5 per cent support from the people in 1995. As many other populist parties, the Vlaams Blok had a very centralized and vertical structure.

The populist protagonist in the United States in the 1990s was with no doubt Ross Perot. He emerged as independent from the main stream parties and he reached the record of the most successful third party since 1912. Perot was a businessman; in fact, he gave to politics a business aspect, stressing the importance of national debt and its reform, using common sense. The supporters were reluctant both to the Democrats and Republicans; Perot initially didn't want to enter politics – he was forced to enter a world, the world of the politician that was not of him. He quitted the campaign after a few months, but suddenly re-entered and “this reinforced his image of reluctance and therefore was a populist gesture designed to stress how far Perot was not naturally of the world he was seeking to enter”¹³⁸. Perot acted through a classical populist strategy, including information; he set up a free telephone number for seeking activists and paid many commercials on television, with no subsidies from the federation. Taggart describes Perot's populism the last one in a long line (in 2000); populism is still active today and this means that politics issue and representative democracy's health are still a real problem.

3. New Right-wing populism: immigration and xenophobia

The 1980s and 1990s have been years in which the issue of immigration was at the daily agenda of the major part of Western European governments. In 1987, the European Community was the home of 13 million foreign nationals; most of them were from non-EC members countries. During those year, first waves of refugees and asylum seekers started their migration flow to Europe (through Italy, in particular).

Most of the native populations considered these immigration waves with disdain, anger and suspicion. Despite the tragedies and horrors committed with WWII,

¹³⁷ Taggart, P. (2000), *Populism*, Open University Press, United Kingdom, p.83

¹³⁸ *Ibidem*, p.42

“xenophobia, anti-Semitism, and racism were largely driven underground, relegated to the side-lines of beer-hall discussions and the lunatic fringes of the nostalgic extreme Right”¹³⁹. Unemployment and social marginalization were increasing and most of the native people were accusing immigrants to be part of the cause. However, the first wave of anti-immigration parties during the 1960s and 1970s in countries such as France, Germany and Switzerland had just a marginal role in politics.

Table 3.1
Foreign Residence in the EC

(in 1,000s and % of total population)

1987	Total Population	Immigrants EC	Immigrants non-EC
Bel.	9,864	533 (5.4%)	315 (3.2%)
Den.	5,102	27 (0.5%)	102 (2.9%)
Fr. (1982)	54,273	1,578 (2.9%)	2,103 (3.9%)
Ger.	61,171	1,377 (2.3%)	3,196 (5.2%)
Gr.	9,740	55 (0.6%)	31 (0.3%)
Ire.	3,543	62 (1.7%)	18 (0.5%)
It. (1981)	56,557	91 (0.2%)	112 (0.2%)
Lux. (1989)	384	102 (26.4%)	10 (2.7%)
Neth. (1988)	14,714	160 (1.1%)	435 (2.9%)
Port.	10,270	24 (0.2%)	66 (0.6%)
Sp.	38,832	193 (0.5%)	142 (0.4%)
U.K.	56,075	810 (1.6%)	1,651 (2.9%)
E.C.	320,526	5,014 (1.6%)	8,179 (2.6%)

Source: European Commission

Table 2¹⁴⁰

Xenophobia and hostility to immigrants re-emerged in the 1980-90s, due to a specific reason: the first immigration wave in the 1970s included immigrants from other Western European countries and from the Balkan region (the only non-continental groups of immigrants were coming from Algeria and Turkey). The 1980-90s saw a huge increase not of immigrant workers, rather of political refugees. The big immigration wave of these decades gave place to new changes in social policies, due to the unexpected large increase of European population.

¹³⁹ Source: European Commission, found in Betz, H.-G. (1994), *Radical Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe*, St. Matins Press, New York, NY

¹⁴⁰ Questions 1-2 from Eurobarometer 30 December 1988; questions 3-7 from Eurobarometer 35, June 1991, found in Betz, H.-G. (1994), *Radical Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe*, St. Matins Press, New York, NY

There is no surprise that the upsurge of European right-wing populist parties happened in the same period of the second big immigration wave. The reaction of some right-wing parties in European countries, even the more liberal ones such as Sweden and Denmark, consisted in an open racist and xenophobic attitude; however, most of the reactions were in a form of prejudice. The populist wave had the opportunity to transform prejudices in real attitude, recalling the sentiments of the earlier decades. Xenophobia was a general right-wing populist trend within the continent; in fact, taking into consideration surveys from single countries, it is clear that a part (half or more) of the population thought that immigration positively contributed to economic growth. Some countries think that the number of the non-EC nationals in the European Community is too high; others, such as Greece, Portugal and Ireland, think that the immigrants are a great source for country development. German population decreased its hostility with immigrants admitting the advantage to have growing human resources. German polls in 1991 showed more optimistic results towards immigrants; on the other side, population in countries like Italy was thinking that immigration was only generating new issues. The table below shows a survey from the Eurobarometer concerning citizens' opinions toward non-EC immigrants.

Table 3.3
Opinions of EC Citizens on the Presence of Non-EC Citizens, Migrants, and Racist Movements in the EC
 (IN % AGREEING WITH STATEMENTS)

	B	DK	G*	GR	S	F	IR	I	L	NL	P	UK	EC
1. The presence of non-EC nationals is a bad thing/to some extent a bad thing for the future of the country:	52	47	43	27	20	44	13	31	18	25	18	35	35
2. Completely approve/to some extent approve movements in favor of racism:	12	16	10	4	10	11	15	8	9	9	14	11	11
3. There are too many non-EC nationals in EC:	56	43	55	29	25	56	12	63	20	44	18	54	51
4. Do not accept presence of people from south of the Mediterranean:	34	25	25	26	11	33	12	15	17	28	7	26	23
5. Do not accept presence of people from Eastern Europe:	27	19	26	24	9	22	13	15	16	22	7	23	20
6. Do not accept presence of political refugees:	29	8	24	18	7	24	18	15	13	16	7	20	19
7. Non-EC nationals' rights should be restricted:	58	32	37	27	12	41	22	28	10	29	11	43	33

B = Belgium, DK = Denmark, G = Germany, S = Spain, F = France, IR = Ireland, I = Italy, L = Luxemburg, NL = Netherlands, P = Portugal, UK = United Kingdom
 * questions 3-7: unified Germany
 Source: Questions 1 and 2 from Eurobarometer 30, December 1988; 3-7 from Eurobarometer 35, June 1991

Table 3¹⁴¹

Even if some countries have been more tolerant concerning non-EC immigrants, numbers however explain disagreement with having more and more foreigners. Anxiety, anger and disappointed were increasing in the mind of many people; the quite negative attitude against immigration has been a great input for growing right-wing populist parties.

Anxiety of the native population is mostly given by fear of losing jobs. The surveys in the various countries were divided by those who were supporting immigrant workforce (immigrants were usually willing to perform *low* jobs that natives would never do) and those who were accusing that immigrants were stealing jobs to the local population. Another reason of being anti-immigrant was (and it is today) fear of violence and crime; in Germany, at the beginning of the 1990s, “the number of those who felt threatened by crime rose from 56 to 57 percent (92 percent in Eastern Germany in

¹⁴¹ Questions 1-2 from Eurobarometer 30 December 1988; questions 3-7 from Eurobarometer 35, June 1991, found in Betz, H.-G. (1994), *Radical Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe*, St. Matins Press, New York, NY

1991)”¹⁴². In 1991, more than half crime suspected and guilty people were foreigners; however, there is some general misunderstanding because a big part of these crimes were constituted by asylum and boarder violations (not by crimes inflicted to others). Moreover, foreign people were and are more likely to be detained¹⁴³. It is obvious that, beyond employment, concerns and prejudices over immigration are strictly connected to social security. Finally, anger and resentment of more extremist people alimented the *fight* against immigrants; immigrants were accused to exploit Western society and its welfare state – meaning that a country had less public financial availability due to immigrants.

In the 1990s, migration experts previewed a big *Africanization* process in Europe. It was also previewed that most of North African immigrants will be willing to live in France – due to language reasons. Previsions were right and the fertility rates continued to grow more in the southern bank of the Mediterranean than in the northern one, leading to higher migration flows from South to North.

Cultural and political concerns about immigration were on the way to have negative results; *fortress Europe* was becoming a welfare space for commodities, and not for people¹⁴⁴. The majority of Western European were not willing to create a multi-ethnic and multicultural society; this was the will of a very small educated part of the population, called *the politically correct elites* by the populists. The right-wing populist supporters were mainly formed by working class white men, tired about altruistic and multicultural politics. Cultural resentment of this part of the natives was against immigration. History tell us the very high – even if opposite – relationship between populism and immigration, even in very liberal democracies, such as the Scandinavian countries.

4. Democracy and Populism

Political and social contestation are very important aspects of democracy, and other government forms, such as totalitarianism. Populism forms itself in a situation of political and social crisis, when democratic values are compromised in some way; contestation can

¹⁴² Betz, H.-G. (1994), *Radical Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe*, St. Matins Press, New York, NY, p. 88

¹⁴³ In 1988, in Italy, more than 50 percent of foreigners, but only 12 percent of Italians were sent to jail for crimes of same type.

¹⁴⁴ Whitney, C.R. (1991). “Europeans Look for Ways to Bar Door to Immigrants”, *The New York Times* December 129, 1991, pp. 1, 8.

also be internal to the democratic system for some reasons, such as: democratic ideology is unsure, if not contradictory, in the application of fundamental principles; democratic ideology gives life to divergent interpretations, such as the populist one. The populist parties were born at the end of the XIX century together with the first democratic developments. Populist parties refuse to be classified with values (like mainstream parties) and they are against every fixed identification. Isaiah Berlin compared the definition of populism with the *Cinderella complex*: “there is no shoe in the shape of populism, but no foot to fit it [...] Populism is too eclectic to be an ideology in the way that liberalism, socialism, or conservatism are”¹⁴⁵.

One of the most diffused approach to populism today, is based on the conception of populism as a pathology of democracy. Even if this is a quite dangerous approach, it cannot be neglected. Is it useful to define populism as a pathology? Or could it be defined simply an expression? Defining populism as a pathology would neither allow the comprehensibility of the phenomenon nor its relationship with democracy. However, the definition of populism as a pathology comes from two sides: the first one finds its inspiration in the assimilation of populism as a general category with a particular expression – represented by extreme right coalitions (Mény, 2004); the second one derives from the realistic (elitist) approach to democracy – a democracy represented by oligarchies. We can then assume that populism constitutes a potential danger to democracy; however, in the course of time, there have been positions defending populism as the *democratization of democracy* (Laclau, 1979) which permits the inclusion of excluded sectors and people. Populism, as other ideologies, such as nationalism or socialism, can be either a threat or a benefit for democracy, depending on the context in which it arises.

Differently from traditional right-wing and fascist parties, populism does not present itself as an antidemocratic movement. A great part of its rhetoric is the complaint of negative issues that are affecting democracy. The proposal of populism is to regenerate democracy, taking it back to traditional principles and values. This attitude – very much used during the XX century in Europe and the United States – finds its origins in the never solved contradiction between ideal democracy (which should give mass access to politics) and concrete democracy. This gap fosters every form of legitimacy, but

¹⁴⁵ Berlin, I. (1967), *London School of Economics Conference on Populism, May 20–21, 1967: Verbatim Report*, The Isaiah Berlin Virtual Library, London

also some forms of manipulations. Democracy and populism are at the same time very close – due to the people as element in common – and very far – considering the level of importance that they give to the people.

It is impossible to have populism without referring to democracy. Populism is quite always present in democracies either through political movements or through political speeches and programmes. In fact, populism and democratic theory have a point in common: the people are at the base of this form of government. However, in the populist conception, the people have *limited action* within the political environment. Obviously, as mentioned before, institutions, central banks, legislative procedures are seen as filters to the expression of popular will. Anger and disappointment were central in populist leaders' speeches; there is not a concrete theory against institutional pluralism and liberalism, but just strong critics to the establishment, which put popular and national sovereignty on top. The theory of democracy in the populist version is more a rejection of liberalist and pluralist *impedimenta*¹⁴⁶. However, populist arguments cannot remain without an answer; as mentioned, the *populist fever* is probably an indicator of a suffering democracy.

The role of the establishment is considered by the populists as an obstacle to the popular will; the clearest case that represents this reflection is the American one. Among all Western democracies, the United States is the democracy which had the highest number of populist movements, starting at the end of the XVIII century with the founding fathers of America¹⁴⁷. Populism had a great chance to develop, even if locally, in the US due to a *dualist (or Manichaeist) vision* of society: on the one side the honest and productive working class, on the other, the corrupted system of finance, corporations and politics. The populists have been a complication in the democratic-republican dualist

¹⁴⁶ Mény, Y., Surel, Y. (2004), *Populismo e Democrazia*, Il Mulino, Bologna (personal translation from Italian to English), p. 60

¹⁴⁷ The foundation of the American institutions, the electoral system and the representation of the citizens created a group of *political élite*; the decisions were confined to a small group of elected people, which act in the name of the people, between them and the establishment. In the populist theory, this constitutes a filter to direct representation. At this point, the social structure is divided in those who think that governing should be in the hands of the wise and intellectual, and those who think about the working class. About the latter case, Jefferson and Jackson have been important icons (the incarnation of the working man); Jefferson remained in the minds of the people for his commitment to fight against banks' power. As we may know, the American populist explosion came between 1870 and 1900 and appeared in different waves, especially with George Wallace, Ross Perot, Peter Buchanan, the Tea Party and Donald Trump.

system. Even if at state level, the populist parties (i.e. Kansas People's Party) gave quite a shock to the political scenario in the United States, with consequences for the future. Moreover, the moral and religious element has always been crucial in the American culture, especially in the South, where religious values highly contribute to the social and political structure. Many of the populist leaders included religious thematic in their speeches, alluding to anti-immigration and multi-religious cities.

Populist rhetoric and terms have been founded in the US and still have not changed significantly. *Representation*, which is at the basis of populist protest, became a synonymous of *betray*. Populism comes out also because the people do not feel represented by politicians; the people feel betrayed by the ruling élites, who do not act as expected. Representation is also a matter of no transparency and access to politics and public offices. In the populist conception, the people are represented by a charismatic leader which has received a process of legitimization and accountability from the supporters and has a high connection with them. The leader drives the people against tolerance of liberal democratic concepts such as pluralism and minorities' rights. Fundamentally, populism can be associated to a democratic ideology, but in contrast with liberal democracy, which constitutes the main model of democracy in the contemporary world.

Finally, the concept of sovereignty is very often invoked in order to disapprove financial, judiciary and media institutions. The importance of national sovereignty diminishes with strong liberal democracies; the populists use the problems inherent to liberal democracy to push the anger of the people against the status quo. Cas Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser provide a very interesting comparison of positive and negative effects (in theory and practice) of populism.

Table 1. Positive and negative effects of populism on liberal democracy

Positive effects	Negative effects
Populism can give voice to groups that do not feel represented by the political elite.	Populism can use the notion and praxis of majority rule to circumvent minority rights.
Populism can mobilize excluded sectors of society, improving their integration into the political system.	Populism can use the notion and praxis of popular sovereignty to erode the institutions specialized in the protection of fundamental rights.
Populism can improve the responsiveness of the political system, by fostering the implementation of policies preferred by excluded sectors of society.	Populism can promote the establishment of a new political cleavage, which impedes the formation of stable political coalitions.
Populism can increase democratic accountability, by making issues and policies part of the political realm.	Populism can lead to a moralization of politics whereby reaching agreements becomes extremely difficult if not impossible.

Table 4¹⁴⁸

Populism can work in the two different roles. For example, a positive effect is given by the aim of including the marginalized society, by giving a voice to it. Giving a voice to the not represented people means exploiting their problems caused by the establishment and talk about topics which are not externalized by the élites. Negative effects are certainly constituted by the attacks to the institutions and to fundamental and minorities' rights (the radical right populist wave of the 1990s focused on these topics, given the increase supranational power of the EU and the immigration issue). With the possibility to have both positive and negative effects, populism can trigger many contexts of institutional changes: this means that populism can contribute both to democratization (leading to liberal democracy) and de-democratization (going back to authoritarianisms) processes.

¹⁴⁸ Positive and negative effect of populism on liberal democracy, found in Mudde, Cas. Kaltwasser, Cristobal Rovira (2017). *Populism. A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, p. 83

5. Communication and Media within the New Populist Surge

Populism is a phenomenon that has been approached by many and different point of views; literature presents populism as an ideology, as a political strategy, a socio-economic strategy, but, however, does not focus on the contribution of media. Given the popular nature of populism, mass media communication strategy is fundamental. It is very important to know the impact of media on populist sentiments and the origins of the “mutual influences between the media and this new kind of populism that has marked the political scene internationally in the last three decades”¹⁴⁹. The media perspective approach to populism wants to clarify the relationship of the populist policies with the media production practices and news. Certainly, the role of the media is highly influenced by the environment political, social and cultural factors. Some consideration of the media analysis has been taken by Mény and Surel (2000): the analysis highlights some specific national factors (corruption, electoral issues etc.) combined with the mediatisation of political life. However, no further specific analysis has been done in this context.

Media is attracted by news; in this case the news may be the defeat of the existing order, meaning the populist surge mining the establishment through abrasive words, public manifestations and ‘emotive issues’ (Mazzoleni, 2003). Part of the media may assure support; in modern society, media and digital support are fundamental for legitimization. Media institutions detain a key role in society; press and news acquired responsibility on the social community. Moreover, media includes freedom of thought, at list in democratic systems.

In order to comprehend one of the starting points of the media-populist analysis, one should make clear that every country has two different types of media: the media of the élites and the popular media. The former reflects the status quo (the establishment), supporting mainstream political parties and not looking for average popular support. The latter seems very attracted by mass media communication, such as radio and tabloids; this type of communication is usually preferred by the supporters of neo-populism, and it mainly refers to the “personality of political actors, on entertainment values, on details of conflicts, rather at the level of gossip, than at the level of serious analysis”¹⁵⁰. The populist

¹⁴⁹ Mazzoleni, G., Stewart, J., Horsfield, B. (2003), *The Media and Neo-Populism: A Contemporary Comparative Analysis*, Praeger Publishers, Westport CT

¹⁵⁰ Ibidem, p. 8

movements used the popular media as a communicational strategy to attract more support from the working class. On the other side, the media intervenes and influences political processes, including the development of neo-populism.

Neo-populism is the result of a mixed ensemble of social, cultural, structural and political elements. Many times, its rise and fall can be explained by the media approach; media helps to understand the support and influence that was given to the populist movements. However, the media approach cannot be rationalized within a general discussion; in fact, the available literature on media populism is built on a comparative research per geopolitical area. One of the main examples of media populism literature is the volume edited by Mazzoleni, Stewart and Horsfield at the beginning of the 2000s. The detailed analysis takes into consideration six liberal Western democracies where media enjoy a very high freedom. These countries – Austria, France, Italy, Australia, Canada and the United States – share common elements, such as fast rise and fast decline of populist movements; quite slow expansion; and eventual conquest of government positions (FPO and Lega Nord).

5.1. Media-Populism in Italy: the Lega Nord Case

The Italian media system since the beginning has quite always been subservient of the mainstream political parties. Newspapers were quite all financed by big industrial groups, and independent newspapers were almost inexistent. In the 1980s, television channels were part of the public media group RAI and mainly controlled by the Christian Democrats (Democrazia Cristiana) and the PCI (Partito Comunista Italiano). With the political corruption scandal (*Tangentopoli*) at the end of the 1980s and beginning of 1990s, the media system started important developments and transformations: these were the years in which the private sector entered into television-business. More space for critics to politics from the private sector was given in television and newspapers. Silvio Berlusconi won the lead of the commercial networks (Italia 1, Rete 4 and Canale 5) with the Fininvest-Mediaset group. These channels were not influenced by politics initially, and *the people* could finally entertain themselves with low level talk shows and commercials. In the 1990s, this type of private television production became very popular and gave a new cultural influence.

At the beginning of the 1990s, there was a very intense, and sometimes controversial, relation between the Italian media system and the new right-wing Populist

Party, the Lega Nord. The leader Umberto Bossi reached an unexpected consensus using, among many tools, a lot of communication strategy in a double way: on the one hand, attacking the status quo media, on the other, “activating a new media logic to ensure its own visibility in the various phases of its development”¹⁵¹.

The Lega Nord’s communications strategy referred to two different and fundamental aspects: the first one (horizontal) aimed at the creation of a grudge between the Northern regions and the Southern ones – meaning the conflict between central power and peripheries; the second referred to a vertical classification of social hierarchies – this increased the anger of the working class against the élites. Beyond these two main points, the Lega Nord turned on many other resentments through communication – such as the conflict between natives and immigrants, the conflict between the politicians and the ordinary citizens. The working class, the small entrepreneurs and other ordinary people could find themselves comprehended in this social context. Roberto Borcio, professor of political science, summarised the Lega Nord’s communication in this table¹⁵² below.

Lega Nord's Communication: Horizontal and Vertical Polarizations

		Horizontal Polarization	
		NORTH	SOUTH
Vertical Polarization	LOW (people)	I Padania (<i>northern regions</i>) Common People Small business Padania workers <i>European Peoples</i>	II Southern immigrants Non-European immigrants <i>Africa</i>
	HIGH (élite)	III Big industry Big finance Big media <i>Big capital</i>	IV Central (<i>Rome</i>) government National parties <i>Mafia</i>

¹⁵¹ Mazzoleni, G., Stewart, J., Horsfield, B. (2003), *The Media and Neo-Populism: A Contemporary Comparative Analysis*, Praeger Publishers, Westport CT, p. 71

¹⁵² Table 4: *Lega Nord's Communication: Horizontal and Vertical Polarizations*, in Mazzoleni, G., Stewart, J., Horsfield, B. (2003), *The Media and Neo-Populism: A Contemporary Comparative Analysis*, Praeger Publishers, Westport CT

The end of the 1980s was characterized by the public opinion's disappointment with the political class. The traditional ideology and system of parties was becoming weaker; instead, the opposition parties were on the way to gain more support because they were seen as a tool of protest by the citizens. The distinction between left and right wings was not at the top of political consideration. Surveys were indicating that more action was needed for struggle against corruption, less taxation and reduction of political parties' power; more support was also increasing year by year to contrast or reduce immigration. All this action was widespread by the mass media – the space in the newspapers for the new issues increased during the 1980s (Table 5 below shows the issues reported by *La Repubblica* in the 1980-1990 decade).

Issues Reported in *La Repubblica* 1980–1990

	Political Corruption	Inefficient Political System	Inadequate State Services	Waste of Public Resources	Immigration Is a Problem	Regional Differences	Total
1980	7	6	3	3	0	3	22
1983	10	9	6	7	1	3	36
1985	11	9	10	6	2	1	39
1986	3	16	13	7	1	3	43
1987	7	12	14	10	1	2	46
1988	14	16	17	8	4	5	64
1989	12	13	31	9	0	9	74
1990	6	23	44	9	17	6	105

Source: Ruzza and Schmidke, 1993.

It emerges that the most significant gap has been made by immigration, which remained external from the political scenario in the previous; however, as we may know, in the following years it will be at the daily agenda until present. As mentioned in the previous paragraphs about new populism, people were mainly against non-EU immigration.

In this context, mass media had very quiet and very noisy periods. Most of the journalists often did not know how to face the understanding and the interpretation of the Lega Nord, given its newsworthiness and trasgressiveness¹⁵³. The Lega Nord always dedicated particular attention to the media strategies; its initial success guaranteed a lot of consideration from the media. The Lega Nord had also a policy concerning media, which was based on three main points: (1) against the subservience of traditional

¹⁵³ Mazzoleni, G., Stewart, J., Horsfield, B. (2003), *The Media and Neo-Populism: A Contemporary Comparative Analysis*, Praeger Publishers, Westport CT, p. 78

journalists to the mainstream party system, including financial institutions; (2) merging people and supporters together in events, using particular symbols and language to make public speeches, which were recorded by the media; (3) attempting to handle its own private media, challenging the traditional one. Point number (2) reflects a tradition that the Lega Nord preserved (other movements abandoned this choice in the 1970s) and still preserves; this was made in order to strengthen the relationship among the supporters and exchange public opinion. Symbolism is a key tool because it started to give a new perception of what a political movement is. There a few events that gained a lot of impact on the media: the important changes and stages celebration in Pontida¹⁵⁴ – which is still an active ritual; the march on the Po river¹⁵⁵ – an event that wanted to celebrate the independence of the Padania *region*.

As a common characteristic of a populist party, the Lega Nord did not focus on a real traditional political programme, rather on the way of communication¹⁵⁶ with its supporters and with the opposition. Umberto Bossi, in his speeches, maintained a very simple style, which could have been understood by ordinary people. As many other populist leaders, his speeches were full of (simple) anger and disappointment for all the political class corruption. However, the party did not come out with a real and rational political-economic programme.

This brief analysis on the Italian media system and its relationship with the Lega Nord underlined different conclusions. First, the media system has not been able to face and interpret the new type of politics that the movement was starting. The media was too much dependent from mainstream parties and was unable to fully express an independent voice to the public opinion. Second, after the success of the Lega Nord, part of the media

¹⁵⁴ The events in Pontida are attended by sympathizers and militants of the Lega Nord; Pontida has been chosen because it is the place where North Italy communes swore to fight against Emperor Barbarossa in 1167.

¹⁵⁵ The march on the Po has been acquired as a new symbol for the movement. The Lega was really adopting the idea of a Padania independent region; in fact, governmental and parliamentary committees were settled up. The Green Shirts were organized and willing to push on. However, the initiative went too far beyond the Lega Nord limits and saw the intervention of the judiciary. Anyway, this event certainly attracted the attention of the mass media.

¹⁵⁶ Umberto Bossi and the other leaders of the Lega Nord underlined two types of separation, one with the political class and one with the Italian language. At conferences and events, they started to adopt local and regional dialects; obviously, this has been a media attraction, especially when the Lega members elected to Parliament were giving their speeches in their own dialect.

acted through an empathic way: some journalists looked at society from the same point of view of the Lega Nord; in this context “the media position clearly favoured a further expansion of the popularity of the Lega Nord and indirectly contributed to its political legitimacy”¹⁵⁷. A third conclusion emerges along with the crisis of the Italian party system; a major part of the media started to make communication contesting the corruption of the mainstream parties and often supporting the legitimacy of a new type of political movement; the media was also supporting, at the regional level, the legitimacy of the Lega Nord. The media support certainly contributed to the consolidation of the national coalition promoted and led by Silvio Berlusconi, which comprehended the Lega Nord. The Lega Nord attempted the opposition to the centre-right coalition, trying to accentuate the populist and independence values. Despite the visibility and great success that the Lega Nord gained at the national level, the scenario was changed; the movement has been taken over by major forces – such as Alleanza Nazionale and Forza Italia – and has been forced to abandon its traditional positions of the past decade. At the beginning of the 2000s, it appeared that the political life cycle of the Lega Nord came to an end. Ten years after, the Lega Nord led by Matteo Salvini assumed a new voice, together with many other European parties, giving rise to the nowadays populist wave across the continent.

¹⁵⁷ Mazzoleni, G., Stewart, J., Horsfield, B. (2003), *The Media and Neo-Populism: A Contemporary Comparative Analysis*, Praeger Publishers, Westport CT, p. 91

CHAPTER IV

**The interpretation of populism in the 2009 to
present period**

1. Historical and Conceptual Background

The populist waves in the 1990s gave a substantial input to the development of left and right wing movements starting from the beginning of the new millennium. In many countries, the mainstream parties were becoming weaker. In particular, the big crisis of 2008 has been a force for new political and social protests against the establishment and the supranational power. It is after 2000 that the movements, both right and left, have expanded, affirmed and have begun to gain greater support. In particular in the Netherlands, in France, in the United Kingdom and expanding even in Eastern Europe (with particular focus on Hungary, Poland and Romania). To sharpen this success, as expected, the economic crisis and the austerity *imposed* by the European government in Brussels. But also and above all migration, which is one of the key issues of populist movements. Between 2014 and 2015, migration has been transformed and has been perceived as a sort of emergency; a lot of resources from many countries in Europe – Italy, in particular, given its geographical position – have been deployed as subsidies for asylum seekers and refugees from North Africa. This attention on migrants connected with the European establishment and high unemployment rate, generated a new and contemporary wave of populism and xenophobia. Buy which are the reasons of the rise of both left and right wing populism? According to facts, there are two reasons. One more related to the economic, social and political situation. And the other linked to the best communication skills demonstrated by the populists and from the leaders. The financial collapse of 2008, the resulting social unease and migration have created tangible discontent. The economic themes caused the populist growth on the left, while migration phenomena encouraged right-wing populist movements, which made the neo-nationalist and xenophobic formations grow fast. Over the years, populist movements have intercepted the problems and sometimes more skilfully than others, also facilitated by the inability to offer concrete answers of the parties defined as "traditional", they have sponsored their policies. They proposed immediate solutions, at least on the communicative level. According to the research, the strategy used is that of polarization between the people – perennial victim of the system, and the others, the politicians or the corrupt elites, who hold power. In the last decade, the message has spread much faster thanks to the use of social networks and new media. Thanks to new technologies in communications, the rejection of traditionalist parties and hate sentiment has been expanding again and very fast among the European continent. As Professor Giovanni

Orsina writes, it is clear that ‘politics is living a period of crisis throughout the West, and in the whole West populist movements are born from that crisis: movements that propose to renew politics by eliminating the current ruling classes, because they consider them corrupt and incompetent, are drawing on the profound virtues of the people, and representing it in an *authentic* way’. On the left and on the right, anti-system forces intercept that slice of the indignant population with traditional parties, sceptical about refugee reception policies, worried about going backwards on the social scale and fearing the increase in crime or excessive weight of Islam. According to the considered slice of people, the politicians and the leaders are considered weak and not able to face immigration and economic issues. Populist support has been reached thanks to the protest vote of the electors, who had fear to be betrayed by the status quo.

The modern conception of parties is changing: many of the electors think that the most eradicated (mainstream) parties are not sufficient anymore. Many of them believe that a strong leader is needed in order to resolve contemporary issues, such as migration and unemployment. The populists strongly believe that democracy can work better without the traditional parties; having a strong leader that behaves as an image of the average supporter¹⁵⁸ is enough to believe in it. The parties are becoming *personalistic*; this means that the party in general assumes its leader’s image¹⁵⁹. Moreover, some of the traditional opposition parties are abandoning their solid structure; the modern scenario of European politics caused high instability, because our democracies are transforming their own fundamental principles.

¹⁵⁸ Beppe Grillo and Matteo Salvini have been acting with a new communication strategy, focusing on news and facts transmission through social networks (including pictures). In most of the images and videos, they speak as the average working class supporter, with very easy and simple words. This new kind of political communication transformed some politicians in *life influencers* for part of their supporters.

¹⁵⁹ Some examples of personal parties were already clear in the 1990s; we can think about Forza Italia, a party acting with the entrepreneurial techniques of its leader Silvio Berlusconi; or, the Movimento Cinque Stelle, the outsider and anti-establishment movement, acting under the spectre of Beppe Grillo’s new communication strategies, including hate for the media, disinformation and fake news.

2. The Contemporary Populist Rise

The last European populist explosion started more or less ten years ago, right after the peak of the economic crisis of 2007-2008. In this decade, the populist wave has highly increased its supporters. To summarize the current situation, it is enough to state some numbers: if in 1998 the populists took part in the government of only two states (Switzerland and Slovakia) and were worth less than 7% of the total votes, today they are in power in 11 countries, and a European citizen out of four voted populist in the most recent elections. Twenty years ago, only 12.5 million citizens were governed by executives who had at least one populist force within it: today those citizens are 170 million. Every populist party has its own story. But it is undeniable how the origin of the consensual boom is to be identified first of all in what happened in 2008. The financial crisis and the consequent recession have made the systems founded on the traditional parties extremely vulnerable to accusations of being corrupt and ignoring the interests of citizens. At the same time, the high volatility of the vote and some emergencies (we think of the Italian case in 2011) have led the traditionally opposed parties (socialist, social democrats, conservative) to increasingly convergent positions on certain policy issues, opening the doors to the narrative populist movements, that didn't have any difference between them. In this first phase, in particular, one should remind the birth of several populist movements also of the left in Southern Europe (Podemos, Syriza). Subsequently, starting from the two-year period 2014-2015, the migration theme became at the heart of international and national politics: the crisis of migrant flows, the difficulties in their management and a pervasive perception of insecurity among citizens have favoured the affirmation of a right-wing populism, especially in the centre and in northern Europe. It is curious to also observe how in the last years there has been an expansion in the populist area of the left (also thanks to the birth of new political issues) in countries of the central-northern block, with the result of an increasingly polarized picture. Finally, the change that hit the media has undoubtedly played a significant role: on the one hand, the emergence of social networks, with their load of disintermediation and polarization; on the other hand, the decline in profits, has pushed traditional media to put at the center of the agenda subjects able to sell more easily, for example by reserving more and more space for political scandals and conflicts, transmitting the perception of their increase. If in the centre and Northern Europe populist parties tend to be right or far-right wing, in the

Mediterranean area, harshly hit by the economic crisis, they tend to be left-wing. Last but not least, the populist parties in the Eastern bloc (meaning the countries of the former Soviet Union) tend to be mostly centre parties, born as mainstream parties and that later on have embraced issues related to populism and national sovereignty.

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