Is Populism Changing the Political Representation of Western Democracies?

Davide Vittori*

Department of Politics, University of Bologna, Italy

Abstract

Populist parties in Western Europe are today regarded as a "threat" to the classical conception of political representation. Despite a possible threat to the pluralism in the European societies, this paper tries to argue that populism is not the cause of the changing political representation in Western mature poliarchies. Rather, populist parties seem to "suffer" the socialization process that takes place once these parties crystallize in the political panorama.

Introduction

The word populism experienced a contradictory evolution in the last decade. From one side it has broaden its meaning, since it is now common to hear in the political debate the allegation of "populism", referred to those politicians who propose unrealistic solutions for complex and multifaceted problems, no matter which party he or she belongs to. From the other side, however, its application within the European party systems has been restricted mainly (but not exclusively) to the extreme right-wing populist (ERP) parties. Populism has been defined as a "disease" [1] or a "spectre" for the Western democracies, because of its rejection of pluralism and its exclusionary features that emerged in some European States. Less attention has been given to the effect on the political representation: in this paper, thus, I try to emphasize, how to deal with the problem of representation vis-à-vis the European populism and whether it can be regarded as a threat to the conception of political representation. Firstly, I try to figure out a broad definition of populism, treating this phenomenon as an ideology that can be found in a wide variety of party systems and within different parties. Secondly, I inquire the conditions that facilitate the success of populist parties in Western democracies. Thirdly, I move ahead considering how the concept of representation has evolved in the last decade vis-à-vis populism: the aim of this part is to understand whether populist parties brought major changes within Europe in the political representation thanks to the favourable political conditions that populism found alongside European States. Finally, I explain why populist parties do not represent a radical challenge for representativeness in mature poliarchies; rather, populist parties are influenced by the institutions in which they acted, being the acceptation of the fundamental rules of the political representation the main consequence of that.

Defining populism

One of the most debated issues that surround the word populism is whether it may be considered an ideology. Albeit proposing different definitions, [2,3] consider the populist phenomenon as an ideology. According to [4] Jost et al., ideology can "reflect both genuine (and even highly accurate) attempts to understand, interpret, and organize information about the political world as well as conscious or unconscious tendencies to rationalize the way things are or, alternatively, the desire for them to be different". In this regard, populism can be seen as a sui generis ideology. I define populism as a complementary ideology, based on the homogeneity of the "people"– being this "group" more or less inclusive – whose integrity is threatened by the ruling élites, the

party systems and, more generally, the institutional and political status quo. The homogeneity of the group (and, consequently, the Manichean division between "Us" and the "Others") that populist parties want to represent can be tracked down since the appearance of the agrarian populism in Russia and in the United States. However, the inclusiveness of these groups differs according to the other political inclinations of the parties, as suggested by the comparison between inclusionary and exclusionary populism proposed by Mudde and Kaltwasser [5].

In general, seven features could describe a prototypical populism phenomenon:

(1) Populists as hostile to representative politics; indeed, populism is only reluctantly political. As Taggart [6] puts it, "eschewing the complexity of representative politics, populists advocate simplicity and directness in their politics" (sometimes with direct appeal to referenda).

(2) Populists as representative of a homogeneous group (be that national, regional or, more broadly, composed by the honest and ordinary people, against the corrupt elite) whose values are rooted in the common wisdom of the ordinary people.

(3) Populism as a powerful reaction to a sense of extreme crisis (be that economical, moral or political).

(4) Populist as proponents of a radical-change approach. Populists tend to propose to the electorate far-reaching, if not utopian, promises, which, nonetheless, tend to be vague and indefinite. Despite the revolutionary content of these promises, populist parties claim that they propose "common wisdom" goals, whose feasibility and immediate effects are real. Gradualism is rejected by populist parties, but electoral campaign revolutionary claims are intertwined with those "old-fashioned" values of a remote past, that politicians have destroyed and which constitute the cornerstone of populist demands. However, for those parties whose representatives obtain key role in the institutions, a different policy-making dilemma emerges, i.e. stipulating policy-making compromises with other key players (allies) or dealing with

*Corresponding author: David Vittori, Department of Politics, University of Bologna, Institutions, History, Italy, 33-40126, Tel: +393478012807; E-mail: vittori.davide@gmail.com

supranational institutions that represent the "Other" in the populist ideology.

(5) Populists as containing institutionalization dilemmas. Populists want to personify the "last chance" for ordinary people to be heard within the institution. Nonetheless, the participation to the electoral competition creates a conundrum in populist parties: the first possibility is becoming an institutionalized party, far from the improvisation of the beginning of their life; the second is maintaining their early non-structure, facing the risk of an internal implosion due to the lack of clear norms of behaviour. Since in the Western Europe, but also in Canada, United States and Australia the link between charismatic leaderships and populist parties/movements seems to be inextricably strong, the sixth variable, is

(6) The presence of strong leaders that convey the political message of the party/movement. Those leaders personify the unity of the party in contrast with the supposed factionalism of the institutionalized parties.

(7) The seventh feature is the emphasis on (7) conspiracy theories [6], that is a constant mention of obscure and unaccountable vested interests, lobbies, secret organizations, which supposedly threaten the integrity of the people.

Populist movements, for examples, tend to build their self not only considering the "Otherness" in some distrusted minorities, such as immigrants – which is typical of the extreme-right populist parties – but mostly showing how the sovereignty and democratic representations are despotized by very powerful, "obscure" and unaccountable groups. According to this view, those groups blackmail the ordinary people with their plots to exploit national and worldwide resources: a non-comprehensive list in the European case includes "the banks", "the speculators", lobbies, unelected bureaucracy (such as, in the European case, "the technocrats in Bruxelles") or even the judiciary power. If populism shapes the way the populist political actor looks at the socio economic and political reality, it nonetheless cannot be considered a full-fledged ideology: I use the term "complementary" in order to explain its side-by-side cohabitation with other ideologies. For that reason, populism is not *beyond* other ideologies, as Taguieff [7] argues. The "complementary" perspective helps to understand why the label "populist" has been given to a wide variety of parties. Limiting the description to the Western-European democracies, it is possible to outline a list of populist parties whose placement in left/right axis diverges significantly. The "party family" that host a vast majority of populist parties is the extreme-right [8] those parties choose to support a populist ideology alongside nationalism or ethnocentrism: the Freedom Party in Austria (FPÖ), the National Front in France (FN), the Progress Parties in Norway, the Danish People's Party Denmark, the National Democratic Party (NPD) and the Republican in Germany, the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) and the British National Party (BNP) in the UK, the Party for Freedom (PVV) in The Netherlands and the True Finns (PS) are the most known. However, even radical left-wing parties have been labelled as populist, i.e. the Party of Democratic Socialism (from 2005 renamed The Left Party) in Germany [9] and [10] and the Sinn Fein in Ireland [11] or the Socialist Party in The Netherlands. Regionalist parties, too, have acquired a populist dimension, in particular the Vlaams Block in Belgium and the Northern League (LN) in Italy. Albeit their inclusion is contested, some mainstream parties such as the Thatcher's Conservative Party, the Labour Party under Blair's leadership [12] and the Union for a Popular Movement in France were regarded as resembling some populist features. The Forza Italia case is the less problematic within

this category: its leader, Silvio Berlusconi is defined by the academic literature as a "Telepopulist" [7], "media populist" a "postmodern populist" [13]. This European panorama shows, from one side, how the populist ideology is malleable to other different core ideologies (from nationalism to socialism) and, from the other side, how deeply it penetrated the European Western democracies.

What favours the emergence of populist parties?

In this section, I focus the analysis on those political and institutional factors – the emergence of cartel parties, the multi-level governance and the mass media society – that may explain the populist success. This framework is essential to understand the relationship between political representation in Western democracies and populism. What is left aside is a case-by-case analysis and a general abstractions of the cultural and environmental factors that led to the emersion of different populist parties in Europe. With this respect I agree with the arguments provided by Cas Mudde [14]. The author claims that "widespread demand of populism is a given, rather than the main puzzle, in contemporary western democracies". Rather, focusing on three medium-term political factors, will allow me to inquire whether populism is congenital to the western democracy, as it evolved in the last decades. The answer to this question is positive: populism, thus, is an integral part of the process of transformation of Western democracies. Nevertheless, this does not necessarily mean that populism is and will be successful for the time being; my analysis should lead to the conclusion that populism will be a latent phenomenon in a representative democracy, whose success may be facilitated by political/cultural/economic crisis, when "radical" solution are demanded by the electorate and perceived as "legitimate" in the political debate.

The emergence of cartel parties

The ideological and organizational transformation within a context of a widely accepted de-politicization of the mainstream parties may have helped populists to be perceived as a non-corrupted other, eager to break "cooperation" and/or "collusion" [15] between mainstream parties. The evolution from "catch all parties" [16] to cartel parties, according to Katz and Mair [17], started in the 1970s, during "a period in which the goals of politics, at least for now, become more self-referential, with politics becoming a profession in itself". With the professionalization of politics, mainstream parties slowly transformed their structures into campaigning organizations, in which "preference-accommodating rather than preference-shaping" was the aim of the party [18]. This process led to a de-ideologization of the intra-parties completion, which was also favoured by the post-Cold War European political arena. As Katz and Mair [15] puts it: these parties increasingly resemble one another; in terms of their electorates, policies, goals, styles, there is less and less dividing them their interests are now much more shared, and this also facilitates cooperation. Even if parties might be disinclined to rely heavily on overt deals with one another, their mutual awareness of shared interests, and their sense of all being in the same boat and relying on the same sorts of resources, means that we can conclude by hypothesizing collusion (or its functional equivalent) and cartel-like behaviour. If mainstream parties increasingly close the gap between their ideological positions, and then anti-establishment parties may stand or, at least, be perceived as outsider with respect to the ruling elite and the political *status quo*. Moreover, both authors (2009:756) agree that cartel parties tend to shift the decision-making process from party on the ground, based on organized membership, to party in public office (PPO), and composed mainly by elected representatives. PPO has acquired greater strength toward State, but less legitimacy among the electorate. This process is caused and, at the

same time, may be a consequence of five symptoms that [19] detects with respect to parties' roots in the society. Mainstream parties no longer provide (1) services to their member, nor (2) they socialize their membership through education or training cadres. In addition, these parties are unable to (3) channel the information and act as a filter for the members in a mass-media society. More importantly, parties (4) do not "aggregate citizens' demands into more or less coherent political agendas, using ideology or group interest as a yardstick", while (5) the decline in parties' membership witnesses the incapability to mobilize on a permanent basis some segment of the population. It is not surprising, in this fashion, those populist parties capitalize this crisis as a way to describe the distance between the "common people" and the "ruling elite". According to the populist view, the latter is worried only about governing in accordance with other cartel parties: the famous slogan of the FN against "the gangs of four" (communist, socialist, liberal and conservative), the denunciation, made by FPÖ of the bi-partisan social partnership, the denunciation of "Roma Ladrona" ("Thieving Rome") by the Northern League and the invectives of Five Star Movement against PD-L (Partito Democratico, PD and Popolo della Libertà, PDL) are a clear example of that.

The intricate labyrinth of multi-level governance

The overlapping of different levels of governance testifies the efficacy of the populist's discourse on "the obscure forces" that threat people sovereignty. In Europe, the multi-level governance is a fact. The intricate decision-making process within the European institutions, the powerful political tool of the "democratic deficit" in Europe and the growing scepticism on the regulating role of several European Union agencies and institutions (such as the European Central Bank) create a perfect scapegoat, namely the European Union (EU) as a whole, for populist parties. Other international institutions, such as the WTO, the IMF and the OECD contributed to shift the political power to the disposal of non-democratic economic interests, rather than limiting their interest, according to Crouch [20]. Another example is the pillar of the four freedoms (free movement of goods, capital, services, and people) within the EU: the "constitutionalization" of these principles was harshly criticized by different populist parties, from the extreme right to the radical left. From one side, the formers criticize (while not all extreme right parties) all four freedoms, but their main target is the fourth (free movement of people): the "invasion" of immigrants, most of them coming from other Member States (MSs) in the periphery of Europe– against which European Union did anything but "legitimizing" and "promoting" this "invasion" is very popular among ERP parties. From the other side, the radical left parties are heavily critical toward the first three freedoms, because of the inequalities that all of them generate; corporations, multinationals and lobbies are the relevant "Other" in this case.

Recently, scepticism toward economic recipes prescribed by "troika" was combined with the populist rhetoric on "stolen sovereignty" and with what I called previously a conspiracy theory complex. National parliaments, moreover, lost their de facto (while not formal) capability to act as a counter-weight of the power of the executive; the presidentialization of politics [21] left populist parties in opposition without any substantial leverage to influence policy making. Since many populist parties have a representation in the national parliaments, it is not unusual for them to assume, not without any reason that national parliaments are the main losers in the European multi-level governance. Parliaments, in the populist view, are "kept in the dark" with regards to the European decision-making. International institutions it is noted by Moravscik, Poguntke, Webb and Fabbrini [21-23], tend to provide more power to the executive vis-à-vis the

Parliaments, without holding any accountability obligations. Finally, it must be considered that transparency has become a relevant political issue in the post-World War democracies. According to Rosanvallon [24], the de-ideologization of politics as well as the advent of media age (see below) led to the transformation of voter's habits: candidates are "no longer required to demonstrate their allegiance to a camp. Simplicity and transparency became cardinal political virtues". The denunciation of the opaqueness of the decision-making in Europe is thus a strong ideological resource for populist parties. Summing up, European countries are inserted in complex multi-level governance that shifts part of the decision-making process from the level of the nation-state to the supra-national one. The sense of powerlessness equips populism with the weapon of the "violated sovereignty" against which they propose the wisdom of the ordinary people.

Mediatisation and personalisation of politics

The third factor that may explain the rise of populist parties is the mediatisation (and personalization) of politics. As [25] argue, "mediatisation is, in fact, a phenomenon that is common to the political systems of almost all democratic countries, where it has taken different shapes and developed at different speeds". Media communication has become critical for every candidate that wants to compete effectively during an electoral campaign: albeit the role of the media in shaping the political arena should be differentiated country by country [26] in their comparative study reach the conclusion that "parties in general are more or less decidedly, if not uniformly, moving toward adopting similar strategic means in conducting their campaigns. In general, the results show a variety of professional campaign activities, even within the largest cluster of parties". The professionalization of electoral campaigns indicates clearly that media are more than ever crucial for political parties. Entering in the "media circus" for parties with less financial resources is essential to catch a nationwide attention. Thus, from one side, populist parties need a constant media presence, but from the other side, media themselves are attracted by those parties that challenge the status quo: "it is a truism that the media simply cannot ignore what is newsworthy, and clearly newsworthy are the politicians who defy the existing order, with their abrasive language, public protests, and emotive issues" [27]. Populist parties and their leaders seem to be very effective in taking the stage in the media: one possible reason is that language in politics has changed and it has moved toward "that of advertising, public relations, and show business" [25]; this transformation fits perfectly the language used by populist, which advocate for simplicity and Manichean distinctions between the binomial couples of "good" and "bad", "us" and "other", "honest" and "corrupt", "ordinary people" and "elite". Since television may bring to notoriety or popularity in few weeks without the intermediation of any political structure [28], populist messages could be broadcasted to a wide and heterogeneous audience. Taguieff defines the interconnection between media and populism as "Telepopulism" Berlusconi [7,29], Memem in Argentina, Collor de Mello, and Fujimori in Peru or even Chavez in Venezuela [30] are some of the most known example. Other "softer" forms of the entanglement between media and populist leaders may be found across Europe (J.M. and Marine Le Pen, Fortuyn, Wilders, Haider, Bossi, Grillo, Farage, Vona). Their strategy is all but unconscious and it was successful in order to improve the recognisability, as well as the popularity of the leaders. As explained by Stewart, Mazzoleni and Horsfield [31] there are six main communication strategies that are employed by populist parties: (1) identification as media underdog; (2) use of professional expertise; (3) reversion of more traditional "unmediated" forms of communication such as rallies; (4) clever exploitation of free media

publicity; (5) strategies to attract media attention and (6) strategic attacks on the media.

Mediatisation is inextricably linked with the concept of personalization of politics: [32] Campus argues that "there is no doubt that television encourages the personalization of politics by bringing candidates' faces and voices into citizens' homes on a regular basis". As for the mediatisation phenomenon, personalisation is not due to the emergence of populism; rather, it fits the peculiar features of Populist Party, namely the necessity to use a strong leader as a way to convey the solidity of the party/movement. The personalization (and presidentialization) of politics indicates that leadership has a relevant impact in shaping the decision-making process [33-35]. Moreover, it creates in the electorate a sense of necessity for every party to be equipped with a strong leadership that can overcome the mediated forms of politics that take place in the Parliament. At least in the first years of its existence, any populist party does suffer from the lack of specialized personnel that constitutes the skeleton of other mainstream parties. This absence, however, could be also considered strength: criticizing the bureaucratic apparatus of other parties, populists evoke an unmediated relationship between the electorate and the leader, who is the only politician, appointed to listen to (and to act in place of) the ordinary people. In some cases populist parties are not able to institutionalize without the strong leadership of his founder: the *Union de défense des commerçants et artisans* (UDCA) founded by Pierre Poujade in France, the Italian Common Man's Front led by Guglielmo Giannini or, more recently, the List Pim Fortuyn in The Netherlands disappeared from the political arena, when the star of their leader fell. Since leadership is essential for populist movements, personalisation of politics is a useful tool in order to gain access to the mainstream media. Albeit focused on U.S. election, Wattenberg remarks can be also extended to understand the way personalisation may influence political outcome: "the key to understanding the rise of candidate-centered politics in the U.S. is not personality politics, but rather the increasing importance of candidate-centered issues". In an electoral competition where the personal characteristics may play a decisive role in voting decision, the personalization of leadership is crucial to attract votes because "the person infers that the leader with the 'right' set of characteristics is likely to react 'correctly' in most situation [36]. This statement is obviously valid also for non-populist leaders; however, populist leaders want to emphasize their personal features in order to hide the structural "weaknesses" of their parties. What has been stated insofar was aimed at explaining those factors avoured the rise of populist parties across Europe. However, populism, as such, has not born in Europe nor it is a recent phenomenon. As Margaret Canovan [37] described in her pioneering study, both in the United States and in Russia, populism had a bottom-up agrarian origin. At the end of 19th century, the conditions for the institutionalization of these movements were not favourable. In the U.S. case, albeit the cultural legacy and the establishment of "a tone of politics that fitted neatly into the prevailing political culture" [6], People's party lacked the resources and the compactness to threat the two-party system; in the Russian case, the narodnichestvo (literally, "going to the people") ideology was transformed into a revolutionary agenda by some of the adherents; in that sense Russian populism "must be understood as part of the complex weave of revolutionary socialist ideas" [6] so that, once the revolution successfully dethroned the czarism, it disappeared in the mare magnum of the Marxist-Leninist ideology. Despite the failure to institutionalize their movement, both movements did not reject the norms and the values of the democracy [7]. Excluding the interwar period as it is not part of the analysis and focusing our attention on the post II World War context, it is emblematic that in

1965 Asor Rosa argued – too prematurely – that "populism is dead" [7] the ground for the rise of populism was not yet fertile. Populism appeared only in episodic elections, such as in France and in Italy with the Poujadism and the Common Man's Front, but it faced several difficulties to crystallize within the European countries. The three factors that I find the emergence of the cartel parties, the growth of multi-level governance and the personalization and mediatisation of politics – in the following decades favoured its ascendency within the intra-party competition and, mostly, allowed populism to become an institutionalized presence across Europe.

I will analyse in the following chapter if this presence is a threat for the concept of political representation within a representative democracy.

Representation and populism

Populist electoral success in Europe has been described as a threat for democracies, democratic institutions and the political representation. This implication is too drastic, however. According to Urbinati [38] populism has to be regarded as "parasitical on representative democracy, if it succeeds in dominating the democratic state, it can modify its figure radically and even open the door to regime change". Albeit the word parasite in the quotation is taken by Derrida's Limited Inc. [39] as remarked by the author, the correct term in that case would be parasitoid, that is a parasite that can lead to the death of the host (the regime that hosts populism). Nonetheless, I would like to expand the parasite (not parasitoid) metaphor, as it is defined by biology, in order to sketch the relationship between representative democracy and populism. What constitutes the nature of a parasite is that it lives at the expense of the host, causing a biological damage to it. Parasitism as a non-mutual symbiotic relationship between species can be defined through different features. Firstly, the parasite depends more or less intimately for its survival from the host. Secondly, its anatomic and morphologic structure is simpler than that one of the host. Parasite life-cycle, thirdly, is shorter than that one of the host, i.e. the parasite normally dies before the death of the host. Fourthly, parasite may have a relationship with only one host, while the host may have several relationships with other parasites.

The fourth feature may be compared to the chameleonic nature of populism. Populism, as Taggart [6] argues, adapts itself to the context in which it has been socialized, the exportation of the same populist phenomenon in other contexts would not produce the same outcome. For that reason, trans-national connections between populist parties cannot be easily created: the challenge of the *status quo* that characterizes populist parties is inextricability linked with the context in which the challenge is posed: the criticism of the social partnership made by FPÖ could not be compared to the Le Pen's denunciation of the "gang of four" and vice versa. Moreover, the host (the representative democracy) may have more than one Populist Party. Italy is the most known example with the actual presence of four populist parties, i.e. Northern League, Forza Italia, Five Star Movement and the Italia dei Valori. If populism is a parasite, its life-cycle is shorter than that one of representative democracy (the host). This feature fits well the episodic and, very often, short-lived nature of populist parties, albeit populism as a modus operandi or rhetoric strategy may survive in non-populist parties. The fact that anatomic and morphologic structure of parasite/populism is simpler than the structure of the host/democracy could be referred to the populist tendency to simplify the complexity of the representative democracy. The Manichean distinction between "us, the people" and the "others" (elite, corrupted parties, unwelcomed minorities), the call for directness in the decision-making in order to

restore "the sovereignty of the people" and the reliance on charismatic or, at least, very influential leadership render this third feature comparable with populism. Until now, three out of four features match the comparison between populism and parasitism. The first feature, however, cannot be regarded as typical for the populist phenomenon, because populism does not depend on representative democracy for its survival. As Urbinati [38] herself claims, from Napoleon to Mussolini populism was part (obviously, not the only part) of the intimate ideology of many autocrats; nor can we infer that the end of the democracy will consequently lead to the death of populism. If the most pessimistic views about populism – a threat for democracy that may lead to a regime change – are true, then populism not only will survive, but mostly it will be a constitutive part of the new regime. This pessimistic view is connected with the possibility for populist parties to cause biological damage to the representative democracy, while living at the expense of this regime. As far as the European context is concerned, it can be inferred that some populist parties, namely populist ERP, can cause damage to democratic principle, but even those parties cannot live at the expense of the democratic regime: this because, the transformative power of populist parties in Europe clashed with representative democracy. Populists usually advocate for more directness in the decision-making: leaving aside the peculiar case of the institution of the referendum in Switzerland, there are no evidence that directness became part of decision-making, when populist parties gained momentum in government as key allies in coalition cabinets. The cases of the List Pim Fortuyn, the FPÖ, the Northern League and Forza Italia demonstrate that the "standard" procedure of the decision-making resisted the entrance of populists in the national government. One underestimated notion that the academic literature does not face in analysing populist phenomenon is that populism, beyond its rhetoric, grows in the society in which it operates. For that reason, from one side its adaptability to different socio-political conditions within a democracy is a symptom of its flexible (or complementary) ideology, but from the other side, populism cannot escape the socialization process that takes place in every society. Then, the non-mutuality between species that characterize the parasitism cannot be found in the dual relationship between representative democracy and populism. Dahl's theory on the probability of the competitive regimes to exist is based on three axioms that can be summarized as follows: the lesser the cost of tolerance and the higher the cost of repression, the higher is the probability for a government to tolerate opposition. Particularly in mature poliarchies [40], that is in most of the Western democracies, the cost for the tolerance are lesser and the cost of repression are higher than other kinds of regime. If populist parties increase the cost of tolerance, then it can be inferred that they are a threat for democracy. In that sense, it may seem intuitive to state that populist parties are responsible for this growth, due to the rejection of pluralism within national borders. However, one should be careful to jump to this conclusion; as Mudde [14] shows, the attitude toward less tolerance vis-à-vis the "Other" as well as the distrust the political class is shared not only by populist voters. Rather, the impression is that populist parties can intercept just a (more or less) significant part of this wider European electorate. So populists, rather than responsible for these attitudes, seem to operate an ex-post intervention in order to instrumentally grasp the malaise of Western democracies. Moreover, it should be maintained a clear separation between nationalist or ethnocentric ideologies and the populist one. It is certainly true that populism may act to reinforce nationalism and ethnocentrism: the insistence on the separation between "us" and the "Other" that was detected in analysing populism is an opportunity that ERPs exploit to strengthen their message against the inclusion of the minorities.

However, inclusiveness may also be a trait that can be found in left-wing populist parties in Latin America [5], in North America – United States, Canada and in Europe [9-11]; indeed, left-wing populism differentiates "from traditional socialist or social democratic parties by de-emphasizing class, socialism, and socialist ideology in favour of a political platform that appeals to the 'people'" [9]. Populism, thus, may reinforce an exclusionary ideology and consequently ERPs could experience a kind of "marriage of convenience" [5] with populism but populism is not the direct consequence of nationalism or ethnocentrism. Reaching the conclusion of this part, it can be argued that populism is not a parasite: it possesses some features of the parasite, but it lacks the most important, that is leaving at the expense of the host, because once populism is in the Western host, it ends up to be influenced and socialized by its permanence within the host's political mechanisms. What has been argued insofar, however, does not reveal entirely the nature of the populist "threat" to representative democracy. My analysis is based on democratic regimes according to the definition provided by Sartori [41] and the impact that populism has in changing the political representation. As it has been stated before, populists propose to challenge the political *status quo* that, in general, excludes the voice of the ordinary man from the decision-making. At a first sight, what populists deny, using the Pitkin's [42] terminology, are the four elements of representativeness: (1) formalistic representation (divided in (1.1) authorization and (1.2) accountability procedures), symbolic representation (2), descriptive representation (3) and substantive representation (4). From a (1) "formalistic" point of view, populists challenge both "authorization" and "accountability". The "other" parties in principle are not authorized (1.1) to take political decision, because if the government is "of the people, for the people and by the people" quoting Lincoln's Gettysburg address, then only the "true" representatives of the people, i.e. populist parties, are authorized to decide on their behalf. The accountability denunciation (1.2) is based on the presupposition that party's representatives are not responsive towards his or her constituents' preferences, so that they prefer to follow the instructions of the party rather than "listen to the people". Symbolic representation (2) should be assessed looking how representative stand for the represented and, in particular, the way in which representation is accepted by the constituency. Populists argue that elected members of the parliament are merely party official, "professionals" of the politics, whose only aim is to be elected and re-elected without serving the "people". Furthermore, populists contend that the ruling elite do not resemble anymore the electorate and the "sovereign people". As far as descriptive representation (3) is concerned, elected members of the Parliament, according to the populist view, are part of an elite, which does not share the same problems of the ordinary people: in sum they are part of a privileged class of "politicians", so that elected does not resemble/"describe" the electorate anymore. Finally, substantive representation (4) is seen as the way representatives act factually in order to serve the interest of the represented. Populists reject the possibility that other parties serve the interest of the people. Nevertheless, these critics have to be carefully evaluated. Criticism on symbolic (2) and descriptive representation (3) deserve particular attention: it is always difficult to evaluate "how" a representative stands for the represented, but it is evident that the growing incorporation of parties within the state, their increasingly shared purpose and identity, and the ever more visible gap that separates them from the wider society, have contributed to provoking a degree of popular mistrust and disaffection that is without precedent in the postwar experiences of the long-established democracies [15]. Moreover, following Mair [43], parties are become more office-seeking with a more rigid control over the selection and the recruitment of party's candidates; parties "are

now increasingly reliant for their organizational survival on the public funding which they receive from the state". Finally, parties have "become subject to a regulatory framework which accords them a (quasi) official status as part of the state". For that reason, this criticism, albeit used to de-legitimize parties' system, has its root in the evolution of representative democracy, especially in Europe. Criticism of substantive representation (4) of the governing parties (or of the members of the parliament that give the confidence to the Cabinet), to the contrary, is used by all opposition parties in the political debate. For any opponents the incumbent government has not served the interest of the "people", while one may cast a doubt on whether the governing parties have served the interest of their constituencies. Where populism more openly fails in its critics to the political status quo of the parties' system is in the authorization (1.1) and accountability field (1.2). Firstly, populist parties as competitors in the election accept the logic of the representativeness. Their participation in electoral ballot, their alliance with other parties and their presence in the Parliament contribute paradoxically to strengthen the degree of acceptability of the representativeness concept. Why then participate in open elections if they deny its validity? It seems, rather, that the populist criticism of the "authorization" (1.1) is no more than a rhetoric tool, used to mark a distance from mainstream parties. Once in opposition, they do not question the legitimacy of the governors, being in line with other "watchdogs" or counter-democratic institutions. Albeit simplifying the political message, they question the legitimacy of elites' actions, following their (populist) ideology in which the elites are regarded as irretrievably colluded to one another; still, they participate in the same assembly of these elites, without being, generally speaking, more disrespectful for the rules of the Parliament than other parties. Their presence legitimizes the assembly and allows them to be socialized within the rule of the parliament, being that socialization conscious or unconscious. Secondly, as Andeweg [19] shows, the tendency of many democracies is to go "beyond representation": in particular, the author describes the ex-post/ex-alto representativeness as the way parties choose to relate with representation. This ex-post/ex-alto positioning is due to the uncertainty about preferences of the electorate, the transformation of parties as para-statal agency, the unpredictability of the political agenda and the process of Europeanization. The ex-alto/ex-post representation, rather than transforming parties and the ruling elite in an unresponsive power, multiplies the channel through which elected members have to be accountable with: not only to the "people", but also to different actors from NGO, international and transnational actors to non-profits association and the mare magnum of the media. Populists, instead, focus its attention only to the responsiveness to the "people" – favoured in this judgment by the perceived opaqueness of the multi-level decision-making – failing to address other sources of accountability, which are more than ever since the end of the World War II. The first conclusion that can be drawn is that populism, rather than challenging the concept of political representation within mature poliarchies, rides the evolution of the representation to criticize the political *status quo*, without questioning the legitimacy of the political representation, being populist parties a more or less consistent part of the electoral market: populists fail to understand this evolution with regards to the authorization and accountability. Is populism, then, innocuous for the democracy? Not completely. Populism, as a matter of fact, is highly suspicious towards pluralism, seen as the dissemination of powers in different institutions. Since poliarchies are inevitably associated with "extensive organizational pluralism" [44], populist may advocate a reduction of the pluralist institution. Nonetheless, in mature poliarchies the price that a populist has to pay for the break of the constitutional equilibrium is too high. The sovereignty of people should be, in the populist view, the main source of legitimacy, so that other balancing institution should be submitted to the popular will. Once a populist party or a populist leader's action is undermined by other constraining institutions, the rhetoric used is that those institutions want to subvert the result of the elections. The Italian case, notably the behaviour of the former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi in front of his judiciary problem, is a good example. This distrust of other balancing powers created a tension in a weakly institutionalized country such as Italy; however, it did not lead to a rupture of the democratic order. Recalling Dahl, the cost for the suppression of the counter-balancing institutions was too high. Italy, moreover, is also a clear example that judicial power could be used by populist parties as a leverage to criticize the ruling elite. Northern League, Forza Italia and, more recently, the Italia dei Valori and the Five Stars Movement exploit the corruption cases of several parties' official to underpin the legitimacy of the parties' system. Although I tried to show my disagreement on a trenchant vision of the "pathological" trait of populism for the democracy, as Rosanvallon [24] do, I agree with the author that the right of scrutiny and criticism was transformed by populism in a "permanent stigmatization of the ruling authority". De-legitimating the political power, especially in that particular period of (political, economical, social) crisis may contribute to exasperate the electorate to the point that the authority is seen as inherently corrupted. Nonetheless, the perception that populists see the ruling authority as a "radically enemy" power is more a rhetoric tool than a reality. As I indicate previously, part of the ruling elite that populists so vehemently fight turned out to be a key ally, once the populist parties succeeded at the election. Strangely enough, or paradoxically to be more caustic, the rejection of pluralism and the perception of the (French) "people" as whole, for example, did not prevent the National Front to advocate for the re-introduction in the French system of proportional electoral law, that favours a more pluralistic representation of the electorate. In conclusion, the populist radical criticism of representative democracy puts pressure on representativeness as a whole, but it does not represent its greatest enemy. Even the harshest criticism to representative democracy that grew in the extreme right political spectrum can be considered, as Mudde argues [14] a "pathological normalcy". Apart from overtly fascist (and, for that reason) marginal parties, ERPs are well connected to mainstream ideas and much in tune with broadly shared mass attitudes and policy positions. The pathological normalcy thesis does not entail that the populist radical right is part of the mainstream of contemporary democratic societies. Rather, it holds that, ideologically and attitudinally, the populist radical right constitutes a radicalisation of mainstream views (ibid.). The radicalization of shared attitudes among voters has led populist parties to negatively judge any decision-making process/outcome of mainstream parties. However, as Rosanvallon [24] correctly puts it, negativity produces structural advantages because "it fully realizes its motivating intention. The result is indisputable, because it takes the form of a simple, intelligible act or decision". Negativity works for mainstream opposition parties as well as for populist parties. The former is a fully "constitutionalized" (and, sometime, "cartelized") opposition. The latter, beyond its effectiveness, is an *a priori* opposition that may challenge the legitimacy of the political *status quo*, but which is not a threat *to* mature polyarchic system or to the concept of political representation in mature polyarchies. What populism seems to express, finally, is a legitimizing disenchantment with representative democracy. Populists seem to delegitimize representativeness, while opposing to the split of the "people" in different electorates, but they accept this division and the rule of the representativeness that is implied.

Conclusion

In this paper I try to demonstrate that populism is not a radical challenge to the political representation in mature poliarchies. The definition of populism as a complementary ideology shows that it cannot be considered a full-fledged ideology. Rather, different parties from radical left to ERPs acquired the label populist. I find seven features that may describe a prototypical populist party. How populist parties have grown in the post II World War context is explained through three factors: the emergence of cartel parties, that allowed populist parties to be perceived as outsider with respect to the ruling elite; the labyrinth of complex international organisations that shifted part of the decision-making process from the level of the nation-state to supranational institutions and the personalization and mediatisation of the media. These three factors explain why populist movements are nowadays an institutionalised presence in the intra-party competition across Europe.

Using the biological metaphor of the parasite I showed that a populist dose not entail a threat to representativeness: albeit populism may exploit some features of the parasite, unlike parasites, populist parties have a mutual relationship with the regime in which they operate: as a consequence, mature poliarchies inevitably influence the way these party are socialized and the threshold of appropriateness that cannot be overcame in order to be perceived as a "legitimate" alternative in the parties' competition.

In my arguments, I do not consider populism as innocuous for representative democracies; however, mature poliarchies are still well equipped to absorb the populist challenge within their institutional arrangements.

Further researches are needed, nonetheless: firstly, it should be seen if mature poliarchies were transformed by populist parties in "something else", less pluralist or differently representative of the electorate. Moreover, a systematic analysis of the representativeness of populist parties and their evolution within different political systems would be very important to investigate whether different a "constitutional engineering" is more or less prone to be influenced by populist parties.

References

1. Amato, Giuliano (2002) "È il nuovo populismo la malattia della democrazia". La Repubblica.

2. Mudde, Cas (2004) "The Populist Zeitgeist". Government and Opposition 39(4): 542–563.

3. Albertazzi Daniele, McDonnell Duncan eds. (2008) Twenty-First Century Populism the Spectre of Western European Democracy, Palgrave MacMillian, New York.

4. Jost, John T, Federico Christopher M, Napier Jaime L (2009) "Political Ideology: Its Structure, Functions, and Elective Affinities". Annual Review of Psychology 60: 307-337.

5. Mudde Cas, Kaltwasser Cristobal R (2013) "Exclusionary vs. Inclusionary Populism: Comparing Contemporary Europe and Latin America". Government and Opposition 48(2): 147-174.

6. Taggart, Paul. (2000) Populism Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000.

7. Taguieff, Pierre André (2003) L'illusione populista. Milano: Bruno Mondadori.

8. Ignazi, Piero (2000) L'estrema destra in Europa. Bologna: Il Mulino.

9. Zaslove, Andrej (2008) "Here to Stay? Populism as a New Party Type". European Review 16(3): 319-336.

10. Decker Frank (2008) "Germany: Right-wing Populist Failures and Left-wing Success". In Twenty-First Century Populism the Spectre of Western European Democracy, Albertazzi Daniele and McDonnell Duncan eds. New York: Palgrave MacMillian 119-134.

11. McDonnell Duncan (2008) "The Republic of Ireland: The Dog that Hasn't Barked in the Night?" inTwenty-First Century Populism the Spectre of Western European Democracy, Albertazzi Daniele and McDonnell Duncan eds. New York: Palgrave MacMillian 198-216.

12. Fella Stefano (2008) "Britain: Imperial Legacies, Institutional Constraints, and New Political Opportunities" inTwenty-First Century Populism the Spectre of Western European Democracy, Albertazzi Daniele and McDonnell Duncan eds. New York: Palgrave MacMillian 181-197.

13. Andrews Geoff (2005) Un paese anormale. L'Italia di oggi raccontata da un cronista inglese. Monte Porzio Catone: EffePi Libri.

14. MuddeCas (2010) "The Populist Radical Right: A Pathological Normalcy". West European Politics 33(6): 1167-1186.

15. Katz Richard S, Mair Peter (2009) "The Cartel Party Thesis: A Restatement". Perspective on Politics 7(4):753-766.

16. Kirchheimer Otto (1966) "The Transformation of West European Party Systems", in Political Parties and Political Development, LaPalombara, Joseph and Weiner Myron, eds. Princeton: Princeton University Press: 177-200.

17. Katz Richard S, Mair Peter (1995) "Changing Models of Party Organization and Party Democracy. The Emergence of the Cartel Party". Party Politics 1(1):5-28.

18. Farrell David M, Kolodny Robin, Medevic Stephen (2001) "Parties and Campaign Professionals in a Digital Age: Political Consultants in the United States and Their Counterparts Overseas". The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics 6(4): 11-30.

19. Andeweg Rudy B (2003) Beyond representativeness? Trends in political representation, European Review 11(2): 147-161.

20. Crouch Colin (2003) Postdemocrazia, Bari:Laterza.

21. Poguntke Thomas, Webb Paul (2005) ThePresidentialization of Politics, A Comparative Study of Modern Democracies. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

22. Moravcsik Andrew (1994) "Why the European Community Strengthens the State: Domestic Politics and International Institutions". Center for European Studies Working Paper Series/52, Center for European Studies.

23. Fabbrini Sergio (2011) Addomesticare il Principe, Perché i leader contano e come controllarli. Venezia: Marsilio.

24. Rosanvallon Pierre (2008) Counter-Democracy, Politics in an Age of Distrust. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

25. Mazzoleni Giampietro, Schulz Winfried (1999) "Mediatization of Politics: A Challenge for Democracy". Political Communication 16: 247-261.

26. Tenscher Jens, Mykkänen Jury, Moring Tom (2012) "Modes of Professional Campaigning: A Four-Country Comparison in the European Parliamentary Elections, 2009". The International Journal of Press/Politics 17(2): 145-168.

27. MazzoleniGiampietro (2003) "The Media and the Growth of Neo-Populism in Contemporary Democracies", in The Media and Neo-populism: A Contemporary Comparative Analysis. MazzoleniGiampietro, Stewart Julianne, and Horsfield Bruce eds., Westport: Praeger Publisher: 1-20.

28. Meny, Yves, Surel, Yves (2000) Populismo e democrazia. Bologna: Il Mulino.

29. MazzoleniGiampietro (1996) "Patterns and Effects of Recent Changes in Electoral Campaigning in Italy", in Politics, Media and Modern Democracy, Swanson David L and Mancini Paolo. Westport: Praeger Publisher.

30. De La Torre Carlos (2010) Populist Seduction in Latin America. Ohio: Ohio University Press.

31. Stewart Julianne, Mazzoleni Giampietro, Horsfield Bruce (2003) "Conclusion: Power to the Managers", in The Media and Neo-populism: A Contemporary Comparative Analysis. Stewart Julianne, Mazzoleni Giampietro and Horsfield Bruce, Westport: Praeger Publisher: 217-238.

32. Campus Donatella (2010) "Mediatization and Personalization of Politics in Italy and France: The Cases of Berlusconi and Sarkozy". The International Journal of Press/Politics 15: 219-235.

33. Political leadership, parties and citizens: the personalisation of leadership (2009). Blondel, Jean, Thiebault Jean-Louis, Czernicka Katarzyna, InoguchiTakashi; PathmanandUkrist; Venturino Fulvio eds. New York: Routledge.

34. Grazia Diego (2011) The personalization of politics in Western democracies:

Causes and consequences on leader–follower relationships. The leadership quarterly 22: 697-709.

35. Rahat Gideon, Sheafer Tamir (2007) The Personalization(s) of Politics: Israel 1949-2003. Political Communication 24(1): 65-80.

36. Blais André (2011) Political Leaders and Democratic Elections. In Political Leaders and Democratic Elections, Aarts K, Blais A, Schmitt H eds. Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1-10.

37. Canovan, Margaret (1981) Populism. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

38. Urbinati Nadia (2014) The populist phenomenon. University of Chicago, Political Theory Workshop.

39. Derrida Jacques (1988) Limited Inc. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

40. Dahl Robert Alan (1972) Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition. Yale: Yale University Press.

41. Sartori Giovanni (1987) The Theory of Democracies Revisited. Chatham: Chatham House Publisher.

42. Pitkin Hanna F (1967) The Concept of Representation. Oakland: University of California Press.

43. Mair Peter (1998) Representation and participation in the changing world of party politics. European Review 6(2): 161-174.

44. Dahl Robert Alan (1978) Pluralism Revisited. Comparative Politics 10(2): 191-203.