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Populism: The Challenge to Liberal Democracy and the Process of Globalisation

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“THERE IS A DORMANT HUGO CHAVEZ OR SARAH PALIN INSIDE ALL OF US”.¹

INTRODUCTION

The debate over populism animates political philosophy and contemporary academia. Populism has emerged as both a political and normative phenomenon that is becoming increasingly widespread. There are several definitions of it, but as such, it remains an “essentially contested concept”.² The following Bachelor’s thesis aims to analyse populism and its actors: the populist leader, the “pure” people and the “corrupted” elite.³ *The main goal of the research questions listed below is to demonstrate a circular logic that argues that populism threatens democracy and its most contemporary evolution - liberal democracy – and that at the same time populism has grown as a consequence of economic globalisation, a process fostered mainly by liberal democracies. However, containing populism and safeguarding democracy is possible if globalisation is restructured in a saner way.*⁴ To do so, I will refer primarily to the existing literature such as William A. Galston (2018), who recently provided an extensive and elaborate account of liberalism and democracy.

Furthermore, I will elaborate on the link between populism and globalization by referring to the economist Dani Rodrik (2018) who highlighted how populism can be considered the political backlash of globalisation. Even though its nature is deeply diversified based on the political environment where it germinates, both right-wing and left-wing populisms are emerging generally as reactions to globalization shocks.

The arguments proposed refer also to authoritative references such as Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser (2017), Jan-Werner Müller (2017), and Benjamin Moffit

¹ Hawkins, Kirk. *Venezuela’s Chavismo and Populism in Comparative Perspective*. Cambridge University Press, 2010.

² Mudde, Cas, and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser. *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, 2017, p. 2. From now on, I will quote from this version of the book.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 6.

⁴ The conceptualization of democracy with its nuanced forms (liberal, illiberal, limited, without state, electoral, etc.) has been at the heart of the political debate with many controversial interpretations of democracy, like the ones by Giovanni Sartori or Amartya Sen. As written, this bachelor’s thesis will focus on the contemporary conceptualization of a particular form of democracy: liberal democracy.

(2020). By making some relevant examples, I demonstrate how populist leaders have eroded democratic dynamics either by proving incapable of governing or simply by not leading to the changes often promised. A couple of counterarguments to this claim are also presented by quoting some prominent authors such as Ernesto Laclau (2005) or the so-called popular “agency” approach.⁵

Finally, I analyse and investigate the solutions that the mentioned authors have proposed to reduce the negative impact of populism on democracies and to loosen the grip that populist leaders have on the “pure” people, while not curtailing economic globalisation but rather rethinking it in a more benign way.

The essential questions that must be addressed from both the empirical and normative points of view are:

- What is populism?
- What is the link between populism and liberal democracy?
- What is the impact of globalization on populism?
- What are remedies to eradicate or at least contain populism while avoiding curtailing globalization?

The thesis is articulated in four chapters and a conclusion. The first chapter addresses the first question, trying to demonstrate that it is complex to provide a single definition of populism. As Dani Rodrik writes:

Populism is a loose label that encompasses a diverse set of movements. (...) What all these share is an anti-establishment orientation.⁶

The anti-establishment attitude of populists toward what they label as the “corrupted” elite is analysed in-depth in the second chapter, which delves into the antithesis between populism and liberal democracy.

The third chapter focuses on link between globalisation and populism, aiming at pointing out that the latter is a direct outcome of the former. It also elaborates on the main consequences of the internationalisation of the world economy and the political arena.

⁵ Hicks, D. John. *Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmer's Alliance and the People's Party*. Greenwood Press, 1931.

⁶ Rodrik, Dani. “Populism and the economics of globalization.” *Journal International Business Policy*, vol. 1, n. 1-2, 2018, pp. 12–33, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s42214-018-0001-4>. From now on, I will quote from this version of the article.

Finally, chapter four discusses some solutions to deal effectively with populism and to protect society from its attacks. I attempt to show that globalization as such cannot be stopped. If populism is strictly related to it, different solutions must be developed.

All the reasonings advanced and the argument proposed include a normative debate that emphasizes the moral and value orientation that populists propose and shows that often the claims by populists prove to be ineffectively addressed once these reach positions of power. In conclusion, democracy affirms itself as the most effective form of government to guarantee the protection of rights and to include the broadest portion of society in the decision-making process, criticized by populists.

CHAPTER 1: DEFINING POPULISM

1.1. The Ancient Origins of the Term Populism

In 2011, in an article entitled “The non-European roots of the concept of populism” Tim Houwen discussed the origins of the term populism by emphasizing its secular roots.⁷ Houwen argues that populism is linked to a corollary of other crucial words and expressions, such as “people”, “democracy”, “elite” or the adjective “popular”. When addressing the issue of populism, there is a fervent tendency to express, one’s agreement or disagreement with it, i.e., scholars while defining populism are also expressing a judgement over the positiveness or negativity of the phenomenon.⁸ In short, determining what populism is, requires determining whether its presence has a positive or negative influence on the political environment within which it emerges. In Houwen’s words:

The word “people” has, however, an ambiguous meaning. On the one hand (...) this underclass posed a danger to public order and rationality of civilized society (...). On the other hand, the “people”, came to be identified as the holders of sovereignty.⁹

Nowadays, it is also impossible to detach the concept of populism from the idea of democracy. In particular, the birth of the term populism is associated with one of the oldest and most resilient democracies: the United States. The first literary source that mentions populism is related to the rise of the American People’s Party (APP) against the Republican and Democratic parties in the United States in 1892. John Donald Hicks narrates the legend of the origins of populism. He asserts that the term was coined by Judge W.F. Rightmire, among the leaders of the APP, as one of the people affiliated with the party complained that it took too long to introduce himself to other people.¹⁰

Understanding what populism is, and providing an organic definition which is agreed upon by the academia is particularly difficult. As Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser theorize (2017):

⁷ Houwen, Tim. “The non-European roots of the concept of populism.” *Sussex European Institute*, 2011, <https://studylib.es/doc/5578091/the-non-european-roots-of-the-concept-of-populism>.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p.6.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p.8.

¹⁰ Hicks, John D. *The Populist Revolt. A History of Farmers’ Alliance and the People’s Party*, pp. 237-240.

Part of the confusion stems from the fact that populism is a label seldom claimed by people or organizations themselves.¹¹

Overall, there are various interpretations which must be considered when discussing populism. For instance, Houwen proposes that populism is a “counter-concept” as it transforms the idea of the people, which becomes positively connotated, and the idea of the elite, which becomes negatively connotated.¹²

1.2. An Ideational Approach to Populism

Another interesting answer to the question “What is populism?” is provided exactly by Mudde and Kaltwasser. According to them, populism is:

A thin-centred ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic camps, the “pure people” versus the “corrupt elite,” and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people.¹³

On the one hand, Kaltwasser and Mudde agree with Houwen that populism deals with the antithesis between the people, which is here connotated by the adjective “pure”, and the elite, which becomes “corrupted”. On the other hand, Mudde and Kaltwasser move away from Houwen as they label populism as a “thin-centred ideology” (the ideational approach).¹⁴

I think that the idea of populism as a thin ideology renders better the malleability of the concept. As the volume “Populism: Its Meaning and National Characteristics” illustrates, there is not a single suitable definition of populism; rather the concept is differently nuanced based on the national or even regional dimension and location that it is analysed, i.e., it is likely that populism in Italy can be described and defined differently from populism in South America.¹⁵ To quote directly from Mudde and Kaltwasser:

¹¹ Mudde, Cas, and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser. *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*, p. 2.

¹² Houwen, Tim. *The non-European Roots of the concept of populism*, pp. 11-12.

¹³ Mudde, Cas, and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser. *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*, p. 6.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 5.

¹⁵ For further information see Ionescu, Ghita, and Ernst Gellner. *Populism: Its Meanings and National Characteristics*. Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969.

Populism must be understood as a kind of mental map through which individuals analyse and comprehend political reality.¹⁶

Given that there is not a single uniform and general political reality, but each political environment develops its own and is characterized by peculiar characteristics, typical behaviours by political actors, and distinct levels of participation, a universal definition of populism must be adaptable and suitable to these different realities.

The idea of a thin ideology can be contrasted to the one of a thick ideology. In the latter case, scholars refer to concepts that are fully self-standing such as socialism, nationalism, or liberalism, i.e., thick ideologies do not need to be attached/to be supported to another ideology to exist. Due to its practical inconsistency, populism is considered, from time to time, as a transitory phenomenon that can have two developments: either it leads to something more articulated or it simply fails, as for Perú with Alberto Fujimori or, more recently, Pedro Castillo.¹⁷

However, populism is different from clientelism. The two phenomena are often interchanged as both involve the concept of the people. Clientelist politics is characterized by an evident exchange between voters and politicians according to the equation: *votes = goods*. The voters are rewarded for their loyalty to a specific candidate through material goods or privileged access to services/employment. Clientelism must be considered as a “strategy”, while populism as an “ideology”.¹⁸ It would be a mistake to consider the two concepts as the two faces of the same coin. The recent example of the Five Stars Movement in Italy works as a good example: people were promised measures such as the *reddito di cittadinanza* (a social measure like a basic income) in exchange for their loyalty to the party. Still, clientelist techniques can be used by non-populist parties as well, even if they are often juxtaposed.¹⁹

¹⁶ Mudde, Cas, and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser. *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*, p. 6.

¹⁷ For further information see Briceno, Franklin, and Joshua Goodman. “Peru president’s power grab recalls country’s dark past.” *AP*, 2022, [Peru president's power grab recalls country's dark past | AP News](#), and Muñoz, Paula. “Latin America Erupts: Peru Goes Populist”. *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 32, no. 3, July 2021, pp. 48-62, [Latin America Erupts: Peru Goes Populist | Journal of Democracy](#).

¹⁸ Mudde, Cas, and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*, p. 8.

¹⁹ For further information see Petrini, Diego. “Reddito di cittadinanza diseducativo e clientelare. La scelta di campo di Renzi. L’asse con Salvini viene prima dei poveri”. *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, 2021, <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2021/07/13/reddito-di-cittadinanza-diseducativo-e-clientelare-la-scelta-di-campo-di-renzi-lasse-con-salvini-viene-prima-dei-poveri/6260047/>, and Sales, Isaia. “Perché il reddito di cittadinanza al Sud colpisce mafie e clientelismo”. *Zoomsud.it*,

To conclude, the core idea of the ideational approach devised by Mudde and Kaltwasser is that populism can be understood as an ideology, which however lacks the strength to stand on the same level as thick-centred ideologies. Thus, it is malleable and fluid as a discourse.

1.3. Populism as a “Set of Distinct Claims”²⁰

Jan-Werner Müller provides an alternative definition of populism. The German scholar defines it as follows:

I argue (...) it is a set of distinct claims and has what one might call an inner logic.²¹

This short conceptualization of populism as a “set of distinct claims” is however not straightforward. What Müller implies is that populism is characterized by an internal architecture that staunchly and fiercely opposes democracy. As he puts it:

Populism is not a useful corrective for a democracy that somehow has come to be too “elite-driven”.²²

Even though the populist logic may achieve short-term consensus, its claim that a “silent majority” can better display democracy than the set of elected representatives remains an illusion. That is why understanding populism, according to Müller, helps to understand the vulnerability of democracy and its shortcomings. Populism can also be understood as a “shadow” that constantly threatens liberal democracy and its institutional settings.²³

To summarize, the definition of populism is disputed, as demonstrated by the various interpretations proposed. Without a doubt, Mudde and Kaltwasser provide the definition, to a certain extent, which allows all the others to be accepted. By assuming that populism is a thin ideology that necessitates being juxtaposed with a thick one, they create the space for the acceptance of its various geographical and political forms due to its malleability. At the same time, Tim Houwen explains that there is not a single model of populism

2022, <https://www.zoomsud.it/index.php/politica/108615-perche-il-reddito-di-cittadinanza-al-sud-colpisce-mafie-e-clientelismo>.

²⁰ Müller, Jan-Werner. *What is Populism?* University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016, p. 13. From now on I will quote from this version of the book.

²¹ Ibidem.

²² Ibidem.

²³ Ibidem.

which exists without the presence of other crucial terms such as the people and the elites, which stand as the typical anthesis on which populist leaders build up their strength and political appeal. Finally, Müller adds that populism is a phenomenon that independently from its definition remains undemocratic.

1.4. The Relevance of Defining Populism

Whether finding a purely formal definition of populism matters or not when studying the phenomenon is also a dubious question. On the one hand, Alessandro Ferrara in his latest book “Sovereignty Across Generations” (2023), believes that despite the multifaceted nature of populism, academia must still attempt to provide a general theoretical framework within which populism is inscribed. In his words:

Complexity is no reason for theory to abdicate its role: the challenge is still entirely before us, to delimit our object, at least as an ideal type distinct from neighbouring phenomena.²⁴

On the other hand, William A. Galston argues that concentrating on the definition of populism implies the risk to end up with a dead-end. He believes that even though defining populism may be important from the academic point of view, there is no definition that encompasses a concrete analysis of the impact that populism has over liberal democracy.

Galston agrees with Müller on the negative connotation of the phenomenon, but as he writes it:

While definitions clarify our thinking, they cannot resolve the dispute over how great a threat populism poses to liberal democracy. We must turn to the facts on the ground, where one-size-fits-all theories cannot be applied effectively to every situation.²⁵

²⁴ Ferrara, Alessandro. *Sovereignty Across Generations*. OUP, 2023, Chapter 3, p. 63. From now on, I will quote from this version of the book.

²⁵ Galston, A. William. *Anti Pluralism: The Populist Threat to Liberal Democracy*. Yale University Press, 2018, pp. 41-42, PDF version [*William A. Galston - Anti-Pluralism The Populist Threat To Liberal Democracy-Yale University Press \(2018\).pdf](#). From now on, I will quote from this version of the book.

Galston's words minimize the importance of the conceptual and definitional debate over populism rather focusing on its practical applicability and compatibility with democracy.

The next sections of this chapter will be focused on the central actors of populism and provide some examples of how these actors interact and coalesce.

1.5. The “Pure” People versus the “Corrupted” Elite

Kaltwasser and Mudde observe that populists connotate the people with the adjective “pure”, while the elite with the adjective “corrupted”. Does this mean, however, that it is possible to have a “we” or “us” versus a “they” or “them”?

Starting with the concept of “people”, Kaltwasser and Mudde label the term a “construction”, and I agree with them.²⁶ The concept is in fact quite vague and abstract as such - it does not specify the common characteristics of those belonging to the people nor their shared goals and values. It seems like everybody, within a community, could be part of the people.

The people refer to groups of individuals that share a common identity and culture, and that can orientate their actions toward a common goal. Normally, the concept is combined by populists with three other concepts: “sovereignty”, “commune” and “nation”. The combinations originating shape three different concepts: “people as sovereign”, “common people” and “people as a nation”.²⁷

The concept of “people as sovereign” relies on the idea peculiar to democracy according to which the people are conceived:

As not only the ultimate source of political power but also as the rulers.²⁸

The formula followed by populists stems from the idea that even though democracy is installed to guarantee rights and freedoms, a gap between the governed and governors persists to a point that the people feel disenfranchised and become unable to directly influence the decision-making arena. One of the causes of for this gap to endure is the incapacity of the elites to represent the voters. It is such gap that gives the populists the

²⁶ Mudde Cas, and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser. *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*, p. 9.

²⁷ Ibidem.

²⁸ Ibidem, pp. 9-10.

willingness to “give back the government to the people.”²⁹ The example of the APP that Houwen uses to define populism³⁰ falls squarely into this category, as populists’ leaders start a struggle which aims at de-establishing institutions that appear ineffective and at the mercy of the elite.

On the contrary, when we talk about “the common people”, it allows a different kind of criticism by populists to the establishment. It is a struggle over dominant ideologies and beliefs:

The notion of common people vindicates the dignity and knowledge of groups who objectively or subjectively are being excluded from power due to their sociocultural and socioeconomic status.³¹

The attitude of populist leaders to reinvent political symbols and the political community to give the impression of a more inclusive *habitat* for the voters is often related to the conceptualization of “the common people”. An example is the one by Juan Peron in Argentina. The former President of Argentina attributed importance to social groups that were once marginalized or excluded from the political *agora*: the *descamisados* and the *cabecitas negras*.³² The main takeaway from the notion of “the common people” is that populists aim at epitomizing the lack of link and moral ties between the established elite, the voters and marginalized groups, whom they claim to represent and are willing to include in their political project.

Thirdly comes the idea of “people as a nation”. This last conceptualization binds together the ethnicity of the people and their cultural and shared values. It turns out that within each state there are communities that share the same foundational myths and the same ethnical descents. Therefore, the pure people would be those sharing the same “nativity”. But is it possible that within a single state there exists just one nation? I.e., that all the people have common origins and share the same habits? Mudde and Kaltwasser answer to the question:

²⁹ It is interesting to look at the idea of “giving back” and its role in democracy as discussed by Janna Malamud Smith in Smith, Janna M. “‘Giving Back’ Used To Be A Principle of Our Democracy. Can It Be Again?”. *WBUR*, 2018, [‘Giving Back’ Used To Be A Principle Of Our Democracy. Can It Be Again? | Cognoscenti \(wbur.org\)](https://www.wbur.org/cognoscenti/2018/07/12/giving-back-democracy).

³⁰ See Section 1.1.

³¹ Mudde, Cas, and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser. *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*, p. 9.

³² *Ibidem*, p. 10.

To equate “the people” with the population of an existing state has proven to be a complicated task, particularly because the different ethnic groups exist on the same territory.³³

There are several examples of multinational states: the USA, Canada, France, and Spain. It would be impossible to define within these states a superior community over the others, and quite unfair to enable that community only to be part of the political life. The idea of “people as a nation” contradicts, from what I can see, the principle of the majority, which is supported by populists. In a world that, as David Held proposes, is made up of “cosmopolitan democracies” characterized by multiculturalism and integration, it is hardly possible to think that most of the population of a state would also share the same national identity.³⁴

Additionally, Müller elaborates on the philosophical influences that have inspired populists’ appeals to the people. According to him, the German theorist Carl Schmitt, and the Italian philosopher Giovanni Gentile “served as a conceptual bridge from democracy to nondemocracy when they claimed that fascism could more faithfully realize and instantiate democratic ideals than democracy itself”.³⁵ If this is true, it turns out that the declinations of the people provided by populists are the bare outcome of an illusion. This illusion determines the fact that the people as a fully rounded concept “can never be grasped and represented”.³⁶ Müller refers to the French Revolution to clarify his point. During the revolutionary process aimed at overturning the absolute monarchy in mid-18th century France, the people became the “Yahweh of the French”. In the aftermath of the Revolution, Jacques-Louis David proposed to “erect a statue of the people on the Pont Neuf” made up of the rubbles of the royal monuments that had been demolished during the war. However, when defining who those people were, it became clear that the people as such is an “unrepresentable” concept.³⁷

³³ Ibidem, p. 11.

³⁴ For further information on the concept of cosmopolitan democracy see Held, David, “Cosmopolitan Democracy and the Global Order: Reflections on the 200th Anniversary of Kant’s ‘Perpetual Peace.’” *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, vol. 20, no. 4, 1995, pp. 415–29. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40644842>.

³⁵ Müller, Jan-Werner. *What is Populism?*, p. 24.

³⁶ Ibidem.

³⁷ Ibidem.

1.5.1. The “Corrupted” Elite

It is more complex to articulate an answer to the question: “Who is the elite?”

First, the elite can be said to be a group whose interests are morally opposed to the general will of the people. In addition, there can be different kinds of elites: social, cultural, economic, and political. The striking paradox is that even though it is often the case that populist leaders are in a position of leadership within one of these fields, they are not considering themselves as elitarian. Former U.S. President Donald Trump is an outstanding example. Before entering politics, Trump was a tycoon who played an influential position in the economic and media market of the United States. However, when deciding to run for president, he was perceived by the people as a new alternative, as his populism was “rooted in claims that he is an outsider to D.C. politics, a self-made billionaire leading an insurgency movement on behalf of ordinary Americans”.³⁸

Hence, the term elite is normally associated with those groups that hold power and ignore the interests of the people and/or sometimes are “working against the interest of the country”.³⁹ Populists claim that the elite also holds economic sovereignty. Even though the elite comes short of political support it can thus remain in power because of economic control. In Europe, the most outstanding example of this kind is found in the rise of former Greek President Alexis Tsipras. His coalition battled against the “economic establishment” that had led the country to a “destructive fiscal, sovereign debt and a political crisis”.⁴⁰

Economic circumstances are seen as an obstacle for the political ascendance of populist leaders. Both left-wing and right-wing populisms do associate the elite with economic sovereignty. The former, as for Bernie Sanders in the United States, demand more state intervention, larger welfare measures for the people and stricter taxation for the opulent minoritarian establishment.⁴¹ The latter emphasize the tendency of the elite to

³⁸ Inglehart, Ronald, and Pippa Norris. “Trump, Brexit, and the Rise of Populism: Economic Have-Nots and Cultural Backlash.” *HKS Faculty Research Working Paper Series*, n. RWP16-026, 2016, p.5, [RWP16-026_Norris \(2\).pdf](#).

³⁹ Mudde, Cas, and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser. *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*, p. 13.

⁴⁰ Markou, Grigos. “The systemic metamorphosis of Greece’s once radical left-wing SYRIZA party”. *OpenDemocracy*, 2021, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/rethinking-populism/the-systemic-metamorphosis-of-greeces-once-radical-left-wing-syriza-party/>.

⁴¹ For further information see Lacatus, Corina. “Populism and the 2016 American election: Evidence from official press releases and Twitter.” *PS: Political science & politics*, vol. 52, n.2, 2019, pp. 223-228, doi:10.1017/S104909651800183, and Stavrakakis, Yannis. “Discourse

favour the “special interests” over the “general interests”.⁴² In the United States the Tea Party, which emerged on the political scene as a populist party, considered bankers as being part of the elite. To its members, the free market, which is considered a pivotal pillar of the popular democracy that is advocated for, is corrupted by the activity of institutions such as the US Congress.⁴³

However, what happens when populist leaders rise to power: are not they building up the new elite? As Mudde and Kaltwasser argue:

Populist actors use a variety of secondary criteria to distinguish between themselves and the people and the elite. This provides them with flexibility which is particularly important when populists acquire political power.⁴⁴

Presidents Hugo Chavez in Venezuela and Vladimir Mečiar in Slovakia demonstrate that populist leaders can hold power for a long time if they can reconceptualize the elite. The main claim that these leaders hold is that if the people democratically elect them, then they are not part of the old-style establishment, and their power becomes fully legitimate. In “The Age of Reform: From Bryan to FDR”, Richard Hofstadter elaborates on the “paranoid style of politics”, i.e., the ability of populist leaders to carve out speeches that allow the people to perceive the establishment as corrupted and unfit to represent the popular will but then to perceive them, as non-part of the elite once in power.⁴⁵ Mudde and Kaltwasser talk about the “resourcefulness of the leaders”, and I believe that this is the most suitable way to underscore the ability of populist leaders to twist the perception of the establishment.⁴⁶

The concept of “the elite” has a larger extension than the one of “the people”. Populists adopt different strategies to make sure that they clearly emphasize the discordance and contrast between themselves and those in power, either because of economic reasons or because of institutional and cultural prejudices.

theory in populism research: Three challenges and a dilemma.” *Journal of Language and Politics*, vol. 16, n.4, 2017, pp. 523-534, doi:10.1075/jlp.17025.sta.

⁴² Mudde, Cas, and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser. *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*, p. 13.

⁴³ For further information on the Tea Party and its implication for populism see Russell, Mead Walter. “The Tea Party and American Foreign Policy: What Populism Means for Globalism.” *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 90, no. 2, 2011, pp. 28–44. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25800455>.

⁴⁴ Mudde, Cas, and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser. *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*, p. 14.

⁴⁵ Hofstadter, Richard. *The Age of Reform*. Vintage, 1960.

⁴⁶ Mudde, Cas, and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser. *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*.

1.5.2. The General Will

The concept of the “general will” (or *volonté générale*) shall also be addressed. To populists, the major disagreements between “the people” and “the elite,” concerns the understanding of how to enact the “general will”. As Kaltwasser and Mudde discuss, to grasp fully the essence of the concept of general will, it is essential to refer to Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s distinction between the “will of all” (*volonté de tous*) and the “general will” (*volonté générale*). The former means that, in a specific moment, the people can sum their interests, while the latter encompasses the idea of individuals joining a community and “legislating their common interests”.⁴⁷ Populist leaders claim to be able to ensure the protection and enforcement of the common interest of the people belonging to the same community. Jan-Werner Müller asserts that:

The populists can divine the proper will of the people on the basis of what it means, for instance, to be a “real American”.⁴⁸

To put it in Margaret Canovan’s words:

Populists should be enlightened enough to see what the general will is.⁴⁹

Both Müller and Canovan refer here to the capacity of populists to be perceived as “saviours” of the people and as true defenders and guarantors of their will. However, more than a proper *volonté générale*, the idea that populisms develop is the one of *volksgeist* (literally “the spirit of the people”). They rely on the creation of communities that are founded on a strong identity, independently from whether it is the most spread one.⁵⁰

In the populist claim over “the general will” there is also an explicit ambition to reach self-government, the ideal situation where “the people” exercise also the function of decision-makers. In chapter 2, I will reflect on Cristóbal Kaltwasser’s analysis of the so-

⁴⁷ Ibidem, p. 16.

⁴⁸ Müller, Jan-Werner. *What is Populism?*, p. 24.

⁴⁹ Canovan, Margaret. *The People*. Polity Press, 2005, p. 115.

⁵⁰ The German concept of *volksgeist* was first introduced by Johann Gottfried Herder in 1774 in an essay entitled “Auch Eine Philosophie der Geschichte”. However, in that essay, Herder resorted to expressions such as *National Geist* (National Spirit) or *Geist des Volkes* (People’s Spirit). It was Hegel in 1801 that coined anew the term. For further information see Mährlein, Christoph. *Volksgeist und Recht: Hegels Philosophie der Einheit und ihre Bedeutung in der Rechtswissenschaft*. Königshausen & Neumann, 2000.

called Dahl's democratic dilemmas to show that populists are fervently enthusiastic about the application of the "tyranny of the majority" during governmental decision-making processes.⁵¹

However, the outcome of populists in power is often far different from what their supporters expected. The idea of the general will, as expressed by populists is often linked to authoritarian developments at societal level. If respecting the general will means creating an ethnically and culturally exclusive community, it also means ghettoizing a portion of the population from the decision-making process of a state. Mudde and Kaltwasser argue that:

Because populism implies that the general will is not only transparent but also absolute, it can legitimize authoritarianism and illiberal attacks on anyone who (allegedly) threatens the homogeneity of the people.⁵²

The idea of homogeneity can be understood when looking at populist slogans such as the ones used by the Italian politician Matteo Salvini *Prima gli italiani* (literally "Italians first") or by Donald Trump "Make America Great Again".⁵³ In both cases, there is an attempt to shift the focus to the pure people and their general will. Behind these slogans, lies the wish to create a popular subject that can challenge the elite, representing the *status quo*. However, the people are not as homogenous or as authentic as populist leaders frame them. The risk run by populists is thus to create "anti-political utopias" that are characterized by the absence of dissonant voices.⁵⁴

1.6. The Populist Leader

There is wide agreement between scholars over the fact that populist leaders pretend to involve and convince the masses and the most popular sector of society that they are the only ones carrying the truth.

To this extent, Paul Taggart wrote that:

⁵¹ Kaltwasser, Cristóbal Rovira. "The Responses of Populism to Dahl's Democratic Dilemmas", *Political Studies*, vol. 62, n. 3, 2014, pp. 470-487, doi: 10.1111/1467-9248.12038.

⁵² Mudde, Cas, and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser. *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*, p. 18.

⁵³ Jan-Werner Müller proposes an interesting analysis of various slogans that have been used, in the European and American continents by populist leaders. Müller, Jan-Werner. *What is Populism?*, pp. 23, 27-28.

⁵⁴ Mudde, Cas, and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser. *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*, p. 19.

Populism requires the most extraordinary individuals to lead the most ordinary people.⁵⁵

Taggart synthesizes the figure of the populist leader. On the one hand, he or she emerges as a charismatic strongman that can mobilize the masses, as he or she claims to be the personification of the so-called *vox populi* (literally “the voice of the people”). Populist leaders need to emerge as representers of the *vox-populi* as they are those carrying on the struggle for the people against the corrupted elite. However, the idea of *vox populi* is artificial and merely rhetoric. On the one hand, it implies the deep connection between the leader and the people. On the other hand, it does also underscore the moral difference between the populist leaders and the elite.⁵⁶

An outstanding example of the anthesis between the personal commitment of the leader and his or her connection with the people is given by the slogan used by the Austrian far-right populist leader Heinz-Christian Strache *ER will, was WIR wollen* (literally “HE wants, what WE want”).⁵⁷ As Müller points out it is quite likely that the populist leader will exactly be the opposite of the ordinary.⁵⁸

Simultaneously, Mudde and Kaltwasser emphasize that conversely to other political and social phenomena where the leader is one of the many determinants for their success, the success of populism depends exclusively on the capacity of the leader to emerge and create an emotional bond with the people. Due to its varying nature populism allows for a diversification in the typologies of leader that take the lead of populist movements. be several types of leaders that emerge.⁵⁹

1.6.1. The Charismatic Strongmen

One of the most common types of leaders is the so-called charismatic strongman. The German sociologist Max Weber first elaborated on the idea of charismatic authority (almost a century before populism started to be studied worldwide). According to Weber, leaders that emerge due to their charisma, are gifted with outstanding qualities that are

⁵⁵ Taggart, Paul. *Populism*. Open University Press, 2000, opening citation.

⁵⁶ Mudde, Cas, and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser. *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*, p. 68.

⁵⁷ For further insights about the populist rhetoric see Wodak, Ruth. *The politics of fear: What right-wing populist discourses mean*. Sage, 2015.

⁵⁸ Müller, Jan-Werner. *What is Populism?*, pp. 27-30.

⁵⁹ Mudde, Cas and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser. *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*, p. 62.

widely shared by and with the people.⁶⁰ Charismatic leaders are also considered popular and strong, with the latter being a consequence of the former. Furthermore, they are often associated with heroism and revelation or virility. At the same time, Weber makes it clear that there is a strong connection between the charismatic authority and the people, but this connection is peculiar to each political reality. Hence, there cannot be a general definition of charisma, as it will depend on what each community believes to be fundamental attributes in the determination of a leader. In Latin America, the term *caudillo* specifically refers to strong leaders “who exercise power that is independent of any office and free of any constraint”.⁶¹ In Argentina, Juan Peron could have been considered as the example *par excellence* of a *caudillo*. He served his country under both authoritarian and democratic regimes and shifted from being a general to a civil politician operating for the interests of the Argentinian people.

A few other examples of charismatic populist leaders can be Silvio Berlusconi in Italy, Pim Fortuyn in the Netherlands, and Marine Le Pen in France. In particular, the former Italian President of the Council of Ministers has relied on the image of himself as a “real man” throughout his political career and has been nicknamed *Cavaliere* (the knight) because of the scandals that have been affecting his terms in office and private life. On the other hand, Fortuyn but also former Brazilian president Color de Mello are cases of leaders that achieved success even though they were not backed by solid organizations or particularly strong parties. Kaltwasser and Mudde discuss the reasons of these diversities:

When populists are leaders of well-organized political parties with a well-defined program, it is more difficult to establish whether support is based on loyalty to the party, support for the program, or a charismatic bond with the leader. Hence, when there is the lack of a resilient and already well-established political organization, it is more likely that support comes as the people perceive the populist leader as one of them. In this case we

⁶⁰ Max Weber’s conceptualization of the three types of authority: legal-rational, traditional, and charismatic is still considered one of the most authoritative references for the categorization of leaders across the world. Legal-rational authorities are those emerging during the process of bureaucratization of the state, while traditional authorities, of which examples can be monarchs such as Louis XIV or emperors like Napoleon, were considered to have a direct connection with God and their power was said to have been conceded divinely. Finally, charismatic authorities emerge often as outsiders. They are naturally gifted to thrive during periods of crisis because of their outstanding personal qualities. Weber, Max. *Politik als Beruf*. Reclam, 1992 [1919].

⁶¹ Mudde, Cas, and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser. *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*, p. 63.

talk about “Le Pen effect” or “Haider phenomenon”, to emphasize the ability of the leader to gather consensus and supporters.⁶²

When analysing these dynamics, Jan-Werner Müller asserts that:

Populists always want to cut out the middleman, so to speak, and to rely as little as possible on complex party organizations as intermediaries between citizens and politicians.⁶³

Populist leaders aim to *directly represent* the people without filters or mediation. The Five Star Movement in Italy grew out precisely from this dynamic. It originated from the blogs of Beppe Grillo. He is a former comedian, who used his blog to create direct contact with the Italian people and expressed his feelings and emotions toward the political situation in Italy.⁶⁴ The role of media is also particularly important when analysing populist leaders’ behaviours. Donald Trump is the most popular and mentioned example of the interaction between media and populism. Before, throughout, and after his presidency, Trump always adopted wild strategies to convey his messages on social platforms such as Twitter or Instagram. As Müller underscores, Trump defined himself as the “Hemingway of 140 characters”.⁶⁵ After the 2020 elections, conspiracy theories over fraud claims and rigged elections, which have been recently dismissed by the United States House Select Committee on the January 6 Attack, started to circulate on Instagram, Facebook and Twitter and were widely supported and stirred by Trump himself.⁶⁶

⁶² Ibidem, p. 67.

⁶³ Müller, Jan-Werner. *What is Populism?*, p. 28.

⁶⁴ Ibidem. It is interesting and paradoxical to notice how the Five Star Movement utilizes an online platform called “Rousseau” to enable its members to express their preferences when crucial decisions internal to the movement must be taken. For a further analysis of the Rousseau Platform and Grillo’s blog see “Tutti i voti su Rousseau. Ecco che cos’è la piattaforma del M5S.” *La Repubblica*, 2021, [Piattaforma Rousseau: cos’è il principale strumento del M5S - la Repubblica](#). Mosca, Lorenzo, and Filippo Tronconi. “Beyond left and right: the eclectic populism of the Five Star Movement”. *West European Politics*, vol. 42, n.6, 2019, pp. 1258-1283, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2019.1596691>.

⁶⁵ Müller, Jan-Werner. *What is Populism?*, p. 29.

⁶⁶ For further discussions over the use of media by populist leaders see “Populist Leaders Thrive on Social Medi.” *Demos*, 2020, [Populist Leaders Thrive on Social Media | DEMOS - Democratic Efficacy and the Varieties of Populism in Europe \(demos-h2020.eu\)](#), and Postill, John. “Populism and social media: a global perspective.” *Media, Culture & Society*, vol. 40, n.5, 2018, pp. 754-765, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443718772186>. To better understand Trump’s populist attitude, see Kazin, Michael. “Trump and American Populism: Old Whine, New

Several biases are influencing both populist leaders and voters. Horowitz *et al.* (2014) have studied that leaders' past experiences such as troubled childhood, involvement in mass protests or revolutionary movements and/or in the army, make them often more sensitive to the idea of mobilizing the people.⁶⁷ The field of behavioural psychology demonstrates that media users are often victims of the so-called confirmation bias, i.e., they are constantly exposed on social media to information that confirms their ideas.⁶⁸

Marine Le Pen is an example of the capacity of a populist charismatic leader to create a broad coalition of heterogeneous parties that hold together to win elections. The fact that Marine Le Pen leads a "front" rather than a party, as her Front National (FN) is called, symbolizes that she "stands for the whole" rather than for a "part of the people" as mainstream parties normally do.⁶⁹ But the leader of the French Front National is an interesting case of a populist leader also because she is a woman. On the contrary to what it can be argued, populist women are many: Sarah Palin in the United States, Pia Kjaersgaard in Denmark, and Pauline Hanson in Australia. The most renowned and notorious populist woman leader was however Eva Peron in Argentina. Her actions alongside her husband Juan Peron have initiated the social movement known as Peronism. Woman leaders provide the image of "self-made" women that have achieved success by their own. Mudde and Kaltwasser highlight the importance of gender in populism, as the

Bottles." *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 95, no. 6, 2016, pp. 17–24. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43948377>, and Campani, Giovanna, Fabelo Concepción, Sunamis, Rodriguez Soler, Angel and Claudia Sánchez Savín. "The Rise of Donald Trump Right-Wing Populism in the United States: Middle American Radicalism and Anti-Immigration Discourse." *Societies*, vol. 12, n.6, 2022, p. 154, <https://doi.org/10.3390/soc12060154>. To overview the role of the House Select Committee see "The Jan. 6 Capitol Attack: Inquiries and Fallout." *New York Times*, series of articles, 2023, [The Jan. 6 Capitol Attack: Inquiries and Fallout - The New York Times \(nytimes.com\)](https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/06/us/politics/jan-6-capitol-attack-inquiries-and-fallout.html).

⁶⁷ Horowitz, Michael C., and Allan C. Starn. "How Prior Military Experience Influences the Future Militarized Behavior of Leaders." *International Organization*, vol. 68, no. 3, 2014, pp. 527–59. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43282118>. (Last access 11/01/2023). For an in-depth analysis of echo chambers on Facebook see: Quattrociocchi, Walter, Scala, Antonio and Cass R. Sunstein. "Echo Chambers on Facebook". *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2016, doi:10.2139/ssrn.2795110.

⁶⁸ For an analysis of the impact of the confirmation bias over people see Nickerson, S. Raymond. "Confirmation bias: A ubiquitous phenomenon in many guises." *Review of general psychology*, vol. 2, n. 2, 1998, pp. 175-220, [nickersonConfirmationBias.pdf \(ucsd.edu\)](https://www.psychologytoday.com/webdav/users/nickerson/ConfirmationBias.pdf), and Del Vicario, Michela, et al. "Modeling confirmation bias and polarization." *Scientific Reports*, vol. 7, n. 1, 2017, pp. 1-9, <https://doi.org/10.1038/srep40391>.

⁶⁹ Müller, Jan-Werner. *What is Populism?*, p. 30.

very fact of being women grants them the status of outsiders.⁷⁰ Most of the elite is generally male-dominated and women represent an alternative to “the ‘good-ol’ boys”. Furthermore, women leaders often characterize themselves as protective mothers connected to their territory of provenance. The former Alaskan governor Sarah Palin coined terms such as “grizzly mother” or “hockey mom” to emphasize the stereotype of a proud Alaskan mother.⁷¹ Women as populist leaders are all but rare. Their strength is to create a maternal connection with the people that they claim to represent, often defined as “their children”, and to reach a consensus because they provide an outsider alternative to the male-dominant narrative of the elite.

To summarize, *contemporary populism is characterized by the presence of charismatic strongmen that are seen as particularly able to thrive during a crisis, to go against the pieces of advice of the experts and to take drastic decisions to enforce the general will of the people due to their extraordinary personal qualities.* Because the perception of the people of individual qualities changes from territory to territory, charisma cannot be defined as a monistic concept.

1.6.2. Entrepreneurs as Populist Leaders

Another kind of populist leader is the entrepreneur. Both Silvio Berlusconi and Donald Trump are leaders that fall into this category too, as before their political ascendance they belonged to the richest portion of the population. The very fact of being entrepreneurs, not involved in the political scenario, makes them the perfect outsiders fitting into the demand side of the people. They do not have any need to participate in the political arena to profit, but they are perceived as personalities willing to “make the effort” to ensure that the general will is respected. Mudde and Kaltwasser underscore the alleged impossibility

⁷⁰ Mudde, Cas, and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser. *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*, p. 70. See also Mudde, Cas, and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, “Vox Populi or Vox Masculini? Populism and Gender in Northern Europe and South America”. *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 49 n. 1-2, 201, pp. 16-36, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0031322X.2015.1014197>.

⁷¹ For an understanding of the terminology used by Sarah Palin see: <https://politicaldictionary.com/words/mama-grizzlies/> and <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-11310773>. For an overview of the importance of populism in Sarah Palin’s campaign see Mudde, Cas, and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser. “Populism and (liberal) democracy: a framework for analysis”, in Mudde, Cas, and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser (editors). *Populism in Europe and the Americas: Threat or corrective for democracy*. Cambridge University Press, 2012, [9781107023857_excerpt.pdf \(cambridge.org\)](https://doi.org/10.1017/9781107023857_excerpt.pdf).

for entrepreneurs to create a connection with the people, as their lifestyle seems at odds with the ordinary life conducted by the people.⁷² However, as often they have been acclaimed due to their successful involvement in the sports industry, as for Berlusconi with A.C. Milan, it turns out that it is for them almost spontaneous to be perceived as one of the people.

1.6.3. Ethnic Leaders and “Insiders-Outsiders”⁷³

Finally, other two types of populist leaders must be also mentioned. The first type are ethnic leaders. Chapter 2 will explore the definition of “ethnopolitism”, but generally, ethnic leaders rely on their “nativism” to create a fracture with the elite, which is labelled as “alien” to the cultural and ethnic reality of a state, as in the case of Evo Morales in Bolivia.⁷⁴

On the other hand, the second type of leader is the “insider-outsider”. In this fourth case, populist leaders create a demarcation line between the “pure” people and the “corrupted” elite by claiming that they are entering politics “by a higher calling” rather than to foster personal ambitions or desires. They come from the same socioeconomic domain as the members of the elite. Within this “insider-outsider” domain there are three subdomains of leaders. They can be just “outsiders”, even though it is a quite rare phenomenon that only in a few cases such as the one of Fujimori and Chavez has proved successful. Fujimori had an academic background and represented the Japanese minority resident in Perú, while Chavez belonged to the Venezuelan army. Otherwise, populist leaders can also be “insiders”, as they come from the contested elite. The only case that is worth noting is the one of the Thai leader Thaksin Shinawatra that was appointed twice as Vice Prime Minister before founding his populist party. Finally, and this is also the most probabilistic case, populist leaders belonging to the “insider-outsider” category can be “insider-outsiders”, i.e., “they have never been members of the political inner circle of the political regime” but are linked to it. Sarah Palin is an example. She entered the political arena under the tutelage of Senator John McCain although not playing substantial

⁷² Mudd, Cas, and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser. *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*, p. 71.

⁷³ *Ibidem*, p. 73.

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 72. For more information on the issue of ethnopolitism see Madrid, Raúl. “The Rise of Ethnopolitism in Latin America”. *World Politics*, vol. 60, n.3, 2008, pp. 475-508, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40060205>.

governmental roles. Similarly, also Corneliu Vadim Tudor, who led the Greater Romania Party (PRM) can be mentioned, as he had worked as a poet under Nicolae Ceaușescu.⁷⁵

1.7. Conclusions

A further and last definition of populism as “politics for ordinary people by extraordinary leaders who construct ordinary profiles” can be proposed.⁷⁶ It conciliates the figure of the leader with one of the people.

Populist leaders can personalize the political environment independently from where they come from. They can be members of the elite, have connections within the elite, or be perfect strangers that enter for the first time the political arena. The core principle that is common to all populist leaders is the concept of *vox populi*, which enables them to be perceived as representatives of the general will of the people against the corrupted elite. On the one hand, male leaders often rely on their charisma and virility, while female leaders stick more to the conservative image of the mother that is connected to the territory and can defend the interests of their “children” – the people. Mudde and Kaltwasser point out that based on the social structure peculiar to each political community:

Traditional cultures will favour inherited female (and male) populist leaders, while emancipated societies will (also) be open to self-made female leaders.⁷⁷

Fundamental, is also the host or thick ideology that is embraced by the populist leader during his or her political activity. As the ideational approach presented at the beginning of the chapter proposes, populism is a thin ideology that necessitates a host ideology to which to be anchored. For instance, there is a straightforward association that links entrepreneurs to neoliberal values while ethnic leaders to socialism.⁷⁸

Even though the image of political outsiders is often unrealistic, due to their out-of-the-ordinary qualities, populist leaders ensure that their ascendance and extraneity to

⁷⁵ Ibidem, pp. 73-76. See also Mudde, Cas, and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser. “Populism and Political Leadership” in Rhodes, R. A. W, and Paul t’ Hart (editors). *The Oxford Handbook of Political Leadership*. Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 376-388.

⁷⁶ Taggart, Paul. *Populism*. Open University Press, 2000. Quoted in Mudde, Cas, and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*, p. 62

⁷⁷ Ibidem, p. 77.

⁷⁸ Ibidem.

politics is perceived by the people as a benefit rather than a deficit. Müller asserts that “a sense of direct connection and communication has to be there” for the voters to endorse populist leaders.

To conclude, it is important to underscore again the importance of symbolism in populism. The populist rhetoric is constellated by words such as “front”, “pure”, “corrupted”, “people”, and “establishment”. All these terms together are important as they provide the “correct symbolic representation” of the populist leader and his or her antithetical attitude toward the political caste. Hence, politicians are perceived as a hegemonic social group rather than an “arbiter of conflicts between groups,” while populist leaders are providing a simplification of political life. Due to their innate communicative skills, they can ensure more legitimacy to governmental decisions and adopt sharp communicative strategies on social media.⁷⁹

However, the causal link between anti-elitarian resentment and the rise of populism is not so easy to be proved. According to Alessandro Ferrara, the major risk in considering such link as a crucial vector for populist movements is to obscure the “specifically political message” raised by populism, which rather focuses on reinstating the people “full constitutional power”.⁸⁰ It is counterproductive to just associate populism with the indictment of the elites due to their incapacity to meet interests, needs and the will of the electorate.

⁷⁹ The triadic relationship between populist leaders, the people, and the elite could be reinterpreted under the sociological lens by referring to Isaac Ariail Reed’s recent book “Power in Modernity”. Reed proposes an analysis of power which draws on a triad composed by “the rector” (the authority), “the actors” (the agents of the rector) and “others” (those excluded by the rector). Under this perspective, the populist leaders would emerge as rectors, as they are the holders of agency, the people would work as actors of the leaders as they provide legitimacy to his or her actions and decisions, and the elite would equate others. In fact, “the elite” is seen in a bad light and the main vocation of populist leaders is to overturn the establishment. As Ernest Kantorowicz proposes in *The King’s Two Bodies*, the main reference for Reed’s books, it could be said that the populist leader, *alias* the rector, develops a tautological duality. On the one hand, his or her physical body provides the concretization of his or her words and actions. On the other hand, his or her spirit is what pervades the minds of “the people” and ensures support. Reed, Isaac Ariail. *Power in Modernity: Agency, Relations, and the Creative Destruction of the King’s Two Bodies*. The University of Chicago Press, 2020, Chapters 1, 2, 5, 8. I am deeply grateful to Professor Isaac Ariail Reed and Professor Lorenzo Sabetta for pointing me out this interesting analogy.

⁸⁰ Ferrara, Alessandro. *Sovereignty Across Generations*, Chapter 3, p. 65.

In “Trump, Brexit, and the Rise of Populism: Economic Have-Nots and Cultural Backlash”, Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris summarize numerous studies on populism by pointing out the main elements, that populist leaders challenge:

(i) The institutional rules of the game regulating the market for party competition (...)
(ii) the supply-side strategic appeals of party leaders and political parties (...) when deciding to emphasize either ideological or populists appeals within this institutional context; and or, (iii) the demand-side of voter’s attitudes, values, and opinion.⁸¹

Based on the definitions of populism which have been discussed in this chapter, the next parts of the thesis elaborate on Inglehart’s and Norris’ findings to develop an analysis of why and how populism is intertwined with democracy and its contemporary development, liberal democracy. I present some arguments in favour of populism to structure a detailed and complete overview of the dissonant academic voices that are part in the debate over populism.

⁸¹ Inglehart, Ronald, and Pippa Norris. “Trump, Brexit, and the Rise of Populism: Economic Have-Nots and Cultural Backlash”, pp. 9-10.

CHAPTER 2: POPULISM AS A THREAT TO LIBERAL DEMOCRACY

Democracy is a model which is born to near perfection in terms of equality of citizens, responsiveness of governments and social stability. Populist leaders claim that however the current forms of democracy can become exclusionary, by leaving behind the lowest and most popular sectors of society. According to populists, this process takes place due to the selfish attitude of the elite, that is mostly interested in defending its privileges and causes, rather than enhancing the interests of the people. Decisions which are held democratically turn out to be thus in discordance with the original definition of democracy, which assumes full equality and representativity among the citizens.

2.1. What is Democracy?

Robert Dahl's "Polyarchy: Participation and opposition" (1971) discusses the fundamental grounds of democracy. Dahl formulates a procedural definition of democracy. To him there are four minimal requisites that a system needs to possess to be classified as democratic: free and fair elections, a multi-party system, alternative media sources and universal suffrage.⁸² If only one of these four components is lacking, then a state cannot be classified as a democracy, or to be more pertinent, as a polyarchy. According to Dahl, *democracy is an ideal type that has not been replicated anywhere in the world*, thus being only approximated through precise institutional arrangements. The process to achieve a polyarchy starts from what Dahl calls a closed-hegemony system.⁸³ Around the preconditions of democracy, there is a normative debate which precedes the

⁸² This definition was then expanded by Dahl in *Democracy and its Critics* (1989) to identify five criteria essential to democracy: effective participation, voting equality, enlightened understanding, control of the agenda and the inclusion of adult residents who enjoy citizenship rights.

⁸³ For further clarifications see Dahl, Robert. *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*, Yale Press University, 1972. In the book Dahl envisages two possible intermediate steps or alternatives to polyarchy: inclusive hegemonies and competitive oligarchies: the former being characterized by prominent levels of inclusiveness and low participation, while the latter presenting quite prominent levels of participation but exceptionally low inclusiveness. To a certain extent a parallel between these two archetypes and what Rouquié (1975) and O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986) define as *democratura* or hard democracy can be made, as both cases present only a few of the minimal requisites of democracy while lacking either in the guarantee of rights or in the state functioning/rule of law enforcement.

procedural debate on whether it would be more proper to use in general, and not only when referring to Dahl's studies, the term polyarchy rather than democracy.⁸⁴

Regarding equality, Dahl presupposes that the equality of people must be intended as each vote counts equally and as the responsiveness of the government (the politics) to the demand of the people (the polity). The division between politics, policy and polity is also at the root of David Easton's elaboration of a political system.⁸⁵ Schmitter and Karl in "What Democracy Is ... And What Is Not" elaborate on the importance of accountability. To them, a system is democratic if:

Rulers are held accountable for their actions in the public domain by citizens acting indirectly through the competition and cooperation of their elected representatives.⁸⁶

Schmitter and Karl add a third dimension to accountability and to the equality of votes: citizenship. The debate on citizenship would disorient the reader, and it is essential to limit the discussion by saying that nowadays several discussions on citizenship are ongoing to determine who should be entitled to political rights within a community (the so-called "boundary problem").⁸⁷

Furthermore, Dahl argues that there are further complementary requirements that need to be enforced in a democratic state: people must have the right to formulate preferences through the concession of basic freedoms such as freedom of expression, of voting, of support, and of organization, freedom to signify these preferences being eligible for public office, and to have preferences weighted equally.

2.2. The "Tyranny of the Majority" and Direct Democracy

The fact that in democracy preferences are weighted equally opens a debate concerning the problem of the "tyranny of the majority". The first to discuss this term was Nicolas

⁸⁴ For simplicity, this thesis will consider the terms "polyarchy" and "democracy" as interchangeable.

⁸⁵ For further information see Easton, David. "An Approach to the Analysis of Political Systems". *World Politics*, Vol. 9, No. 3, 1957, pp. 383-400, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2008920?origin=JSTOR-pdf>.

⁸⁶ Schmitter, C. Philippe, and Terry Lyn Karl. "What Democracy Is ... and Is Not." *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 2, n. 3, 1991, <https://www.ned.org/docs/Philippe-C-Schmitter-and-Terry-Lynn-Karl-What-Democracy-is-and-Is-Not.pdf>.

⁸⁷ For further clarification on the boundary problem and its implications in contemporary societies see: Tanasoca, Ana. *The Ethics of Multiple Citizenship*. Cambridge University Press, 2018, pp. 112-13.

de Condorcet, who postulated that theorem known as Condorcet's paradox (1785), which was then extended and reformulated by Kenneth Arrow's General Impossibility theorem (1951). According to Condorcet, *voters' preferences are perfectly consistent and transitive when singularly taken, but when these preferences are aggregated, both characteristics are lost, so that preference aggregation becomes particularly difficult.*⁸⁸ Therefore, from a rational point of view, majority ruling is not always the winning or most strategic decision. Political rationality, i.e., making the choice that maximizes the outcome and minimizes the costs, does not always entail siding with the preferences of the majority. Arrow went then a step further by illustrating that "clear order of preferences cannot be determined while adhering to mandatory principles of fair voting procedures".⁸⁹

2.2.1. Why are Referenda Used by Populists?

To this extent, Pierre Rosanvallon argues for the idea that populist leaders ignore both Condorcet and Arrow's findings, as they aim at achieving a more direct form of democracy. At the beginning of his recent book "The Populist Century: History, Theory and Critique", Rosanvallon discusses referenda, tools on which populists are often vocal. Rosanvallon argues that referenda "do not meet the range of expectations projected onto this instrument"⁹⁰, as often citizens are not capable of exerting any concrete intervention in the political decision-making sphere nor do referenda compensate for the deficit of political participation which is experienced in modern democracies.

Jan-Werner Müller offers an interpretation of the growing demand for referenda by populist leaders. According to him, the inefficiency of this instrument is due to the purpose that populists' leaders want to make of it:

⁸⁸ For a modern evaluation of the empirical relevance of the Condorcet Paradox see Van Deemen, Adrian. "On the Empirical Relevance of Condorcet's Paradox." *Public Choice*, vol. 158, no. 3-4, 2014, pp. 311–30, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24507602>.

⁸⁹ Liberto, Daniel. "Arrow's Impossibility Theorem Definition". *Investopedia*, 30th June 2023, <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/a/arrows-impossibility-theorem.asp#:~:text=Key%20Takeaways-,Arrow's%20impossibility%20theorem%20is%20a%20social%2Dchoice%20paradox%20illustrating%20the,principles%20of%20fair%20voting%20procedures>.

⁹⁰ Cunha, Diego, and Paulo Henrique Paschoeto Cassimiro. "Populism as a model of "polarized democracy: Pierre Rosanvallon's theory of populism in contemporary debate". *Sociologias*, year 24, n. 59, January-April 2022, p. 224, <https://doi.org/10.1590/15174522-106783en>.

The referendum serves to ratify what the populist leader has already discerned to be the genuine popular interest as a matter of identity, not as a matter of aggregating empirically verifiable interests.⁹¹

Populists do not use referenda to empower the people but to justify predetermined choices. Müller's interpretation is important because it provides a different answer to the antithesis between the elite and the people than the one proposed in chapter 1. As Müller argues, if populists hold the position of elite or representatives of the people, representation and elitism are not anymore, an issue. The real difference lies in the conceptualization of elite that they provide. As for the examples of Silvio Berlusconi in Italy or Christoph Blocher in Switzerland, they allegedly claim to be part of a "proper" elite which "executes the people's unambiguously articulated political agenda".⁹²

Mudde and Kaltwasser refer to Alberto Fujimori's Peru and Rafael Correa's Ecuador as examples of the necessity of populist leaders to enforce mechanisms typical of direct democracies such as referenda. Both leaders have undertaken a process of deep constitutional reformation followed by referenda.⁹³

These examples justify the idea that it is possible to understand populism as promoting institutions and mechanisms that "enable the construction of the presumed general will". Populism relies on the idea of "common sense," i.e., it relies on the dissatisfaction of the people to create a common enemy to then detach to this enemy by meeting the increasing popular demand for instruments of direct decision-making. At the same time, however, *these instruments such as plebiscites or referenda are not used to legislate or enact the popular will, but simply to ensure that the populist leader's decisions are perceived as popular.* The paradox is that of "populism without participation".⁹⁴

On the one hand, the people are only passively called into action to legitimize the populist leaders' actions. On the other hand, populist leaders are not interested in providing the people with the actual possibility of accessing the decision-making arena.

The problem of participation is deeply analysed and studied by Bernard Manin. According to him, the democratic system has evolved toward a model of "audience

⁹¹ Müller, Jan-Werner. *What is Populism?*, p. 25.

⁹² Ibidem.

⁹³ Mudde, Cas, and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser. *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*, pp. 81, 84-85.

⁹⁴ Müller, Jan-Werner. *What is Populism?*, p. 25.

democracy” which relies on a more qualitative relationship between the representative and the voters, characterized by lower turnout and higher mediatization of politics.⁹⁵

2.3. Dahl’s Dilemmas

Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser lays out from the conceptualization of democracy by Dahl two core dilemmas that populists exploit in their attempt to overturn the establishment.⁹⁶ The first one is what Kaltwasser calls the “boundary problem”, while the second one consists in the “limits of self-government”.

2.3.1. The First Dilemma: The Boundary Problem

The boundary problem deals with one of the pivotal points to both democratic theorists and populists: determining who is included in the people. According to Dahl, the people include “all adults members of the association except transients and persons proved to be mentally defective”.⁹⁷ However, as Kaltwasser argues, this principle, which is also known as the “all-subjected principle”, can be disputed both normatively and empirically. On the one hand, the idea that boundaries define who can participate in the decision-making process underestimates diasporas and foreigners. Diasporas’ members are not entitled to participate in their country of origin’s politics because of their residency abroad, and the latter because do not hold citizenship. Populists’ responses to this first dilemma can be retraced in the definition of populism and of the people that were theorized in chapter 1. The people are those “pure” as they share the same “ethnos”. This first definition is strictly linked to the idea of imagined communities by Benedict Anderson. The people are considered sharing those common ethnical, racial, and cultural attributes that contribute to forming national communities. Such conceptualization creates problems of discrimination toward what Mann defines as “out-groups”⁹⁸, and the additional problem that if each community sharing ethno-national characteristics must be considered as an independent state, then there would be many and potentially overlapping states, as people may be part of more than one ethnical community. The second definition of the people

⁹⁵ Manin, Bernard. *The Principles of Representative Government (Themes in Social Sciences)*. Cambridge University Press, 1997, Chapter 6.

⁹⁶ Kaltwasser, R. Cristóbal. “The Responses of Populism to Dahl’s Democratic Dilemmas”.

⁹⁷ Dahl, Robert. *Democracy and its Critics*. Yale University Press, 1989, p. 129.

⁹⁸ Mann, Micheal. *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing*. Cambridge University Press, 2005.

by populists takes on the idea of “plebs,” i.e., “it makes all inhabitants of the governed territory members of the people”.⁹⁹

2.3.2. The Second Dilemma: The Limits of Self-Government

Turning to the second dilemma, the limits of self-government, Kaltwasser underlines here that Dahl is concerned with the potential discordance between constitutionalism and popular sovereignty. On the one hand, democracies need “independent and unelected institutions” that safeguard the rights of the individuals. On the other hand, these institutions may not work properly “when it comes to the people’s capacity to monitor their functioning and enact the popular will”.¹⁰⁰ This problem is particularly evident when constitutional courts are taken into consideration. As Dahl argues, they are “quasi-guardians” that control, and often struck down, policies adopted by elected bodies such as parliament and the executive. However, as for the US Supreme Court, the judges that are part of it can have a strong political endeavor and be influenced by it when making decisions.

Moreover, there is another limit to self-government, the “paradox of constitutionalism”. Initially underscored by Dahl and then developed in-depth by Loughlin and Walker, the paradox of constitutionalism assumes that constitutions are the outcome of the bargaining process between political forces. Once a constitution is adopted, even if it entails an institutional architecture which proves to function properly, the people should still have “the ability to play an active role in (re-founding) and updating the higher legal norms”¹⁰¹, but in many “democratic” governments the process of popular ratification is downplayed.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Kaltwasser, R. Cristóbal. “The Responses of Populism to Dahl’s Democratic Dilemmas”, p. 480.

¹⁰⁰ Ibidem, p. 475.

¹⁰¹ Kaltwasser, R. Cristóbal. “The Responses of Populism to Dahl’s Democratic Dilemmas”, p. 475. See also Loughlin, Martin, and Neil Walker. *The Paradox of Constitutionalism: Constituent Power and Constitutional Form*. Oxford University Press, 2007.

¹⁰² Jürgen Habermas holds a different view on the matter. According to his *co-originality* thesis, it is always possible for people to “refer to the texts and decisions of the founders and their descendants, in a critical fashion” as the rule of law is created in harmony with the principle of popular sovereignty. However, as discussed at the beginning in the chapter, populists do not believe in the harmonic synthesis between constitutional form and power as they hold that popular sovereignty is constrained and limited by institutions. Furthermore, as Kaltwasser argues, there is a problem of consistency in Habermas’ theorization. In fact, as extreme right-wing activism in Europe or terrorist organization in the Middle East demonstrate, it is also true

According to Kaltwasser, the response that populists offer to the second dilemma is ambiguous. It depends on whether they believe that the constitutional framework underlying a state was enforced to defend the elite or not. In the former case, when the constitution is perceived as a stalwart of the interests of the establishment, then populist leaders and parties are willing to introduce and support modifications to it. Such modifications can be either expressed through amendments or through reforms “to develop new institutions which can enact the popular will”. In the latter case, if the founding legal document is considered as having been written in the interest of the people, populists make perceive that the establishment is displaying the institutions set up by the constitution to guarantee the inscribed rights and freedoms, attempting to preserve the system of “check and balances” in a personalized way, rather than ensuring their proper functioning. Thus “those who belong to the pure people, should be in charge of the independent institutions”.¹⁰³

2.4. Ethnocratic Populism

Populist parties defend the principle of majority, and often they do so by attempting to create what Cas Mudde has defined as an “ethnocracy”.¹⁰⁴ The concept of ethnocracy is prevalently associated with the concept of “nativism”.¹⁰⁵ Ethnocracies are models that aim at reaching monoculturalism, that are characterized by a dominant ethnic group that holds control over the state and subsequently subordinates other ethnicities and minorities to its laws and coercion. As briefly presented in chapter 1, ethnocratic populism’s claims are embodied in the image of an ethnic leader, who can mobilize groups which share an

that often not even fundamental rights entrenched in a constitutional text are perceived as co-decided, but as an “arbitrary imposition that constrains the people’s capacity to vote.” Habermas, Jurgen. “Constitutional Democracy: A Paradoxical Union of Contradictory Principles?” *Political Theory*, vol. 29, n.6, pp. 766-81 (emphasis in original), quoted in Kaltwasser, R. Cristóbal. “The Responses of Populism to Dahl’s Democratic Dilemmas, *Political Studies*,” pp. 476-77.

¹⁰³ Kaltwasser, R. Cristóbal. “The Responses of Populism to Dahl’s Democratic Dilemmas”, p. 481. For a deeper analysis of the “check and balances” system see La Porta, Rafael, et. al. “Judicial checks and balances.” *Journal of Political Economy*, vol. 112, n. 2, 2004, pp. 445-470, [judicial_checks.pdf \(harvard.edu\)](#), and Greene, S. Abner. “Checks and balances in an era of presidential lawmaking.” *The University of Chicago Law Review*, vol. 61, 1994, p. 123, [Checks and Balances in an Era of Presidential Lawmaking \(uchicago.edu\)](#).

¹⁰⁴ Mudde, Cas. *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*. Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 138-157.

¹⁰⁵ The concept of nativism will be discussed further and more in-depth in chapter 3.

intense sense of common ethnicity and use it as evidence to mark their distance from “the corrupted elite”. The former Bolivian president Evo Morales fits well into this category. He became the first Indigenous president in the history of the South American state. Morales made of ethnicity a tool to defend its authentic vocation, differently from the previous leaders of Bolivia, who were mostly Europeans. He comes, in fact, from the Aymara group, that after the Quechua, is the largest Indigenous group in Bolivia. His slogan “We Indians are Latin America’s moral reserve” underscores that Morales’ response to the establishment relied on emotionality and feelings too, aiming at creating a connection with the common people.¹⁰⁶ Nonetheless, the clearest example of ethnocracy was South Africa during Apartheid. The legal and moral systems were constructed to ensure the dominance of the “white” minoritarian group over the “black” or “coloured” majority. However, it is possible to identify ethnocratic societies also in Europe. On the one hand, the most evident example comes from the Republic of Estonia. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and its independence, the parties holding power in Estonia, the Isamaa and the Estonian National Independence Party, enforced a set of anti-Russian measures, such as the so-called “citizenship law”, aimed at delegitimizing and disenfranchising the Russian-speaking population from both the social and political life. In Mudde’s view also Germany can be defined as an ethnocracy. Before adopting a less restrictive *ius soli*, it enforced a rigid policy to access citizenship, based on the *ius sanguinis* principle.¹⁰⁷ It is not a case that populist leaders adopt these measures to contrast multiculturalism, which however is becoming the dominant social reality of contemporaneity.

2.4.1. The Institutional Attack and Euro Skepticism

The populist attitude to attack institutions that are perceived as protecting the interests of the elite, or not ensuring the enactment of the majority principle, is becoming more frequent but also more aggressive, as the recent episodes of the 2021 January 6 United States Capitol Hill’s riots or the 2023 January 8 Brazilian Congress’ attack

¹⁰⁶ Mudde, Cas, and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser. *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*, pp. 72, 73.

¹⁰⁷ Mudde, Cas. *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*, pp. 143-144. See also Melvin, J. Neil. *The Politics of National Minority Participation in Post-Communist Europe: State-Building, Democracy and Ethnic Mobilization*. Routledge, 2000, pp. 129-166.

demonstrate. Even though the international community immediately condemned those events, they still represented an attack to the heart of democratic institutions, and as such, made clearer to the world that populism's force cannot be underestimated. The fact that people are not accepting electoral results, which are recognized as one of the four main minimal requirements for democracies in Dahl's theoretical formulation, makes evident that populisms have far more consensus and grip than expected.¹⁰⁸

It must also be said that another set of institutions that populists are consistently challenging is the European Union (EU). The EU is perceived as an agent imposing constraints and coercion over the will of the majority. As the so-called subsidiarity principle enshrined in the Treaty on the European Union (TEU) emphasizes, there are areas of decision-making which are now exclusively upheld by the European Union institutions. Mudde points out to Estonia when he addresses the issue of loss of national sovereignty. There, the right-wing conservative party, the Estonian Independence Party, is particularly known for its anti-EU and anti-NATO positions. Nonetheless, the most recent example of a populist attack and victory over the European Union is represented by Brexit. The United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) led by Nigel Farage obtained in 2018 a landmark achievement for populism around Europe. After a referendum conceded by the former UK's Prime Minister David Cameron, the British people were called to decide whether to stay or leave the European Union. Thanks to a particularly shrewd campaign against the EU, the UKIP managed to obtain a shocking success (from a Union perspective), which has led to the activation of article 50 of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU) with the United Kingdom officially abandoning the European Union at midnight on the 31st of January 2020.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ There are some interesting articles to deepen the understanding of the chronology and importance of the attacks against democratic institutions in the United States and Brazil. See "Capitol riots timeline: What happened on 6 January 2021?". *BBC*, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-56004916>, Duignan, Brian. "January 6 U.S. Capitol attack." *Britannica*, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/event/United-States-Capitol-attack-of-2021>, and Meredith, Sam. "'A cowardly and vile attack': Over 400 arrested after Bolsonaro supporters storm Brazil's Congress.", *CNBC*, 2023, <https://www.cnbc.com/2023/01/09/over-400-arrested-after-bolsonaro-supporters-storm-brazils-congress.html>.

¹⁰⁹ A digital version of article 50 TEU is available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:12012M050>. Mudde, Cas, and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser. *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*, pp. 94. Mudde, Cas. *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*, pp. 164-65.

2.5. Liberal Democracy: A Minimal Definition

In 2018, William A. Galston elaborated on the foundations of liberal democratic theory:

This type of political order rests on the republican principle, takes constitutional form, and incorporates the civic egalitarianism and majoritarian principles of democracy. At the same time, it accepts and enforces the liberal principle that the legitimate scope of public power is limited, which entails some constraints on or divergences from majoritarian decision-making.¹¹⁰

Galston extracts four main principles which must be analysed in depth. The first one is the *republican principle*. Galston refers to it as the sovereignty of the people. Broadly speaking, sovereignty is a concept which began to spread across Europe in 1648 with the Westphalian Peace Treaty. However, at the time, it had a much more a sort of “statal” connotation, i.e., it referred to the sovereignty of the states, as newly born sources of authority, through the principle of the *superiorem non recognoscem*.¹¹¹ Therefore, sovereignty was initially referring to the fact that no authority could exist above the one of the states. On the contrary, Galston argues for the sovereignty of the people; those individuals who belong to a defined territory, are bound to it by law, and in democracies, enjoy both civil, social, political, and economic rights and duties. The American Declaration of Independence provides a useful analytical framework to summarize Galston’s point of view:

Governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Galston, A. William. “The Populist Challenge to Liberal Democracy”. *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 29, n. 2, p. 10, available at: <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-populist-challenge-to-liberal-democracy/>.

¹¹¹ This principle affirms that there is no superior authority to one of the states given the absence of a world government. Limitations of sovereignty have occurred since 1945, when the UDHR issued by the UN placed under constraint the legitimacy of the rulers for the first time.

¹¹² For a transcribed version of the original Declaration of Independence of the United States of America see “Declaration of Independence: A Transcription.” *National Archives*, [Declaration of Independence: A Transcription | National Archives](#).

Therefore, liberal democracy entails an essential principle that *whatever rule of law coerces the people, and whatever initiative is conducted by rulers or governors, it must be accepted and legitimized by the people through consent.*

Second, comes the *democratic principle*. Galston recuperates what has been widely discussed about democracy in the previous sections of the chapter as he assesses that:

Democracy, at the most basic levels, requires both the equality of all citizens and broadly inclusive citizenship [...] the other key pillar of democratic governance is majority rule.

When compared to the discussion about majoritarian rule and its potential risk, Galston provides a different analysis of the majority:

[...] Public decisions are made by popular majorities of citizens whose votes count equally and democratic decision-making extends to a maximally wide range of public matters.

Galston envisages a model which assumes a sort of libertarian-direct democracy. As he writes:

There is nothing undemocratic about majoritarian decisions that systematically disadvantage specific individuals and groups or invade private rights.

Galston makes an interesting point: the strength of the willingness of populists to achieve full control of the people over political life could be seen as a justification of populist claims. *If people are politically entitled but elitarian decisions systematically prove disadvantageous for them, then the people may start feeling disenfranchised.*

Turning to the third principle at the core of liberal democracy described by Galston, it is the *constitutional principle*. Constitutionalism is important because it creates the basis upon which liberalism emerges.¹¹³ Constitutionalism works as a limit to the activity of

¹¹³ An interesting article about this debate is written by Hedling, Nora. "The Fundamentals of a Constitution.", *IDEA*, 2016, [The Fundamentals of a Constitution \(constitutionnet.org\)](https://constitutionnet.org). To this extent, it is also worth noticing the debate around the Indian constitution, one of the few states to have a constitutional document described as mixed. See also Ambedkar, A. R. B., "Indian Constitution is rigid as well as flexible". Do you agree with this statement? Justify your views along with suitable examples". *Universal Group of Institutions*, <https://universalinstitutions.com/indian-constitution-is-rigid-as-well-as-flexible-do-you-agree-with-this-statement-justify-your-views-along-with-suitable-examples/>.

government, to the guarantee of basic rights and duties of the citizens, and it includes the rules as well on how to modify the constitutional text of a state. There exists a horizontal or vertical separation of powers, as in the case of the United States, making it impossible for one of the three governmental branches (judiciary, executive and legislative) to take over the others. In the former case, a typical way of referring to it is the “check and balances system”¹¹⁴, while an example of the latter may be federalism, which encompasses multi-levels of authorities. In Galston’s words:

Constitutionalism, denotes a basic, enduring structure of formal institutional power, typically but not always codified in writing [...] constitutions also establish the boundaries for the institutions that wield it.

When considering liberal democracies, importance must be attributed to *liberal constitutionalism*. Liberal democracies place constraints over public power, restrict the power of action of each branch of the state.

Interestingly, the United States Declaration of Independence allows for populist legitimization of the Constitution:

We the People of the United States [...] do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.¹¹⁵

The reported passage clarifies the distance between the will of the elites and the will of the people. The latter is what has made it possible to write and adopt the document as such; whereas, if it were for the elite, the document would not have been ratified. And exactly because the people accepted the Constitution as it was drafted, then it is regarded as a legitimate one.

2.5.1. Populism as a Positive Response to Early Democratization

Since the entrance into force of a constitution marks the beginning of democracy then Mudde and Kaltwasser are right when writing:

¹¹⁴ For further information read Madison, James. *Federalist 47 (1788) and Federalist 51 (1788)*. *Library of Congress*, <https://guides.loc.gov/federalist-papers/text-41-50#s-lg-box-wrapper-25493412>.

¹¹⁵ For a transcript of the US Constitution please look at “The Constitution of the United States: A Transcription”. *National Archives*, <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution-transcript>.

During the first stage of liberalization¹¹⁶(...) populism tends to be, *grosso modo*, a positive force for democracy. Because it helps articulate the demand for popular sovereignty and majority rule.¹¹⁷

Therefore, when the constitutional pillar is intended as a stalwart to popular sovereignty and the protection of the popular majority, it could even be assessed that populism contributes positively to its strengthening as it fosters the enactment of such majority. Populism could even be said to support democratic transition. It advocates for the idea of rulers' election as in the case of the Mexican Party of the Democratic Revolution.¹¹⁸

2.5.2. Laclau's Defence of Populism

The understanding of populism as an integrant part of the process of democratization is what Ernesto Laclau and the "popular agency approach" argue for.¹¹⁹

Scholars supporting the latter theories, see populism as a positive phenomenon that allows the mobilization of the people aimed at transforming liberal democracy into a communitarian democracy.¹²⁰ An example of this approach comes from the American People's Party analysed by the already mentioned Tim Houwen. Its attempt to mobilize the most rural and popular sectors of the US in the late 19th century was part of the broader attempt to create a more inclusive democracy.¹²¹

¹¹⁶ The map provided by Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017) describes the process of democratization and of de-democratization. In the case of full authoritarianism (FA), democracy is reached through two middle steps: competitive authoritarianism (CA) and electoral democracy (ED). In the first stage (from FA to CA), populism has a positive impact on the process of liberalization, and so it has in the second stage (from CA to ED), even though it is more ambiguous. It is during the third and final stage (from ED to full-fledged democracy) that populism takes a negative attitude. Mudde, Cas, and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser. *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*, p. 87.

¹¹⁷ An outstanding example of the proactivity of populism was the Polish movement of Solidarity which brought Lech Walesa to power after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990. Its leaders agreed on the need to abandon communism but were deeply divided on what future road to embrace. Thus, some of them founded populist parties. Mudde, Cas, and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser. *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*, pp. 88-89.

¹¹⁸ To know more about the PRD, see "Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas". *Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Cuauhtemoc-Cardenas-Solorzano>.

¹¹⁹ Gorup, Michael. "Populism, political organization, and the paradox of popular agency." *Constellations*, vol. 28, n.4, 2021, pp. 522-536, doi:10.1111/1467-8675.12594.

¹²⁰ Mudde, Cas, and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser. *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*, p. 3.

¹²¹ Houwen, Tim. *The non-European Roots of the concept of populism*, pp. 8-12.

On the contrary, the “Laclauan” school is born with the philosopher Ernesto Laclau.¹²² Laclau argues for the positivity of populism as “an emancipatory force to achieve liberal democracies, as it integrates people usually excluded into the political system”.¹²³ Laclau and its successors such as Chantal Mouffe, believe that populism is not only capable of creating the preconditions for a more inclusive expression of democracy but that by doing so it also includes people that are normally marginalized. It would be interesting to question Laclau on whether populists could revise the concept of citizenship and how so. Normally populism is quite hostile toward migration fluxes and external interferences, thus the question of larger inclusivity may be challenged by some modern examples as the parties of the Brothers of Italy or Le Front National in France; that are vocal on securitising borders.¹²⁴ It is also true that Laclau does not accept populism as a doctrine. He is quite sceptical about its pertinence with the democratic environment for its ways to gather consensus. However, Laclau believes that although its impact on pre-existing institutions is largely undisputed, also the contribution that populism brings in terms of including marginalized social sectors into the decision-making arena should be considered with more attention.

2.5.3. Rosanvallon’s Attack to Populism

On the other hand, Pierre Rosanvallon comes in support of the fundamental antithesis between liberal democracy and populism. To the French scholar, populism is a tool devised to achieve illiberal democracies, as for Hungary or Poland, through the imposition of limitations on the fundamental rights of the citizens, applied in the name of the will of the people.¹²⁵ Rosanvallon argues that: “the disruption that populism brings has not been assessed yet with any degree of accuracy”.¹²⁶ Populism is not a phenomenon that brings up any kind of emancipatory force, but rather it relies on the people to create a more direct form of democracy which is bound together through emotions and feelings.

¹²² Mudde, Cas, and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser. *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*, p. 3.

¹²³ Laclau, Ernesto. “Populism: What’s in a Name?.” *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*, vol. 48, 2005, pp. 1-14, [Populism What’s in a name.doc \(live.com\)](https://www.oxfordjournals.org/doi/pdf/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199730112/0130001).

¹²⁴ For further information see: Austin, Nelson. “The Rise of Neo-Nationalism and the Front National in France.” *Seattle University Undergraduate Research Journal*, vol. 4, n. 14, 2020, <https://scholarworks.seattleu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1136&context=suurj>.

¹²⁵ Rosanvallon, Pierre. *The Populist Century: history, theory, critique*. Polity Press, 2021.

¹²⁶ *Ibidem*, p.1.

The clearest example is the demand that often populist leaders have for more political involvement through referenda.

Rosanvallon moves a normative criticism to populism too. It accuses it to pretend that its leaders are the only ones bringing light to truths and morals, while the surrounding environment is solely characterized by immorality and evil. However, this is not the case, and populist leaders must recur to lies that confuse the people and the political debate.

To conclude, it is vital to mention the other three approaches that negatively evaluate populism. The first one deals with its conceptualization as a “political strategy”.¹²⁷ In South America, young generations trust charismatic leaders that can rely on unmediated support and maintain a direct connection with them, aiming at gaining power in the shortest period possible. This is considered a quite weak definition as it implies the short durability of the phenomenon, or at least the fast interchange of different leaders.¹²⁸ Secondly, there comes what I shall label the “folkloristic approach”.¹²⁹ Mudde and Kaltwasser write that this approach relies on folklore. Leaders recur to traditions, habits and customs which are typically linked to their country while often adopting disrespectful behaviours toward minorities and inappropriate and minatory language to refer to those groups.

By disrespecting the dress code and language manners, populist actors can present themselves not only as different and novel but also as courageous leaders who stand with the people in opposition to the elite.

All in all, the minimum contribution that populism has during the earliest stages of democratization is immediately suppressed by its attitude throughout the last and most fundamental phase to enforce liberal democracy: democratic deepening. This phase corresponds to the moment in which the development of liberal democracy, as a full-fledged system, is achieved. To understand why this is the case there is the need to introduce the central idea of the *liberal principle* as explained by Galston:

Recognizing and protecting a sphere beyond the rightful reach of government in which individuals can enjoy independence and privacy.

¹²⁷ Kaltwasser, Cristóbal Rovira and others (editors). *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*. Oxford University Press, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198803560.001.0001>, chapter 3.

¹²⁸ Mudde, Cas, and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser. *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*, p. 4.

¹²⁹ *Ibidem*.

Galston initially differentiates between the idea of liberty for the “ancients” and for the “moderns” by referring to Benjamin Constant. In the former case, liberty gravitated around the idea of self-government as for Greek polis. However, due to the increasing size of modern communities, cities, and states¹³⁰, this path is now impracticable. Hence, it is solely possible for contemporary societies to ensure that citizens are free to elect their representatives through elections, but most importantly, to ensure that the government is excluded from a determined set of domains ranging from economy to religion, from society, and culture, which remain to the exclusive control and handling of the people. To this extent, populism may agree with the formulation of the liberal principle. What is missing is the fact that populism rejects the constraint that majorities have about minorities:

All liberal democracies are characterized by institutions that aim to protect fundamental rights to avoid the emergence of the tyranny of the majority.¹³¹

Nonetheless, populism and the liberal principle clash on the fact that to the former nothing should limit the majority.

2.6. Populism is Part of Democracy but it is Not Democratic

So far, I demonstrated that populism is deeply rooted in democracies. As much as Laclau and the popular agency approach defend its capacity not to be anti-democratic but solely anti-liberal, I analysed a wide range of reasons why populism “exploits the tensions inherent to liberal democracy”, and while claiming to be the most straightforward road toward majority rule (democratic legitimization), it evolves into illiberal democracy.¹³² As Rosanvallon argued, despite populism seems to foster the idea of direct democracy, in reality, populist movements are quite in agreement with elections and representative institutions. Rather, *they pretend that those institutions are in the hands of the wrong elite and rely on the struggle to give them back to the people.*

The point is: does this mean that populism is fully democratic by accepting electoral results and the institutional frameworks of the societies where it emerges?

¹³⁰ Constant, Benjamin. “The Spirit of Conquest and Usurpation and Their Relation to European Civilization,” in Fontana, Biancamaria (editor). *Political Writings*. Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 102.

¹³¹ Mudde, Cas, and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser. *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*, p. 87.

¹³² *Ibidem*, p. 88.

There is no reason to locate, along an imaginary scale ranging from fully-fledged democracy to totalitarianism, populism, and extremisms such as fascism on the same side. However, such conclusion does not mean that populism is an integrant part of democracy. It is not sufficient to accept electoral results (a factor which, as witnessed in the US Presidential Elections of 2020, is also sometimes missing) to let populism follow democracy.

Populists still tend to “curtail rights and reduce the independence of the judiciary, and intimidation of the press and opponents”. All these attitudes together are a violation of the pillars of liberal democracy proposed by Galston but also a challenge toward a “just and stable society” that avoids oppression of citizens who do not hold the majority at elections, thus breaching the core of democracy as discussed before through Dahl’s axioms. However, Alessandro Ferrara pushes the debate even further by assessing that by looking at the behaviours by populist leaders, populism could be considered as the “closest approximation to fascism from within the democratic horizon”.¹³³ Populists fall short of democratic requirements even if they accept electoral results and “by grounding their legitimacy to rule in election victories and legal change, occupy the turf of democrats who can’t quite figure out what is wrong with this procedure”.¹³⁴

2.7. Considerations at Odds

In this section, I propose an original interpretation of the problem between populism and liberal democracy. Starting from the principles of justice discussed by John Rawls in “A Theory of Justice” (1971), I shall propose different versions of democracy that may be more suitable to populists. Furthermore, I will also elaborate more on the concept of symbolism in Section 2.7.2 by drawing a comparison with the writings of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu.

2.7.1. Liberalism and Populism

To override the problem of actual entitlement and lack of democratic belonging as highlighted by populists, two considerations need to be drawn out. The first one deals with the question of whether populism as such would favour or not a model of democracy

¹³³ Ferrara, Alessandro. *Sovereignty Across Generations*, chapter 3, p. 71.

¹³⁴ Scheppele, L. Kim. ‘The Opportunism of Populists and the Defense of Constitutional Liberalism.’ *German Law Journal*, vol. 20, n. 3, 2019, pp. 330–31, doi:10.1017/glj.2019.25.

as the one described by John Rawls in *Theory of Justice* (1971). The idea of “property-owning democracy” elaborated by the American scholar relies on the two principles of justice:

Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive scheme of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar scheme of liberties for others.

Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both (a) reasonably expected to be to everyone’s advantage, and (b) attached to positions and offices open to all.¹³⁵

The two principles, which are ordered by priority with liberty coming first, equality second and welfare and efficiency last, could limit the space of manoeuvre for populist discourses. In fact, in a democracy where efficiency is left behind in favour of inalienable liberties, that are guaranteed by the fact that people are endowed by the state with the resources and opportunities needed to fully use their freedom, and where the principle of the *maximum minimorum* (maximin) is applied; i.e. where the elite placed behind the veil of ignorance chooses as ideal initial situation for the creation of a state the one which disadvantages less those suffering of a natural unfavourable condition, leaders would radically be perceived as much more disinterested to their advantage and people would feel less dispossessed and disenfranchised.¹³⁶ Hence, the initial hypothesis of populism prospering in a “property-owning democracy” logically falls short.

However, alongside Habermas, Rawls in his “Political Liberalism” (1993) elaborates on the differences between the “public forum” and the “background culture”.¹³⁷ The former represents the core of the polity: the institutional architecture of a democracy composed of the classical tripartite distinction of powers: legislative, executive and judiciary. The latter is a freer domain where public opinion is formed. According to

¹³⁵ Rawls, John. *A Theory of Justice*. Harvard University Press, 1999, p. 53.

¹³⁶ For more information on the concepts of *maximin* and veil of ignorance see Maffettone, Sebastiano. *Rawls: An Introduction*. Polity Press, 2010, chapters 3,4 and 5. See also, O’Neill, Martin, and Thad Williamson. *Property-Owning Democracy: Rawls and Beyond*. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2014.

¹³⁷ Contrary to Rawls, Jurgen Habermas defines the first arena as the “strong public”, while the second arena is called the “public sphere”. See Rawls, John, *Political Liberalism*, Columbia University Press, 2005, p. 220, and Habermas, Jurgen. *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, The MIT Press, 1998, pp. 306-308, and Habermas, Jurgen, Religion in the Public Sphere”. *European Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 14, n. 1, pp. 1-25, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0378.2006.00241.x>.

Rawls, some basic standards of civility apply to the second arena, such as tolerance, virtue, and acceptance of the burdens of judgment.

Starting from this basic distinction, the two philosophers elaborate on two degrees of democratization that populist leaders may reach: hollowed-out and enfeebled democracy. The first type relies strongly on Ferrara's principle of "presumptively justified intolerance"¹³⁸: demonizing opponents and demolishing the public forum. The demonization process hits last the judiciary, but most importantly it focuses on how the more formal arena acts (it degenerates into a public space). To quote Ackerman and Rosanvallon, hollowed-out democracies may be intended as "governments by emergency" or "democracies of interaction" where the populist leader is perceived, as discussed in chapter 1, as the messiah who can communicate exclusively with the electorate (alias the people) and can save the state in an emergency, which is created by the leader.¹³⁹

On the other hand, enfeebled democracies lead to structural changes at the level of background culture. Communication becomes intolerance and the goal pursued here by populists is the polarization of the social sphere, which however does not affect primarily the public forum that remains untouched or slightly modified without losing its standards of civility advocated by Rawls. An evident example of the latter was the tenure that Italian politics endured during Berlusconi's four governments between 1994 and 2011. The *Cavaliere* created populist rhetoric that transformed his political struggle into a struggle against "communists" coming from other parties.

To summarise, liberalism sets three aspects that are recurrent in populism: *the people are conflated with the electorate*, implying that the will of the people exactly matches the will of the voters. Secondly, *the result of the equation between people and the electorate consists of the electorate being attributed full constituent power*. Finally, *populist leaders accept only one "legitimate interpretation of the general interest of the people", according to the "presumptively justified intolerance" against dissonant voices*.

¹³⁸ See Ferrara, Alessandro. *Sovereignty Across Generations*. Chapter 3, pp. 66-70.

¹³⁹ For further information read Rosanvallon, Pierre. "A Reflection on Populism". *Books and Ideas*, Dossier: Democracy—Bridging the Representation Gap, 2011, p.2, [20111110_populism \(laviedesidees.fr\)](http://laviedesidees.fr), and Ackerman, Bruce. *The Decline and Fall of the American Republic*. Harvard University Press, 2010, pp. 73–75.

Populism rejects pluralism. As for Italy in 2021, where the two major populist parties were the League and the Five Star Movement. The rejection of “alternative voices” to the ones of the populist leaders can create a conundrum where the “pure” people find themselves both ruling and opposing the government. Hence, populism may lead to the “ubiquity of the people”.

Müller in “The People Must Be Extracted” (2014), admitted that:

What populism necessarily must deny is any kind of pluralism or social division [...] is only the people on one hand and, on the other hand, the illegitimate intruders into our politics [...] there can be no such thing as a legitimate opposition.¹⁴⁰

Populists admit only one conception of the good. Therefore, the illiberal model argues for the cessation of the political arena as a place where different ideas and opinions come across and are debated, by suppressing “the intermediate layers between the rank and file and the populist leader”.¹⁴¹

It looks like *the people can be reduced to a political subject holding the agency for the enacting of the constitution within a determined territory*. Furthermore, right-wing populisms do accentuate that the people may be a synonym of “nation”, sharing the same cultural and historical characteristics.¹⁴²

Alessandro Ferrara debates that populism could be considered “post-liberalism” in so far as it is understood as grounded on the idea of a fully constituent electorate which not only allows to raise constitutional points (amendment or changes to the actual written or unwritten document to bring it back to resembling its original spirit) but also to “entirely revise” the constitution.¹⁴³ Naturally, when understanding the meaning of “constituent power” as already presented by Rousseau and Sieyès, it is important to broaden the definition to the very general capacity to start a new political order.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁰ Müller, Jan-Werner. “The People Must Be Extracted”. *Constellations*, vol. 21, n. 4, 2014, p. 487, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8675.12126>.

¹⁴¹ Ferrara, Alessandro. *Sovereignty Across Generations*, chapter 3, p. 81.

¹⁴² Some examples may be provided by the slogan “Italians first” by the leader of the League Matteo Salvini or Jean-Marie Le Pen’s “aux français”.

¹⁴³ Ferrara, Alessandro. *Sovereignty Across Generations*, Chapter 3, p. 69.

¹⁴⁴ Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. “The Social Contract” in Betts, Christopher. *Discourse on Political Economy and The Social Contract*. Oxford University Press, 2008, Book II, Chapters 4 and 6, and Book III, Chapter 18, p. 133 and Sieyès, Emmanuel J. ‘Views of the Executive Means Available to the Representatives of France in 1789’. In Sonescher, Michael (editor), *Political*

2.7.2. The Bourdesian Symbolism of Populism

The second conclusive consideration delves more into the concept of voting. If we attempt to understand voting from a sociological perspective, we could consider it as a form of symbolic power.

Symbolic power is a power to construct reality (...) Symbols are the instruments par excellence of social integration: as instruments of knowledge and communication, they make possible the consensus on the sense of the social world which makes a fundamental contribution toward reproducing the social order; 'logical integration is the precondition of 'moral' integration" (...)

Ideologies serve interests which they tend to present as universal interests, common to the whole group. The dominant culture contributes to the real integration of the dominant class (...) to the fictitious integration of the society, and hence to the demobilization of the dominated classes; and to the legitimation of the established order by the establishment of distinctions (hierarchies) and the legitimation of these distinctions.¹⁴⁵

Elites, who are those imposing on lower classes the idea of democracy as a superior and efficient form of government, could be recurring to the hallmark of democratic functioning, voting, as a mere instrument, or symbol, to justify their ruling, which even though it is built upon consensus and majority rule, works at the disadvantage of the popular sector. But the very fact that people accept voting and believe that by casting their preferences something at the societal level could change, thus maintaining the social order, is to populist a wrong assumption, exactly because nothing changes. As discussed in chapter 1, populist leaders emerge often as charismatic personalities trying to subvert the established social order. It could be affirmed that populist leaders believe to be immune to the "logical and moral integration" mentioned by Bourdieu and expressed through symbols and dominant culture. They aim to mobilize the popular sector through strikes, protests, caucuses, and most importantly to "awake" the people and to prepare

Writings, Hackett, 2003, p. 12. See also Sieyès, Emmanuel J. What is the Third Estate? 1789, [Sieyes3dEstate.pdf \(uoregon.edu\)](#).

¹⁴⁵ Bourdieu, Pierre. "Sur le pouvoir symbolique". *Annales*, vo. 32, n.2, 1977, pp. 405-11, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0308275x7900401307>.

them for a new democracy. To support my claim, I would like to refer to Cas Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser:

Demonstrations, marches, and rallies are regular political phenomena in contemporary societies [...] when protests are not episodic occurrences, but endure over time, we are dealing with a social movement [...] noninstitutionalized collective action is often caused by the lack of access to the decision-making process.

Populist social movements [...] are examples of bottom-up mobilization.¹⁴⁶

As said before, populism aims at the de-structuration of the dominant symbolic form of power through the routinization of practices which are at the core of the democratic principle. To sum up, populism “champions popular sovereignty and majority rule” aiming at a mobilized subversion of the democratic apparatus and a “modification of democratic procedures”.¹⁴⁷

2.8. Conclusions

Winston Churchill once argued that: “democracy is the worst form of government – except for all the others that have been tried”.¹⁴⁸ Juan José Linz, as Churchill did, argued that that people will accept the malfunctioning of democracy, because of their belief that there is no other form of government that can improve the functioning of institutions while simultaneously ensuring an acceptable life condition to the people. In the field of international relations, Alexander Wendt and the constructivist school argue for the fact that the whole international system is the outcome of intersubjective meanings that have created universally, or quasi-universally, accepted definitions¹⁴⁹. Anarchy, state, and democracy are all part of this set of meanings. Therefore, it is possible that eventually people will change their perception of democracy with time. The so-called Beijing consensus model provides an outstanding example of such shift.¹⁵⁰ In the last four

¹⁴⁶ Mudde, Cas, and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser. *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*, pp. 46-47.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 97.

¹⁴⁸ 11 November 1947.

¹⁴⁹ For further explanation on the constructivist school in International Relations, read Wendt, Alexander. *Social Theory of International Politics (Cambridge Studies in International Relations)*. Cambridge University Press, 1999.

¹⁵⁰ For further information read: Halper, Stefan. *The Beijing Consensus: How China's Authoritarian Model Will Dominate the Twenty-First Century*. Basic Books, 2010.

decades, from Deng Xiao Ping onward, China has shown to the world that it is possible to grow fast in economic terms while ensuring welfare measures and a degree of meritocracy within the party system. It may not be sufficient to base legitimacy on a simple belief held by people. During the 77th UN General Assembly, the Malian President was clear on the non-tolerance of foreign pressures on the establishment of democracy in Mali.¹⁵¹

The tendency to democratize the world is not new to the West. In fact, since Immanuel Kant's 1795 "Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch", the liberal academia has fostered the idea of democratic theory, i.e., there are no maximum costs which humanity is willing to pay if, in the end, democracy will be "exported" and established all over the world.¹⁵² Liberals provide some interesting reasons why this should be the case. Some of these reasons are called monadic and examples are the externalization of internal procedures typical to democracies including free competition and transparency. There are then some dyadic reasons namely mutual acceptance and a developed system of economic interchange. To brief on this normative debate on the pertinence of a universally accepted conceptualization of democracy, I would like to make the appropriation of a phrase said by the sociologist Craig Calhoun: "to talk about democracy means to talk with strangers".¹⁵³ There are many actors in the world that, as highlighted, do not share this vision of democratic superiority, either because of cultural, social, or historical reasons. Therefore, I would rather suggest a more empirical approach which limits understanding the different forms of democracy and to the debate on how to further implement these forms trying to minimize deviations from the ideal type proposed by Dahl.

It does not have to be a surprise that populists are often able to challenge concretely democracy and its underpinnings. Democracy is a broad field to study in-depth. Overall, populism is strictly interconnected with the idea of liberal democracy, a concept which can be considered quite recent. When analysing the different forms of democracy, Arendt Lipjhart proposes a twofold model dividing democracies into consensus or majoritarian

¹⁵¹ An integral version of the speech is retrievable at Nazioni Unite. "Mali – Prime Minister Addresses United Nations General Debate, 77th Session". *Youtube*, <https://youtu.be/Qwp1L5SUJ5k>

¹⁵² See Macpherson, B. C. *A Democratic Theory: Essays in Retrieval*. Oxford University Press, 2014.

¹⁵³ The integral interview can be retrieved at Reset DOC – Dialogues on Civilizations. "Craig Calhoun – The Power of Imagination". *Youtube*, <https://youtu.be/N5IV9o8QQmk>.

(also known as Westminster), based on how particular characteristics such as unicameralism/bicameralism, review of legislation, centralized or decentralized judiciary are disposed of.¹⁵⁴ However, according to the surveys conducted by Kriesi and Ferrin liberal democracy, alongside the social and direct variants is one of the dominant visions of democracy.

To summarize, democracy emerged in ancient times as a form of government aimed at ensuring freedoms and rights to the members of a political community, but its substance has been increasingly challenged by populist leaders, who aim at subverting the established institutional architecture, which is considered either protecting the interests of the corrupted elite or not ensuring the full effectiveness of the majority principle. On the one hand, populists disrupt the democratic system by proposing direct changes to the founding legal document of a state: the constitution.

On the other hand, they foster the idea of creating ethnocracies: regimes characterized by the dominance of an ethnical group over all the others, by enforcing a set of rules and criteria to access citizenship and political enfranchisement that are increasingly becoming more stringent. If originally the concept of ethnopopulism was confined to Latin America with Evo Morales in Bolivia or Alberto Fujimori in Perú, it is currently growing as a phenomenon also in the European continent as the examples of Estonia and Germany demonstrate. Populisms are also challenging supranational institutions that are perceived as outsiders, depriving the people of their decision-making control and sovereignty, as in the case of UKIP. At the same time, the people are often more willing to accept populists' claims either by directly attacking those institutions or by supporting their anti-EU and anti-NATO ideological battles as witnessed by Brexit.

I have first analysed the concept of democracy itself by summarizing the long discussion over its main features. It has been explained that populist leaders often attempt to fabricate a direct model of democracy. Moreover, the four main principles which, according to Galston, are the fundamental prerequisites of liberal democracy, have been discussed. Even though the arguments provided by Laclau, and the popular agency

¹⁵⁴ Other features which are used by Lijphart to classify the two models are the composition of the cabinet, the number of parties and the features of the party system, the electoral system, the dispersal of government power, the rigidity of the constitution, and the dependency of central banks. See Lijphart, Arendt. *Patterns of Democracy. Governments Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries*. Yale University Press, 2012.

approach may be convincing in elaborating on the positivity of populism as an emancipatory force for democracy, however, as several approaches to the phenomenon that have been mentioned, have demonstrated, populism lacks the consistency for being regarded as a democratic asset.

On the contrary, during the most crucial phase to achieve liberal democracies: democratic deepening, populism comes short of consistency and support. First, it assumes a rigid posture toward migration, citizenship and cultural matters as showed by the examples of Hungary, Poland, Italy, and France, where in the last years some relevant populist leaders have emerged such as Viktor Orban, Giorgia Meloni and Marine Le Pen.

On the other hand, I tried to leave some grounds for an ulterior discussion, as to me populism also demands the abolition of the symbolic power of voting - the idea that voting is used by the elite to legitimize its ruling rather than to allow the people to be actually and concretely engaged in the decision-making process, and it is also favouring a model of democracy that moves toward the hollowed-out and enfeebled models described by Rawls and Habermas.

It is accepted that populism criticizes the limits imposed on the tyranny of the majority in favour of minority rights, even though as explained three centuries ago by Nicolas the Condorcet, the problem of the consistency of the majority is pertinent and relevant. At this point what still lacks, is the development of the idea that populism has a strict link with globalization. The third chapter does so, by focusing on the causes and consequences of such relationship.

CHAPTER 3: GLOBALIZATION AND POPULISM

In the introductory part of this thesis, I proposed the idea of a link between globalization and populism. The following chapter will analyse such relationship.

As seen so far, populism is a multifaceted concept, which changes and applies differently based on the reality where it emerges. *Globalization is also controversial because it is highly political*: those in support of it believe that it is emancipatory, aiming at decreasing the relevance of national boundaries, being a win-win scenario (the best goods are now accessible everywhere without any national barriers, and market efficiency is making “everybody” better off). Furthermore, seen from this perspective, globalization is said to increase market efficiency, democracy, justice, emancipation (sticking to national identity would mean remaining vernacular and parochial) and peace.¹⁵⁵

On the contrary, critical voices of globalisation, believe that it is a trap (if one looks at Marxism, it considers underdevelopment a consequence of an unequal economic systems) leading to global apartheid, security threats, the worsening of democracy (by reducing the actual space of manoeuvre for national electors as the decision-making process is moving supranationally) and larger inequalities.¹⁵⁶

To understand how populism has taken advantage of globalization, it is first necessary to elaborate further on the distinction between right-wing and left-wing types of populism to see how they differently rely on globalisation to carry on with their ideological battles.

In “Populism” (2020), Benjamin Moffit includes a discussion on the differences between right-wing and left-wing populisms. The former, challenges primarily immigrants and foreign investors, who allegedly mine the economic stability of the states

¹⁵⁵ Among the academic voices in favour of globalization, it is necessary to distinguish between globalists and transnationalists. The former school endorses a quantitative definition of globalization which relies on indexes and numbers. While the latter considers it a structural phenomenon which is merely qualitative. See Dicken, Peter. *Global Shift: Mapping the Changing Contours of the World Economy*. Guilford, 2011, and Garret, Geoffrey. *Partisan Politics in the Global Economy*. Cambridge University Press, 1998. See also Hay, Colin, and David Marsh. *Demystifying Globalisation*. Macmillan, 2000 and Held, David, and Anthony G. McGrew. *The Global Transformations Reader*. Polity Press, 2000, and Holm, Hans-Henri, and Georg Sørensen. *Whose World Order?: Uneven Globalisation and the End of the Cold War*. Westview Press, 1995.

¹⁵⁶ See Richmond, Anthony H., and Kathleen Valtonen. *Global Apartheid: Refugees, Racism, and the New World Order*. Oxford University Press, 1995.

and disrupt the job market, while the latter focuses on extending welfare measures and broadening safety nets for the middle and low-income class.

3.1. Right-Wing Populism

Right-wing populism relies on a solid association between the concept of people and the one of nation. Therefore, those societal groups who do not share the same socioeconomic and sociocultural traits as the people, and often these are minorities, are by default not included in the domain encompassed by the term nation. For right-wing populists, the “sociocultural dimension of identity overrides the broader socioeconomic concerns”.¹⁵⁷ Cas Mudde (2007), adds that right-wing populism is strongly embedded in the concept of nativism. The origins of nativism are as old as the ones of populism. It was John Higham (1955) who theorized a definition of nativism as a “certain kind of nationalism (...) defined as intense opposition to an internal minority on the ground of its foreign connections”.¹⁵⁸ Nativism prefers the “native exclusively on the grounds of its being native”.¹⁵⁹ The term also encompasses racism and xenophobia, arguments which, as already discussed in the previous chapters, are often taken up by right-wing populist parties in their attempt to marginalize outsiders to the inner group of native people. But it can also be that nativism is not racist; as Mudde asserts, nativism “does not reduce parties to mere single-issue parties”.¹⁶⁰ Rather it often combines a strong nationalism with sporadic xenophobic attacks, as shown by the examples of parties like the *Vlaams Blok* (VB), the *Deutsche Volksunion* or the *Centrum Democraten* in Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands.¹⁶¹

It is also important to underline that nativism does not equate to the extreme right. According to Mudde, the latter is a combination of authoritarianism and antidemocracy which includes nativism too, but for which nativism is not the core argument.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁷ Moffitt, Benjamin. *Populism*. Polity Press, 2020, e-book, p. 44, [*Benjamin-Moffitt-Populism- Key-Concepts-in-Political-Theory -Polity- 2020 .pdf](#). From now on, I will quote from this version of the book.

¹⁵⁸ Higham, John. *Strangers in the Land, Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925*. Rutgers University Press, 1955, pp. 3-4.

¹⁵⁹ Michaels, Walter Benn. *Our America: Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism*. Duke University Press, 1995, p. 14.

¹⁶⁰ Mudde, Cas. *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*, p. 19.

¹⁶¹ For further information on how these groups act see Vlaams Belang, DVU (Deutsche Volksunion) | Rechtsextremismus | bpb.de and Centrumdemocraten (CD) - Parlement.com.

¹⁶² Mudde, Cas. *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*, p. 23.

Somehow it is paradoxical how right-wing parties have emerged and consolidated as mainly embedded in the cultural, national, or nativist argument as they originally emerged as conferring primary importance to economic issues. They were advocating *laissez-faire* approaches to the national economy and the self-regulating power of markets. But that agenda left its pace to the defence of traditional, ethical, and religious values typical of the vernacular origins of the nation-state where they emerged. As Schwarzmantel argues, the very definition of “right” has always “denoted a philosophy that was hostile to the politics of modernity, with its ideas of emancipation and rationality”.¹⁶³ This rationale has laid the foundation of neoconservative right-wing parties.

However, nativism is different from being anti-modern. It rather relies on targeting minorities, as for the examples of Geert Wilders and Pauline Hanson in the Netherlands and Australia respectively. The former conducted his campaign against Moroccans, while the latter run against Muslim communities.¹⁶⁴ Nativism may also be directed, as in the case of UKIP, toward more abstract and transnational actors like Brussels’ authorities. Right-wing populists do challenge the elite as well as minorities, but they do not reject democracy as such, they rather go against its liberal form advocating for a more majoritarian version. Nativism and right-wing populisms cannot be assimilated to fascists and extremist movements as the latter do not “claim to speak for ‘the people’ or use this signifier in their discourse”, while populists do so.¹⁶⁵

It is also true, as Moffitt points out, that academia is divided on whether all right-wing parties relying on nationalism and nativism must be considered populists or not. On the one hand, some scholars believe that what matters is whether nationalism/nativism or populism comes first. In the former case, parties cannot be labelled as populist. While, according to others, the primacy issue does not count as “populism always combines with other ideological content”.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ Schwarzmantel, John. *The Age of Ideology*. Macmillan, 1998, p. 112.

¹⁶⁴ See “Dutch Populist Geert Wilders talks of Moroccan ‘scum’”. *BBC*, 2017, Dutch populist Geert Wilders talks of Moroccan 'scum' - BBC News, and Murphy, Katharine. “Pauline Hanson wears burqa in Australian Senate while calling for the ban.” *The Guardian* (Australia), 2017, Pauline Hanson wears burqa in Australian Senate while calling for ban | Pauline Hanson | The Guardian.

¹⁶⁵ Moffitt, Benjamin. *Populism*, p. 46.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p. 47. See also the discussions by Rydgren and Pappas on the difference between populism and nationalism. Rydgren, Jens. “Radical right-wing parties in Europe: What’s populism got to do with it?”. *Journal of Language and Politics*, vol. 16, n. 4, 2017, pp. 485–96,

3.2. Left-Wing Populism

Left-wing populism also encompasses a *stratum* of nationalism as demonstrated by leaders such as Hugo Chavez, Evo Morales, and Juan Peron. However, nationalism is not the only feature. Benjamin De Cleen (2017) points at the idea that left-wing populists are engaged in a battle for national sovereignty which is mainly economic rather than cultural.¹⁶⁷ In fact, as for the leader of the La France Insoumise (LFI) Jean-Luc Melenchon, left-wing populists are normally accepting pluralism and multiculturalism, something that right-wing populists rarely do. Hence, their populism is transcending toward the search for “civic nationalism” challenging the economic decisions of transnational actors such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Trade Organization (WTO) or the EU.¹⁶⁸ This openness toward pluralism, as Moffitt notes, does not necessarily mean that left-wing populists move toward liberal democracy much easier than right-wing do. On this aspect, often they fall short of their promises and appeals too, for instance, the direction that the governments of Peron and Chavez took more autocratic than democratic.¹⁶⁹

Mudde elaborates a different distinction between left-wing and right-wing populisms by creating three different categories: social populists, neoliberal populists, and right-wing populists. The first group comes mainly from the left as it proclaims egalitarianism and somehow rejects nativism. On the other hand, neoliberal populists attach the central weight of their reasoning to economic neoliberalism, while right-wing populism, mainly non-egalitarian, functions as an umbrella definition including also national populists - those who rely on nativism as a core theoretical argument.¹⁷⁰

doi:10.1075/jlp.17024.ryd, and Pappas, Takis S. “The Specter Haunting Europe: Distinguishing Liberal Democracy’s Challengers”, *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 27, n. 4, 2016, pp. 22–36, [The Specter Haunting Europe: Distinguishing Liberal Democracy’s Challengers | Journal of Democracy](#).

¹⁶⁷ De Cleen, Benjamin. “Populism and nationalism”, in Kaltwasser, Cristóbal Rovira, et al. (editors). *Oxford Handbook of Populism*. Oxford University Press, 2017, pp. 354-356.

¹⁶⁸ Moffitt, Benjamin. *Populism*, p. 48.

¹⁶⁹ For further arguments on the nature of Peron’s and Chavez’s regimes see De la Torre, Carlos. “Populism and nationalism in Latin America”. *Javnost - The Public*, vol. 24, n. 4, 2017, pp. 375–90, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13183222.2017.1330731>.

¹⁷⁰ Mudde, Cas. *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*, pp. 29-30.

3.3. Defining Globalization

As explained in the introduction of the chapter, globalization is a contested concept too. Robertson (2000) argues that it germinated from the 15th to the 18th century and that it boomed from the second half of the 19th century onward. While according to Scholte (2008), globalisation only begins in the middle of the 20th century.¹⁷¹

Both schools of thought agree that the first global actors were merchants or traders like Marco Polo, then from 1880 to 1914 a golden period characterized by mobility and trade (the so-called “Belle Epoque”) accelerated global trade, but it ended abruptly with WWI. In between the two world wars, a more nationalistic return of globalisation struck the world (1914-1945) before technological progress and economic exchange rocketed from the 50s onward.

Among its several contemporary conceptualizations, the one by David Held is the broadest one. He argues that globalisation is: “the expanding scale (extensity), growing magnitude (intensity), speeding up (velocity), and deepening impact of patterns of social interaction”.¹⁷²

However, sociologists such as Pierre Bourdieu and Anthony Giddens have described globalization more originally. The former considers it as “Western imperialism”, while for the latter it is “the compression between time and space”.¹⁷³

Dani Rodrik (2011) believes that the definition of globalization is “ambivalent”. This ambivalence derives from the fact that even if there are evident benefits from it such as intertemporal consumption, international borrowing, and lending, “global portfolio diversification”, and wider capital mobility, scepticism on its short-term benefits is still spread. Furthermore, there is a quite straightforward link between financial globalization and financial crises over time. Even if the latter have always been linked to

¹⁷¹ See Robertson, Roland. *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture*. SAGE, 2000, and Scholte, Jan Aart. “Defining Globalisation”. *The World Economy*, vol. 31, n. 11, 2008, pp. 1471-1502, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9701.2007.01019.x>.

¹⁷² Held, David, and Anthony G. McGrew. *The Global Transformations Reader*. Polity Press, 2000.

¹⁷³ Bourdieu, Pierre, and Loïc Wacquant. “On the Cunning of Imperialist Reason”. *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 16, n. 1, 1999, pp. 41–58, <https://doi.org/10.1177/026327699016001003>, and Giddens, Antony. *The Constitution of Society*. University of California Press, 1984. On the concept of “time-space compression” see Harvey, David. *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Blackwell, 1989.

underdeveloped countries' incapacity to keep the pace of developed countries, also advanced economies theoretically better prepared and structured, fell into the same vicious cycle.¹⁷⁴ Such infrastructural and institutional incapacity to handle crises extended to the internal sphere as well causing inequalities and large increases in capital flows. The bleak scenario is completed by the fall of corporate taxation which has been experienced as a direct outcome to the global mobilization of capital. Looking for example at the European Union, taxation is one of those areas which have remained quite strong in the hands of the Member States. Articles 113 and 115 of the TFEU, which write down the rules for tax harmonization, require an unanimity vote within the Council of the European Union, i.e., unanimity between all the member states.¹⁷⁵

What all the definitions share is the idea that globalization is about the socio-economic context of the global world, and that it is a controversial phenomenon. Going further, some scholars argued that it has never existed (i.e., that the very term is misleading, that the world was never globalised but rather it has experienced differentiated integration, which did not amount to a fully integrated single system), other that it has been ongoing for many centuries (from the moment that the rest of the world started to be conquered through colonialism, or just by the spread of global religion).¹⁷⁶

Surely, globalization is a phenomenon that has been observed clearly in the last 40 years. However, because of the increasing polarization of international affairs, the process of globalization itself is called into question. Some countries are not anymore keen on global integration and value development (both the USA and the EU are worried that extending value chains would make it dependent on some suppliers which could be unreliable from time to time such as China).¹⁷⁷ Therefore, some forms of regionalisation

¹⁷⁴ Rodrik, Dani. "Populism and the economics of globalization." *Journal International Business Policy*, pp. 12–33.

¹⁷⁵ Digital versions of both articles are available, respectively, at EUR-Lex - 12008E113 - EN (europa.eu) and at EUR-Lex - 12016E115 - EN - EUR-Lex (europa.eu).

¹⁷⁶ These critical thinkers are generally known as "sceptic". See Hirst, Paul, Thompson, Grahame, and Simon Bromley. *Globalization in Question*. Polity Press, 2009.

¹⁷⁷ See Dorn, David, Autor, David H, and Gordon H. Hanson. "The China syndrome: Local labor market effects of import competition in the United States." *American Economic Review*, vol. 103, n. 6, 2013, pp. 2121–2168, doi: 10.1257/aer.103.6.2121, and Wang, Yan, and Yao Yudong. "Sources of China's economic growth 1952–1999: incorporating human capital accumulation." *China Economic Review*, vol. 14, n. 1, 2003, pp. 32-52, <https://doi.org/10.1596/1813-9450-2650>, and Guthrie, Doug. *China and globalization: The social, economic, and political transformation of Chinese society*. Routledge, 2012.

or inter-regionalisation may be more fitting the current geopolitical and strategic circumstances - that is also why the transatlantic bond has been revitalized (North America, Europe and Indo-Pacific adjuncts).¹⁷⁸

Overall, globalization can be intended as a phenomenon within which all regions of the world are planning to become economically integrated. Interestingly, however, at the beginning the debate on globalization was somehow exclusionary: it was mostly conducted by urban, white, middle-class, Judaeo-Christian, older English-speaking men resident in the Global North.¹⁷⁹

When we try to analyse its causes, it depends on the academic perspective that we are taking, but in general *globalisation is the outcome of the fertilization of capitalism, technological growth, the erosion of the labour-market protection, and of the transnationalization of the world.*¹⁸⁰

Technological development has played a crucial role in the spread of globalization. Some countries such as China have emerged and now dominate the market due to their technological progress, but exporters, multinational companies, banks, and managers have also benefitted the most from high-tech. It is also true that out of the rise in technological development the people in poverty have seen their life conditions worsening off due to the, the amplification of the inequality divide.

Therefore, it is possible to identify seven major points that must be considered when attempting to comprehensively deal with globalization.

First, its *nature* (what is globalization? Is it not necessarily uniform and all benefit from it? Or rather it tries to marginalize some countries and regions? (North America and Europe and Asia leaving aside Africa). Secondly, the *origins* of its fast pace. Was it intentionally created by the colonial hegemons? Was it spontaneously bottom-up

¹⁷⁸ See Frankel, Jeffrey A. (editor). *The regionalization of the world economy*. University of Chicago Press, 2007, and Mittelman, James H. *The Globalisation Syndrome: Transformation and Resistance*. Princeton University Press, 2000.

¹⁷⁹ The first formulation of the word “Global North” to be distinguished from the “Global South” dates to an article by Alfred Sauvy entitled “Trois Mondes, Une Planete”, published in August 1952 in the French newspaper “L’Observateur”. Subsequently, various scholars such as Immanuel Wallerstein used the term to emphasize the difference between a capitalist centre of the world, the Global North, and a more peripheric or semi-peripheral Global South. See Wallerstein, Immanuel. *The Modern World System*. University of California Press, Volumes I, II, III and IV, 1974, 1980, 1988.

¹⁸⁰ See Dicken, Peter. *Global Shift: Mapping the Changing Contours of the World Economy*. Guilford, 2011.

generated by social innovators, or by political entrepreneurs? In this latter case, it could be intended as a mushrooming of different dynamics. Is it historically unique? Possibly it is not so new and There Is No Alternative (TINA).¹⁸¹ Thirdly, the reasons for moving toward a globalized world (the *motives*) must be considered: why was it created? Which were the ultimate goals in overcoming national barriers? Fourthly, its *consequences*: what is its impact on world states and democracies? Fifthly, the interests of globalization (the so-called *cui prodest*): who is benefitting from globalization? Who are the winners and losers? Sixthly, *justice*: globalization may be a mistake by policymakers, it may turn out that the winners are non-Western countries like China and India or the BRICS at large¹⁸² and the losers are Western low-middle classes. In particular, this last point is feared by the people as witnessed by the large consensus gathered by parties against globalization like the UKIP, or by politicians like Donald Trump and Giorgia Meloni.¹⁸³ The effects of globalization are very different from those that its promoters were foreseeing when boosting it i.e., the USA were not aware that globalization could have pushed China so high in the economic arena. And finally, what about the *future*? Are we moving toward a global society? Or to models of global governance?

Political responses to these seven questions have been different between rejectors and proponents of globalization (neoliberalism against economic nationalism, religious revival, radical environmentalism advocating for the rejection and reform of the process). An example of protectionist revanchism was the slogan by the Italian *Unione Generale del Lavoro* (Work General Union) “DELOCALISING IS A BETRAYAL OF ITALY”. It emblematically stands for those party’s actions both right-wing and left-wing which are deeply against globalization. Normally, it is more the centre-left and centre-right that are in favour of globalization. Politically speaking this assumption is evidence of a larger number of cross-coalitions, as for the Italian *Governo Giallo-Verde* (literally, Green-

¹⁸¹ System theories argue that the system is so complex that it cannot be changed. Chen, James. “TINA: An Acronym for ‘There Is No Alternative Defined’”. *Investopedia*, 2022, TINA: An Acronym For 'There Is No Alternative' Defined (investopedia.com).

¹⁸² The acronym BRICS stands for Brasil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa.

¹⁸³ The brief interview delivered by Nigel Farage to GB News on the 26th of October 2022 may help to understand how right-wing populists sharply criticize globalisation. “I am really sorry Mr. Kirkup [...] in British Government”. *GB News, Twitter*, 2022, [GB News on Twitter: "I'm really sorry Mr. Kirkup but the A-list syllabus includes the word globalist and globalism! This is an attempt to stop us using an accurate word about what has happened in British Government.' @Nigel Farage reacts to an accusation that he is 'stirring up populist rage.' https://t.co/JqgfEcsTZo" / Twitter.](https://t.co/JqgfEcsTZo)

Yellow government) made up of The League and the Five Stars Movement, which took over Italy in 2018. These two parties were the most anti-globalization, even if fully in dissonance on other issues.¹⁸⁴

Inherent to globalization there are also three paradoxes: First, *globalization is not equally distributed*; some regions are more globalized than others, however some are unable to attract business and cannot create competitive advantage - migration is for them a way to escape from the problem with people moving to non-marginalized regions and sending remittances back to their home countries.¹⁸⁵ Secondly, *marginalization within globalization is producing brain drain and migration for permanent reasons*. Even in regions perfectly integrated, there is still migration. For instance, in Mexico, there is a consistent and diffused system of migration coming from intra-regions. This changes the structure of the economic zones affected, and it destroys the social structures by bringing up phenomena such as the feminization of work, as discussed by Saskia Sassen.¹⁸⁶ Thirdly, *if migration is an unintended outcome of globalization, this means that it cannot be stopped unless we give up on globalization*. Within these three paradoxes, populism has assumed a more nationalistic posture intended to regulate at the regional level migrations at the regional level as in the case of the development of the concept of “Fortress Europe” implemented on the EU borders since *regulation 1612/68*.¹⁸⁷ However, regularization does often not prove to work. Hence, as a consequence, there comes irregular migration.

¹⁸⁴ See Varriale, Amedeo. “Institutionalized Populism: The “Strange Case” of the Italian Five Star Movement.” *ECPS Party Profiles. European Center for Populism Studies (ECPS)*. June 8, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.55271/op0009>.

¹⁸⁵ See the series of lectures delivered by Professor Leila Simona Talani at both King’s College University and LUISS Guido Carli University. PDF version is available at PEIM marginalisation pdf.pdf, and PEIM MENAmarginalisationnoaudio.pdf.

¹⁸⁶ Sassen, Saskia. “Women’s Burden: Counter-Geographies of Globalization and the Feminization of Survival.” *Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 53, no. 2, 2000, pp. 503–24. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24357763>. (Accessed 20 June 2023).

¹⁸⁷ Regulation 1612/68 on the freedom of movement of workers within the Community (EEC) is considered the first stalwart of the process of securitization of borders of the European Community, which reached its pinnacle with the creation of an area of Justice and Home Affairs (now Justice, Home, and Security) with the Treaty of Maastricht in 1993. The regulation has now been repealed by regulation 492/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 April 2011 on freedom of movement for workers within the Union. Digital version available at EUR-Lex - 32011R0492 - EN - EUR-Lex (Europa.eu). For more on the “fortress Europe” concept, see Junemann, Annette, Fromm, Nicolas, and Nikolas Scherer. *Fortress Europe? Challenges and Failures of Migration and Asylum Policies*. Springer VS, 2019.

3.4. Populism as a Response to the Tensions of Globalization

Populism emerges and exploits the new political cleavage between winners and losers of globalization, which was presented in its most clear form in the Stolper-Samuelson's Theorem of 1941.¹⁸⁸ If, as Dani Rodrik proposes, we apply the model devised by the two American scholars to the US economy, it was already clear before WWII that: "low-skilled workers are unambiguously worse off as a result of trade liberalization".¹⁸⁹

If we consider that trade liberalization aims at increasing the prices of products to be exported relative to the prices of the goods imported, an unambiguous fall in real returns is produced according to the so-called *magnification effect*: openness to trade creates losers and generates distributional inequalities in terms of production and industries.¹⁹⁰

Additionally, the gradual reduction of trade barriers leads to the de-nationalization of the world, what David Held has labelled as "cosmopolitan democracy".¹⁹¹ Populism, especially right-wing, defends barriers and grows as perceived saviour of low and middle-income classes' interests. Therefore, managers, entrepreneurs, tycoons, and company owners who have entered a state that was not their own to do business are perceived as part of the establishment, that has welcomed them, going against the "will of the people", and disrupting the national identity of the state.¹⁹²

As said above, globalization concerns migrations as well. As witnessed by the slogan "E' finita la pacchia" (literally, "the sleeping time has ended") used by The League party in Italy, immigrants too are considered enemies of the religious and cultural background of the state. In Europe, they are still deemed as "eroding welfare systems" and bringing up "austerity and recession", leading ultimately to xenophobic claims by right-wing leaders. In Southern America, are on the contrary to Europe, the institutions building up the New International Economic Order, that are considered as the major enemies of the

¹⁸⁸ Stolper, Wolfgang F. and Samuelson, Paul A. "Protection and real wages." *Review of Economic Studies*, vol. 9, n. 1, 1941, pp. 58–73, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2967638>, and Chiquiar, Daniel. "Globalization, regional wage differentials and the Stolper–Samuelson Theorem: Evidence from Mexico". *Journal of International Economics*, vol. 74, n. 1, 2008, pp. 70-93, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jinteco.2007.05.009>.

¹⁸⁹ Rodrik, Dani. Populism and the economics of globalization, p. 14.

¹⁹⁰ Ibidem.

¹⁹¹ See Held, David. *Democracy and the Global Order: From the Modern State to Cosmopolitan Governance*. Stanford University Press, 1995, and Held, David. *Cosmopolitanism: Ideas and Realities*. Polity Press, 2010.

¹⁹² Rodrik, Dani. Populism and the economics of globalization, p. 24.

people by populisms.¹⁹³ Only Spain and Greece, in Europe, saw an inflation in left-wing populism as it targeted the same institutions and actors as in Latin America, being the states that were most adversely affected by the 2007-2008 crisis together with Italy.¹⁹⁴

The United States are surely the most complex case, as both right-wing and left-wing populisms challenge globalization: on the one hand, for socialists like the US Senator Bernie Sanders, the major goal is to expand the welfare state system, while curtailing the privileges of the economic elite and criticizing trade and commercial agreements.¹⁹⁵ But at the same time, right-wing populism, of which Donald Trump stands out as a major representative, hit immigrants mainly coming from Mexico and Islamic countries, considered as sources of cultural animosity and economic jeopardy.¹⁹⁶

There has been a direct challenge to the European Union's intrusion into the trade and commerce sphere by European populism. According to article 207 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU)¹⁹⁷, the EU has exclusive competence in concluding international agreements on tariffs and trade (as for the WTO) but it can also, occasionally, inherit exclusive competence for concluding international treaties whenever it is provided by a legally binding act, it is needed to attain its objectives or it affects or alter the scope of its rules.¹⁹⁸ Populists perceive that officials in Brussels are "stealing away" economic sovereignty from the member states, and that this practice is causing more harm than good.

¹⁹³ Kaufman, Robert R. "The Political Economy of Latin American Populism." In Dornbusch, Rudiger, and Sebastian Edwards (editors). *The Macroeconomics of Populism in Latin America*. National Bureau of Economic Research, 1991, pp. 15-43.

¹⁹⁴ See "La crisi economica italiana 2008-2014", La crisi economica italiana 2008-2014 | Politica Semplice, and, Stevis-Gridneff, Matina, and Steven Erlanger. "Greece's Experiment With Populism Holds Lessons for Europe." *New York Times*, 2019, Greece's Experiment With Populism Holds Lessons for Europe -The New York Times (nytimes.com).

¹⁹⁵ See Weissmann, Jordan. "Bernie Sanders' Take on Globalisation Is Simple, Ideologically Comforting, and Factually Wrong." *SLATE*, 2016, Bernie Sanders' take on globalization is simple, ideologically comforting, and factually wrong. (slate.com).

¹⁹⁶ Vickers, Mary. "And Some, I Assume, Are Good People:" Examining the Impact of Donald Trump's Presidency on the Lived Experiences of Latinx Teens". *Honors Program Theses*, 2020, p.123,

<https://scholarship.rollins.edu/honors/123>.

¹⁹⁷ A digital version of article 207 of the TFEU is available at EUR-Lex - 12008E207 - EN (europa.eu).

¹⁹⁸ This principle, known as *substantive exclusivity*, is enshrined in article 3(2) of the TFEU. Digital version available at EUR-Lex - 12008E003 - EN (europa.eu).

However, as Rodrik underscores, it is also true that in Europe the levels of social protections and welfare states are much more generous than in the US, where left-wing populism is advocating for larger protections and safety nets. What populists miss here is that compensation is not cheap. To apply lump-sum or progressive taxation is not always practical as it increases the deadweight loss of the state (as in the case of the transfers imposed as an outcome of the “China trade shock” which led to a 33\$ per capita deadweight loss).¹⁹⁹

Simultaneously, and probably more seriously, the second difficulty related to compensation is purely political. Each candidate could promise compensation, but being particularly onerous and complex to be accomplished, citizens would see that it is nothing more than a political lie.²⁰⁰ Therefore, even if it is true that trade causes job displacement and losses, it is also true that migration is used as a “scapegoat” too often. Turning again to right-wing populism, of which examples may be the ones of The League by Matteo Salvini or Le Pen’s Front National, it identifies foreigners as one of the main causes of the negative outcome of globalization. It is paradoxical how often, in reality, foreign investors are those bringing economic assets to national economies thanks to the abolition of barriers and the signature of bilateral investment agreements which protect transactions, typical consequences of globalisation.²⁰¹ Bloom, Starsmans and Sheskin (2017) have found that when people were asked which would be the ideal national distribution in their country, in terms of resources, they would prefer an unequal distribution.²⁰² The truth is that people are deeply worried about economic unfairness more than economic inequality. As said by Rodrik:

Fairness concerns are likely deeply embedded in our evolutionary history as a strategy for dealing with opportunistic behaviour.²⁰³

¹⁹⁹ For further information on the “China Trade Shock” see David Dorn, David H. Autor, and Gordon H. Hanson. “The China shock: Learning from labour market adjustment to large changes in trade”. *Annual Review of Economics*, 2016, 8, pp. 205–240, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-economics-080315-015041>.

²⁰⁰ Rodrik, Dani. Populism and the economics of globalization, p. 17.

²⁰¹ For further information on international investment law see Gaeta, Paolo, Vinuales Jorge Enrique, and Salvatore Zappalà. *Cassese’s International Law*. Oxford University Press, 2020, Chapter 20, pp. 518-525.

²⁰² Starsmans, Christian, Sheskin, Mark, and Paul Bloom. “Why people prefer unequal societies.” *Nature: Human Behaviour*, vol. 1, n. 82, 2017, p. 82, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-017-0082>.

²⁰³ Rodrik, Dani. Populism and the economics of globalization, p. 17.

The psycho-neurological aspect impacts the ability of populist leaders to thrive within a globalized world: citizens, who as discussed equal the voters according to the populist's equation, empathize more with those individuals who come out as losers of globalization, having lost their jobs, having a lower income or being replaced by technological tools than with the presumed winners. As Ehrlich (2010) points out:

Inequality is felt most acutely when citizens believe that rules apply differently to different people.²⁰⁴

3.4.1. Political Globalisation

When considering globalisation, the debate on its political legacy is left aside. Generally, we could define political globalisation as the shift from national to supranational sovereignty through regional or international organizations such as the EU or the UN. On this point, Mudde asserts that: “the process of political globalisation has generated the most extreme reactions”.²⁰⁵ Especially radical right populism is fearing the rise of international political connections. The idea of a New World Order (NWO) is perceived as a threat to national integrity as much as economic internationalisation. In the US as well as in Europe, populist parties are battling against the idea of having a “central government of the world” or more regional centres which, in the words of the former leader of the Hungarian Justice and Life Party (MIEP) István Csurka, leads to “cosmopolitan homogenization”.²⁰⁶ In Europe, however, populist leaders do not have any specific enemy, they rather oppose the very core of the idea of international harmonization and unification. The Russian Liberal Democratic Party (LDPR) considers not only the IMF, World Bank (WB) and G-7 but also all military organisations such as North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as pivotal instruments of the NWO. While in the US there is more rooted *paranoia* toward the idea that internationalisation means less control of internal affairs. There is a quite evident proliferation of conspiracy theories

²⁰⁴ Ehrlich, Sean D. “The fair trade challenge to embedded liberalism.” *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 54, n. 4, 2010, pp. 1013–1033. Available at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40931152>.

²⁰⁵ Mudde, Cas. *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*. Cambridge University Press, 2007, p.193.

²⁰⁶ Blokker, Paul. “Populist nationalism, anti-Europeanism, post-nationalism, and the East-West distinction”. *German Law Journal*, vol. 6, n. 2, 2005, p. 386., doi:10.1017/S2071832200013687.

that argue that the American Council for Foreign Relations hides the truth from the citizens and makes decisions which go against the protection of national interests. Mudde asserts that “globalisation is a multifaceted enemy” to populists, as it challenges the “independence and purity of the nation-state”.²⁰⁷ Not only does economic globalisation contribute to stream populist attacks toward foreign investors and workers’ migration but there are also other two phenomena which contribute to populism: cultural and political globalisation. The former is rejected because it “annihilates the cultural diversities of nations and creates the wrong culture”²⁰⁸, while the latter is disregarded because it creates an NWO which deprives the states of their full sovereignty. Paradoxically however most anti-globalist movements come from the left and are quite progressive, therefore, right populism cannot embrace them. Secondly, as Mudde underscores, globalisation is still not central to populism. As I argue, populism is present and “kicking” because of the cleavages and implications emerging from and due to globalisation. This is why populists do not have to answer the question of the actual impact of workers’ migrations and loss of economic and political sovereignty. What matters is that they have these “enemies” so that they can continue with their political presence and pressure to claim to defend the interests of the people vis-à-vis the establishment.

3.5. International and Transnational Populism

Globalization has led to the loosening of national borders and the opening of economies. Such internationalization process has had as a direct outcome the rise of groups of populism which develop across states and Moffitt (2020) analyses these new forms of *international* and *transnational populism*. The former aims at coalitions of parties which coordinate their actions on “an international basis” starting from a common arena where they are together. The example provided by Moffitt is the one of the Europe for Freedom and Direct Democracy groups in the European Parliament. Together they gather the Alternative Fur Deutschland (AfD), Five Stars Movement and UKIP. At the same time, also in Latin America, on a more leftist matrix, the Peoples of Our America, a coalition of populist leaders, can be considered part of international populism. These coalitions generally have a “common perception of the elite”, which may represent either

²⁰⁷ Mudde, Cas. *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*, p. 196.

²⁰⁸ Ibidem.

fonctionnaires in Brussels, as for the first example, or economic projects and funds, as for the second case, while holding a deeply national conception of the people. In other words, Nigel Farage, leader of UKIP, agrees with Alexander Gauland, a member of the AfD, on their Eurosceptic claims but the former will protect the interests of the British nationals while the latter will stand as a representative for the German people. As Moffitt puts it, international populism is characterised by “the feeling of nationally sovereign ‘peoples’ who share a common enemy”. Therefore, internationalism “is always secondary to the lingering nationalism of the individual populist articulations of the people”.²⁰⁹ International populism may even be considered a sort of “meta-populism”.²¹⁰

On the other hand, transnational populism starts from the assumption of a “common people” and tries to gain support downwardly, in the various national arenas. Moffitt describes this phenomenon as quite rare but he still comes up with an interesting example: the DiEM 25 (Democracy in Europe Movement) launched in 2016 by the former Greek finance minister, Yanis Varoufakis.²¹¹ The central rationale behind the movement was to develop a “cross-border pan-European movement” battling against the European elite ranging from “the Brussels bureaucracy” to “the Troika” by adopting as common denominator the idea of ‘common people’ sharing “radical, anti-authoritarian and democratic Europeanism”.²¹² The main goal of transnational populism is surely the capacity to “transcend” a national definition of people to construct a more global version of it, which “goes across national borders or is spoken of at a level above that of the nation-state”.²¹³

3.6. The Consequences and the Future of Globalisation

To foresee the consequences of complex and long-term phenomena such as globalisation is not an easy task. Academic voices are divided and contrasting. On the

²⁰⁹ Moffitt, Benjamin. *Populism*, pp. 52-53.

²¹⁰ De Cleen, Benjamin. “Populism and nationalism”. In Kaltwasser, Cristóbal Rovira, et al. (editors) *Oxford Handbook of Populism*, p. 356.

²¹¹ For further information on the DiEM25, see DiEM25: Democracy in Europe Movement 2025. “Europe is ruled by oligarchs”. 2016, DiEM25 - Democracy in Europe Movement 2025.

²¹² Varoufakis, Yanis. “What’s DiEM25, really? Reply to open letter by Souvlis and Mazzolini”. *OpenDemocracy*, 2016, [What’s DiEM25, really? Reply to an open letter by Souvlis & Mazzolini | openDemocracy](#), and Varoufakis, Yanis, Barnett, Anthony, and Alex Sakalis. “Democratising Europe: A transnational project?” *OpenDemocracy*, 2016, [Democratising Europe – a transnational project? | openDemocracy](#).

²¹³ Moffitt, Benjamin. *Populism*, p. 53.

one hand, scholars such as Gilpin (2000) believe that because we cannot speak of globalisation in a proper sense, all trends linked to contemporary international political economy are still at the mercy of the states, and it would be pointless to even open the debate over their consequences.²¹⁴ Cerny (2010) proposes an alternative interpretation: globalisation would lead to an institutional change which would make the state modify “the perception of its role in the economy and the provision of public goods”, as well as its way to interact economically with other states in the international system.²¹⁵

Hence, according to the liberal institutional argumentation advanced by Cerny, the most direct outcome of globalisation would be the proliferation of international and transnational interactions which could likely lead to a shift in sovereignty from the state to supranational organizations such as the European Union.

If we consider the four types of globalisation that David Held distinguishes: thick, diffuse, expansive and thin, we could say that for Gilpin, globalisation remains thin; i.e., only encompassing an extensity of connections, while for liberal institutionalists and transnationalists, those who advocate that globalisation can be radically modified exclusively with a shift in technological development, we are currently experiencing the thick stage, characterized by high extensity, intensity, velocity and reciprocity.²¹⁶

As Frieden (2017) argues, the main consequences of the relationship between populism and globalisation depend thus on whether the latter phenomenon will evolve and on how it will do so.²¹⁷ If it remains a state-controlled phenomenon, despite the crisis of authority and legitimacy envisaged by Overbeek and Van der Pijl, then populism will likely be a national issue.²¹⁸ But if, as Held proposes, the model of cosmopolitan

²¹⁴ Gilpin, Robert. *The Challenges of Global Capitalism: The World Economy in the 21st Century*. Princeton University Press, 2000.

²¹⁵ Cerny, Paul. *Rethinking World Politics: A Theory of Transnational Neo-Pluralism*. Oxford University Press, 2010. Cited in Shaw, Timothy M., et al. (editors). *The Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary International Political Economy*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, p. 419.

²¹⁶ Held, David. *Democracy and the Global Order: From the Modern State to Cosmopolitan Governance*. Stanford University Press, 1995, Held, David. “Law of States, Law of Peoples.” *Legal Theory*, vol. 8, n. 1, 2002, pp. 1–44, doi:10.1017/S1352325202081016, and Held, David. *Cosmopolitanism: Ideas and Realities*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010.

²¹⁷ Frieden, Jeffry. “The Political Economy of the Globalization Backlash: Sources and Implications.” *Jeffry Frieden Harvard University, Mimeo*, 2017, [the politics of the globalization backlash.pdf \(harvard.edu\)](#).

²¹⁸ Overbeek, Henk. “The Budapest Process: Internationalization of Migration Control, Paper presented to the 40th Annual Conference of the International Studies Association”. 16–20 February 1999, Washington, DC, *Mimeo*, 1999, and Overbeek, Henk. “Globalisation,

democracy will take over, then the sporadic examples of international and transnational populist phenomena described by Moffitt, will multiply and become dominant.

The following assumption moves the point of the discussion to the actual question: can globalisation be governed? In 2009, Hirst *et al.* in their “Globalisation in Question; the International Economy and the Possibilities of Governance”, criticize the idea that national sovereignty is becoming obsolete.²¹⁹ On the contrary, they backed Gilpin’s arguments by asserting that if the states decide to curtail globalisation they could do so without any implication.²²⁰ While, Mittelman and other institutionalists believe that globalisation has reached a stage for which it cannot be governed, let alone stopped. The major evidence is the proliferation of sites of power and the ongoing process of international institutions building, which is increasing, rather than decreasing, the competition between national and international sovereignty.²²¹

James Rosneau (2002) comes up with the idea of “fragmentation of authority”: authority is no anymore exercised solely at the governmental level but also through a series of informal and formal networks of transnational dimension, which involve NGOs, transnational corporations and markets as well. Hence, globalisation could be potentially governed but only by the new governance system because states alone would prove incapable of doing so. Cerny agrees with this idea:

(...) Globalisation (...) strengthens the hands of transnationally linked interests and actors and shifts the balance of agenda setting, policy bargaining, and policy outcomes towards globalizing coalitions and protoalitions.²²²

Sovereignty and Transnational Regulation: Reshaping the Governance of International Migration.” In Gosh, Bimal. *Managing Migration: Time for a New International Regime*. Oxford University Press, 2000. See also Van der Pijl, Kees. “Arab Revolts and Nation-State Crisis.” *New Left Review*, vol. 70, 2011, <https://hdl.handle.net/10779/uos.23323295.v1>.

²¹⁹ Hirst, Paul, Tompson, Grahame, and Simon Bromley. *Globalisation in Question, the International Economy and the Possibilities of Governance*. Polity Press, 2009.

²²⁰ Gilpin, Robert. *The Challenges of Global Capitalism: The World Economy in the 21st Century*. Princeton University Press, 2000.

²²¹ Mittelman, James H. *The Globalisation Syndrome: Transformation and Resistance*. Princeton University Press, 2000.

²²² Rosenau, James. “Governance in a New Global Order.” In Held, David, et al. (editors). *Governing Globalisation: Power, Authority and Global Governance*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002, pp. 71-72, 80. Cited in Shaw, Timothy M., Mahrenbach, Laura C., Modi, Renu, and Xu Yi-Chong (editors). *The Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary International Political Economy*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, p. 425.

Right-wing populist movements rely on such upward shift of sovereignty to defend what they consider to be the national culture and to claim that workers are now at the mercy of the state, which is reducing their rights, and therefore their bargaining power toward firms (now free to move across states) and the power of workers' unions as well, while also rendering national economies uncompetitive.

To this extent, Mittelman (2004) advances what I consider to be the most compelling hypothesis: the rise of a “double movement” where politics becomes subordinated to the economy, while the middle class and those individuals dubbed as the losers of globalisation produce a “counter-movement, allowing for a new social equilibrium to be established”.²²³

3.7. Conclusions

To conclude it is necessary to move a step further in the discussion. When talking about globalisation, we could even speak of “hyper-globalization”, in the sense that overall, the “ratio between political and distributive costs to net economic gains is particularly unfavourable”.²²⁴ As for the 2007-2008 crisis that hit the US as much as Europe, full economic regionalization seems hard to be achieved. The global governance model, which is aiming at overcoming national differences by creating a cosmopolitan world, is leaving space for populist movements coming from both the right and the left, to exploit the tensions inherent to globalization and to guide the loser's side. As Mudde discusses, right-wing populisms often rely on nativism, an ideological thought defined as “holding that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group (“the nation”) and that non-native elements (persons and ideas) are fundamentally threatening to the homogenous nation-state”.²²⁵ While left-wing populism is more focused on economic battles ensuring broader safety nets and more developed welfare systems. Both types of populism are attempting to handle, although differently, the increasing demand

²²³ Mittelman, James H. *Whither Globalization*. Routledge, 2004. Cited in. Shaw, Timothy M, Mahrenbach, Laura C., Modi, Renu, and Xu Yi-Chong (editors). *The Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary International Political Economy*, p. 426.

²²⁴ Rodrik, Dani. *Populism and the economics of globalization*, p. 27. Furthermore, Pietro Maffettone proposes the idea that the concept of hyperglobalization does not entail an attempt to reduce the barriers to economic integration but rather it attempts to homogenize the rules which are adopted at the national level to reduce the differences between national economies. See Maffettone, Pietro. *Populismo e Filosofia Politica*. Liguori, 2020, Capitolo 3.

²²⁵ Mudde, Cas. *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*, p. 19.

for protectionist standards advocated by low and middle-income workers who feel pressurized by the increasing technologization and speed of the job market. As postulated in section 3.6. these individuals may become the countermeasure to globalisation by creating a compact movement.

To overstep the problem, it may be useful to think that: “global rules, will be written and administered by the very special interests that dominate domestic policy as well”.²²⁶ In this way, globalization would also be perceived as a more benevolent phenomenon, rather than as a challenge to the national interests of the states. Populism could be radically reduced if globalization is framed and addressed in a “national” way, which means larger protections for workers losing their jobs, larger welfare measures and a more positive narrative on the role of immigrants in national economies. The real problem is to understand whether the side effects of globalization can be concretely limited, populism being one of them, or if by accepting globalization, we are forced to accept and to deal with the illiberal “baggage” coming with it. So far, it is hard to provide a clear answer. It strongly depends on the theoretical approach that we consider more reliable. On the one hand, realists advocate for the possibility of states curtailing globalisation. On the other hand, liberal institutionalists and transnationalists believe that it is hardly tangible to restrain the upward institutional shift, which combined with technological exposure, is leading to a more supranational dimension of sovereignty culminating ultimately in a cosmopolitan democratic system.

In the following and last chapter, I will try to assess the real impact of populism and understand whether it is reasonable to worry about it as a potentially permanent phenomenon or if it is feasible to tackle populism, reduce its impact and ultimately, in the long term, eradicate it.

²²⁶ Rodrik, Dani. *Populism and the economics of globalization*, p. 27.

CHAPTER 4: HOW REAL IS THE RISK?

As discussed so far, populism is a multifaceted phenomenon in contradiction with liberal democracy, but not antidemocratic, consequential to the cleavage between losers and winners of globalisation, a phenomenon which was created and fostered by democracies themselves. Populism stands with the losers' side and echoes their claims against the establishment in an attempt to enforce a majoritarian direct model of democracy that could reinstate the people into their central role of direct policymakers.

This last chapter aims to assess the concrete risk of populism by providing some reflections on the demand and supply side of the phenomenon while also offering some solutions which could prove effective to reduce the presence of populist actors in the various political arenas and reframe globalisation in a saner way.

4.1. The Demand Side of Populism

For populism to be successful it must be demanded by the people, as for any other political actor. But why do people want populism? Many electors believe that the establishment is “dishonest” and “self-serving” and that it functions “behind closed doors” which boost corruption and ignore the will of the people. As Mudde and Kaltwasser argue, populist attitudes lay “latent” within the population of a state.²²⁷ But surely, the idea that the people should become more involved and eventually take directly the most important decisions concerning the life of the polity is riveting, especially to minorities or more marginalized groups of society. Often people manifest their attitude toward populism when there is a widespread perception that “threats to the very existence of society are present” as in the cases of *Tangentopoli* in Italy, that led to the rise of Berlusconi or the Great Recession at the roots of the political success of populist parties such as Podemos and Syriza in Spain and Greece. Sporadic economic scandals are then different from systematic corruption.²²⁸ The latter is related to democracies characterized by problems of stateness. These problems enhance populism's strength and increase the

²²⁷ Mudde, Cas, and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser. *Populism: A very short introduction*, pp. 98-100.

²²⁸ *Tangentopoli* is the Italian term to indicate the period ranging from 1990 to 1992, leading to the disappearance of the parties that characterized and animated the First Republic (1948-1992) such as the Italian Communist Party, the Christian Democrats, and the Italian Socialist Party because of corruption and bribery (in Italian, *tangenti*).

perception of the people of an unresponsive political system. Mudde and Kaltwasser assert that:

Once voters feel orphaned by the established political actors, they become inclined to interpret political events through the mental map of populism.²²⁹

The logical map of populism labels the elite as “corrupted” due to their incapacity to act for the people, who feel that their interests are not protected. The question is: do political actors have to accord precedence to their role as responsible agents or as suitable representatives of the people? Often, as for South America, they are constrained by international economic institutions, therefore the former’s role prevails over the latter’s. Whenever this happens, populism is ready to take over, as for the recent elections in Argentina where the right-wing populist leader Javier Milei triumphed at the run-off over the Minister of the Economy Sergio Massa, promising to “end Argentina’s decay”.²³⁰

Furthermore, it is also true that contemporary societies are constantly changing and these changes both at the social and economic levels are favouring the activation of populism. Individuals are becoming more informed, more independent, and more self-conscious, not accepting anymore the “natural dominance of the political elites”. Awareness raises as well due to the less stringent control to which media were ones exposed, although some democracies, including the United States, still rank low in the 2023 World Press Freedom Index.²³¹ The media are freer from political parties and in constant competition with each other. Therefore, populists focus less on serious political issues and have increased “their coverage of issues that sell”. Whenever “democratic aspirations and anti-establishment sentiments come together” and find in the media a powerful ally, populism is activated and the people’s latent attitude toward it becomes manifest.²³²

²²⁹ Mudde, Cas, and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser. *Populism: A very short introduction*, p. 101.

²³⁰ See Roncoroni, Juan Ignacio. “New Argentinian president Javier Milei promises to ‘take a chainsaw’ to country’s crippled economy”. *The Conversation*, 21 November 2023, <https://theconversation.com/new-argentinian-president-javier-milei-promises-to-take-a-chainsaw-to-countrys-crippled-economy-218155>.

²³¹ “2023 World Press Index – journalism threatened by fake content industry”. Reporters Without Borders (English version), <https://rsf.org/en/2023-world-press-freedom-index-journalism-threatened-fake-content-industry>.

²³² Mudde, Cas, and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser. *Populism: A very short introduction*, pp. 103-104.

4.2. The Supply Side of Populism

To respond to its demand, populism combines, as discussed in chapter 1 and 2, a wide array of ideologies and grievances such as nativism and socialism. The main aim of populists is to politicize issues which are not dealt with by the political elite, but which are dear to the people. In the words of Mudde and Kaltwasser:

Both the actions and inactions of mainstream political parties play a major role in the success and failure of populist forces.²³³

However, it is important to bear in mind that often populists do contribute to political failures of their polity. Populism is not immune from political errors and miscalculations which worsen off the people. But, as the previous section argued, the media do support populism whenever they “badger” mainstream politicians and act as the voice of the people trying to reveal corruption and ongoing scandals affecting the establishment.

As chapter 3 has underlined, populism is an evolutionary and changing process. It started and still is a main national byproduct developing into transnational and international forms. As Moffitt argues, populism’s main ability is “to cut across several different political, ideological and organisational contexts”. The three major areas where populism is changing are: its being considered apolitical style, its relationship with the media, and its capacity to trigger crises.²³⁴

Concerning its contemporary characterization, populism is a nuanced concept which lies in a grey area that emphasises its lack of substance. As chapter 1 underscored, Mudde and Kaltwasser define it as a thin ideology which is juxtaposed with a thick ideology such as socialism or nationalism. It could be interesting to understand how populism performs differently, based on the host ideology to which it is attached and, on the environment where it prospers, or to dig more to grasp which are the main common traits of its being considered a political style.

Moreover, the relationship between populism and media remains also largely unexplored. I briefly mentioned in chapter 1 that psychology plays an important role in

²³³ Ibidem, p. 105.

²³⁴ Moffitt, Benjamin. *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style and Representation*. Stanford University Press, 2016, pp. 155-163, [*Benjamin Moffitt - The Global Rise of Populism Performance, Political Style, and Representation-Stanford University Press \(2016\).pdf](#).

the way leaders act, and in the way how people perceive populism. But is also true that in contemporary societies media are essential. Hence, how the media portray populist leaders, and their claims can have substantial implications for the life of populism. The last Italian general elections of 2022 witnessed an outstanding increase in media use by political parties and leaders. Unfortunately, young voters who rightfully obtain information mainly from social platforms often vote for those politicians who “impressed them the most” rather than objectively evaluating their careers, curricula, and programs. On the aspect of spectacularizing their electoral campaigns it seems that populists are quite extraordinary. Both Silvio Berlusconi and Matteo Salvini’s Tik Tok accounts went viral due to their capacity to produce stylish videos and content. If the political establishment can raise awareness about the dangers related to populism through media, it could become an effective antidote against populism itself.²³⁵

At the same time, we must also imperatively consider the capacity of populist leaders to frame situations as crises. Especially for what concerns democratic problems, populist leaders are quite good at exaggerating them to a point that they may seem fully-fledged institutional crises as for immigrants from Libya in Italy or Muslim communities in France. It is essential to temper down the terms used by populism by effectively communicating with the population through experts and empirical and scientific evidence which dismisses their claims.

Populism is spread all over the globe and its future may truly depend on the breaching impact of its communicative style and aspect. Because “the march of mediatisation continues onwards”, populist actors will attempt to monopolize the media and dominate it with flamboyant content that is effective on users and makes them appear as closer than ever to the people.²³⁶ If mainstream politics understands this risk and tries to prevent it immediately, it can be a good signal for avoiding the changing patterns of populism. As Fieschi puts it:

²³⁵“Ciao ragazzi: il primo video di Berlusconi su TikTok nel 2022”. *Youtube*, uploaded by Sky TG24, 12 June 2023, <https://youtu.be/y3n3nFQm11o>.

²³⁶ Moffitt, Benjamin. *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style and Representation*. Stanford University Press, 2016, p. 162.

[Populism] is meaningful and its very abundance could just as easily be testimony to the interest and urgency of the task.²³⁷

4.3. What is Left of Populism?

According to Müller, the seriousness of populism can be summarised through seven points (theses). First, populism can be described as the “permanent shadow of representative politics” thus neither falling into the “pathology” category nor being considered as the “authentic part of modern democratic politics” area. Rather than being conceived as anti-representation, populism should be understood as a process where its advocates claim to be the only “legitimate representative” of the people’s interests. Besides, Müller argues that “not everyone who criticises the elites is a populist”. The main feature of populism is its capacity to insist on the immorality of the elites and its clash with the “moral, homogenous entity whose will cannot err” - the people. The people is the artificial construction that turns out to be the most powerful weapon in the hands of populists as it can be used at any time, after any election to contest the winners. Therefore, the concept of people is deeply symbolic. Further, as discussed in chapter 1, populists often call for direct instruments such as referenda to legitimize the people. However, Müller rebukes the claim that populists use these instruments to initiate an “open-ended process of democratic will-formation among citizens”. They are rather interested in confirming through these instruments what they have decided to be the will of the people. Populism does not equate to larger participation. In addition, populists are engaged in “occupying the state, mass clientelism and corruption, and the suppression of anything like a critical civil society”. They often aim at rewriting constitutions or at least their discourses lead to constitutional conflicts. Last, but not least, Müller affirms that: “populists should be criticized for what they are (...) but that does not mean that one should not engage them in political debate”. As already said, the political elite must not avoid listening to and considering populists’ claims, it should be open to debate and discuss those claims. After all, not all the problems raised by populists are radically unpalatable. However, the mistake that must not be done is to think, as chapter 2 demonstrated, that populism is a corrective to liberal democracy. Müller agrees and

²³⁷ Fieschi, Catherine. “Who’s Afraid of the Populist Wolf?”. *Open Democracy*, 2013, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/whos-afraid-of-populist-wolf/>.

concludes: “[Populism] can be useful in making it clear that parts of the population are unrepresented (...) [It] should force defenders of liberal democracy to think harder about what current failures of representation might be”. Therefore, liberal democrats, if willing to defend this model of democracy, are called to consider the populist voice and to transform its claims and backlash in a way that may allow populism to exist while not representing a threat to the very foundations of liberalism and democracy.²³⁸

4.4. The Incompleteness of Liberal Democracy

Liberal democracy is still incomplete. And it is on its incompleteness that populism grounds its force. As Galston points out:

Liberal democracy goes hand in hand with rationalism [...] and also with individualism. [...] It requires respect for the rule of law and patience in the making of law.²³⁹

It is a model which essentially requires its members, the citizens, to also welcome the “intrinsic shortcomings” and the “necessity of compromise with those with whom they disagree”. Democracy, and liberal democracy indeed, require the toleration and acceptance of differences in public opinions and expressions, due to the *ethos* that characterizes liberalism. Galston defines it as “resolutely nonheroic, prizing security over risk and peace over war”. It is evident how liberal democracies all over the world attempt to provide citizens with security and to condemn war as “a disagreeable necessity rather than a glorious adventure”. What liberal democracy implies is self-restraint, that is also its main source of vulnerability. Populism takes advantage of the fact that often citizens “crave more unity and solidarity than liberal life typically offers” and exploit them. Through its dyadic vision of society opposing the malign force of the elite and the virtuous force of the people, populism emerges, and populist leaders become the agents capable of overcoming the malign elite oppressing the citizens. However, in doing so, populism turns out to be always anti-pluralist as it only accepts those members of the community sharing its ideological battles and positions.

²³⁸ Müller, Jan-Werner. *What is Populism?*, pp. 70-71.

²³⁹ Galston, A. William. *Anti Pluralism: The Populist Threat to Liberal Democracy*, pp. 105-106.

The citizens do often prefer to form compact communities which are grounded on common values and ideas because it is far less demanding than “a wider, more abstract concept of equal citizenship or humanity”.²⁴⁰ On this conflict between a practical outcome and an ideal one, populism draws its strength: it relies on the “enduring incompleteness of life in liberal societies”. After all, as Galston affirms:

(...) When masses of like-minded individuals find a common purpose in the struggle against society’s imperfections and injustices (...) set aside gain in favour of service.²⁴¹

People are stimulated by populists’ claims as they recognize in the words of the populist leader the same ideological and policy battles that they believe should be fought. Support increases even if what populists do is just develop impressive slogans which are not concretized once in power.

Another point of discussion is the fact that liberal democracies are often “individual”; i.e., they are grounded on a strong individualism, which does not often satisfy citizens, who are more prone to adopt a community approach, sharing burdens and responsibilities.²⁴² At the same time, the liberal attempt to reach equality is seen as a potential disease erasing the distinctive traits of individuals, who are in their “like-minded” community and still want to preserve their peculiarities. More in-depth, liberal democracies try to combine “more equality with economic and social inequality” as the economic elite appears disconnected from the well-being of the community. And the latter feels outraged. Unfortunately, there is a moral hierarchy which emerges in liberal democracies. Those who belong to a higher status tend to “look down” on those of inferior status. Even if liberal democracy, as Galston puts it, “accords social status based on achievement rather than the accident of birth, (...) individuals can achieve (status) along many different dimensions, and the kinds of achievement a society singles out shape how it defines status”.²⁴³ Those people who feel that they are left behind prefer to follow their

²⁴⁰ Ibidem.

²⁴¹ Ibidem, p. 108.

²⁴² The antithesis between individualism and collectivism is one of the six indicators used by Guy Hofstede to develop its Country Comparison tool, that assigns to each state of the world a unique coefficient. See Country Comparison Tool. *The Culture Factor Group*, <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison-tool>.

²⁴³ Ibidem, p. 110.

gut and are those who, being psychologically more marginalized, tend to favour populism.

Public frustration is at the roots of liberal democracy because aside from the moral issue, the elite gives strength to populism as it disregards completely electoral promises making citizens cast doubts about its legitimacy. Furthermore, the division of powers typical of democracy often slows down the decision-making process and the presence, as for Italy or Germany, of multipartite parliaments makes it longer and more effortful for the governments to execute policy. It becomes difficult for the citizens to side with the elite, when exposed to bureaucratization and year-long debates over a piece of legislation.

A very last point about liberal democracies must be made about their being intertwined with markets. If regulated markets produce inequality, inequality then becomes a problem for democracy. As chapter 3 emphasises, states (among them many are liberal democracies) cannot control, let alone solve the tensions between the market, which is becoming more international and integrated, and the institutional architecture typical of democracy. Galston asserts that it is indispensable that the “entire West” exercises its capacity for reinvention and for the “re-examination of long-held beliefs along with an expanded social imagination”.²⁴⁴ Populism is ready to exploit these mentioned economic tension as well, especially by attacking those individuals who are considered responsible for national economic instability and for the larger pressure felt by workers in the job market as well as advocating for wider social measures which protect national groups from globalisation.

4.5. Some Solutions to Safeguard Liberal Democracy

Karl Loewenstein (1937) elaborates on the concept of militant democracy: all extremist groups should be banned as a preventive measure against their coming to power.²⁴⁵ However, populism presents challenges which are different from extremists. Rather, what the establishment should do to ensure that the people perceive liberal democracy as the best idea of state configuration too, is to battle against what activates the demand side of populism: corruption and economic inequalities. In the former case, politicians should not deny scandals but rather promote a proper and transparent

²⁴⁴ Ibidem, p. 112.

²⁴⁵ Loewenstein, Karl. “Militant Democracy and Fundamental Rights, I”. *American Political Sciences Review*, vol. 31, n. 3, 1937, pp. 417-432, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1948164>.

investigation - they should offer their palms of hands to the people. Institutions should be perceived as fully autonomous, thus “able to hold state officials and elected politicians accountable to the citizens”.²⁴⁶ Consequently what elites should develop while governing, are efficient systems of prosecution and sanctioning attempting to tackle and diminish the occurrence of scandals and shows the people the efficiency of the system. The same applies to endemic corruption, with the only difference being that the latter requires a strengthened system of rule of law enforcing definitive measures against those officials favouring the corruption network.

Besides the institutional aspect, the state shall also be capable of altering the existent distribution of resources, connections and activities which is at the basis of globalisation. Those supranational and international institutions should, according to Mudde and Kaltwasser, follow a “carrot and stick” system. On the one hand, should encourage citizens to report wrongdoings and to improve working conditions. On the other hand, should push central governments to achieve legal and institutional reforms.²⁴⁷

At the same time, the elite is called to demonstrate that it prioritizes the people’s interests. Therefore, *it is called to favour representation over responsibility*. Otherwise, as the Netherlands show with the recent landslide support for Geert Wilders in the 2023 elections, populism can emerge also in those countries without serious corruption or inequality problems.

More awareness toward populism can be achieved through mass measures such as civic education, a strategy already followed by organs such as Federal Agency for Civic Education (BpB) in Germany.²⁴⁸ It strengthens democratic beliefs, and it explains why pluralism and liberalism are important. It is a much more efficient approach than a simple warning against extremism leading to increasing mistrust in the establishment.

Because populism and mainstream politicians share the same business, i.e., politics, either as in the few cases of Denmark and Finland they cooperate, or the latter ends up creating a *cordon sanitaire* against the former. This measure is supported by those institutions which protect fundamental rights. Especially supreme courts should be entitled to dispossess those groups representing illiberal threats to democracy from

²⁴⁶ Mudde, Cas, and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser. *Populism: A very short introduction*, p. 110.

²⁴⁷ Ibidem, p. 111.

²⁴⁸ For further information see “Federal Agency for Civic Education”. *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung*, Federal Agency for Civic Education | bpb.de.

political entitlement. Further, as in section 4.1. was argued, the media are also crucial. The more truthful narration over populism is externally conveyed, the more the people will avoid giving their trust and confidence to it.

It is more dubious whether the idea of massively excluding populists is the most effective. Probably it could be more convenient for mainstream politicians to interact with populist leaders and to dismiss all their unplausible claims while accepting those points such as the inclusion of marginalized sectors of society into the political arena.

4.6. Rethinking Globalisation

In the last forty years, Western states have opted for a strong and deep model of economic integration, losing progressively the capacity to control some of the most important areas for their economic policymaking while favouring the emergence of a few groups within society such as technocrats, as they were considered “experts” capable of steering the economy toward international and regional standards not achievable elsewhere.

In chapter 3, the link between populism and globalisation was first presented and then analysed. The central idea is that populism is one of the countereffects of globalisation, emerging as a reaction to the new political cleavage between winners and losers of globalisation, to defend and give voice to the latter group. However, if it is true that economic integration cannot be stopped, is there any possibility to rethink this process in a “saner” way?

One answer is provided, by Dani Rodrik in “The Globalization Paradox” (2012). First, to develop a more benign form of globalisation it is essential to differentiate between the international trade regime and global finance.

When discussing the former, it is evident that restrictions on imports and exports have been reduced to the lowest level in history. Hence, it is not the problem of opening trade which must be tackled. As Rodrik poses it: “what generates higher incomes, better jobs and economic progress is not more trade as such”, but rather “the ability to consume those goods at lower cost and sell our products at better prices abroad”.²⁴⁹ The real problem

²⁴⁹ Rodrik, Dani. *The Globalisation Paradox: Democracy and the Future of the World Economy*. W. W. Norton & Co. Inc, 2012. The quotations for this thesis are taken, however, from the PDF version of the book available at [*RODRIK The Globalization Paradox.pdf](#), p. 153.

nowadays is to make the openness of trade sustainable and in agreement with social goals such as income inequality or gender gap. What Rodrik proposes is a “decisive shift in the focus of multilateral negotiations”. Individual nations should be more empowered to take action than they are. In other words, there must be a setback in international obligations, which allows nation-states to “protect social programs and regulations, renew domestic social contracts, and pursue locally tailored growth policies”.²⁵⁰ What is needed is a reorientation from an exclusive focus on access to the market to a broader focus on domestic policy space too, as it would allow national governments to demonstrate that at least a portion of economic sovereignty resides still in their hands and allow them to tackle social issues used by populists to gain support.

Rodrik asserts that: “a sustainable trade regime ultimately rests not on external constraints but on domestic political support”. The sentence means that to provide more legitimacy to globalisation from the internal point of view of the citizens to states, the public debate on trade rules and conditions must be more representative and deeper. There must be wider awareness of the measures which could lead to the suspension of trade agreements and thus “informed deliberation at the national level”.²⁵¹ If the people are well-informed about what and how politics acts with respect to economy policies, they would feel more considered and included in the process.

While some critics may assert that a model like this would curtail the interconnection with other states, it is not true that enhancing confidence in domestic deliberations would lead to the overlook of other countries’ circumstances. It would rather make visible to the eyes of those states that decision-makers can discern between protectionist cheating and legitimate regulations and that whenever suspending or reducing trade, it would always be for reasons requiring the latter. Hence, more national autonomy would “serve democracy” and ameliorate relationships between states.

Furthermore, extensive safeguards for environmental, labour and consumer safety are also essential, as they would transform the world trading system into an eco-friendlier model while recognizing that states can uphold national standards “when trade undermines broadly popular domestic practices”.²⁵² However, to achieve such a goal,

²⁵⁰ Ibidem.

²⁵¹ Ibidem, p. 154.

²⁵² Ibidem, p. 155.

there is the need to reconsider current safeguards, which require either the most-favoured-nation treatment of exports or compensation. The former, which asks to countries to apply the most favourable custom on alike products coming from different countries to which originally two different tariffs were applied, should be only applied to imports. The latter, which is needed anytime that a trade concession is revoked is anachronistic. Due to the constant change in the dynamics of the economy, the nature of concessions cannot be always perfectly predicted.

It should be more sensed to leave the possibility open for states to opt out from agreements due to national issues except for authoritarian regimes that would have “make an explicit social or developmental case to justify safeguard measures”.²⁵³

The trade regime finds itself in a deep impasse as witnessed by the Doha Round began in 2001 aiming at developing the current WTO system. States aim at low-return, high-cost strategies which leave the world economy to unilateral protectionist measures imposed by governments leading to the refusal by states to sign further international agreements that may impair their policy space sovereignty. Or, as Rodrik defines it, “deep integration” will prevail leading to more constraining agreements which however will produce devastating effects for democracy such as shrinking the space for institutional diversity and the proliferation of doubts over the current trade regime, all aspects which reinforce populists claims to return to national economy fully controlled by the state and by domestic policymaking.²⁵⁴ Complementary, developing states will favour regional economic initiatives such as the One Belt One Road Initiative sponsored by China since its launch in 2013 to the deadlocked international system.

4.6.1. Sustainable Economy and Democratic Institutions

Western democracies have all proved incapable of taking care of economic globalisation while also implementing a fully democratic system to deal with policymaking which would not facilitate the loss of domestic sovereignty. Therefore, institutions do also play a fundamental role in producing what was defined as sane globalisation. As Rodrik argues:

²⁵³ Ibidem.

²⁵⁴ Ibidem, p. 157.

If we want to maintain and deepen democracy, we have to choose between the nation-state and international economic integration (...) between deepening democracy and deepening globalisation.²⁵⁵

Because the markets are not self-generating entities but rather grounded on social institutions there is a need for a set of institutions which can handle efficiently an advanced economic system by eventually sanctioning those who violate rules and practices regulating the trade. For instance, there is a need for actors that can manage transaction costs framed according to the needs and interests of domestic economies. The point is the same as for trade (and it will be also with finance): *because domestic interests vary from state to state, there is the need to have different institutions from state to state as well*. Only after a deep institutional core has been developed to protect national economies, these institutions can be homogenized according to some international standards. Pietro Maffettone proposes an interesting reflection: if we believe that the state should be able to control internal economic situations, if economic globalisation is framed as part of the “institutional homogenization” model, and if democracy means the decision-making process to develop such economic institutions, the triangle between globalisation, institutions and democracy becomes extremely complex.²⁵⁶ But, to come back to chapter 2, as Dahl argued, accountability is an essential element of democracy, and to have economic institutions which provide the citizens with effective solutions to domestic circumstances, even when adverse, may radically increase the trust that those citizens have toward the establishment.

Acemoglu and Robinson (2013) argue for the idea of economic institutions to regulate globalisation and curtail populism:

Inclusive economic institutions (...) are those that allow (...) participation by the great mass of the people in economic activities. (...) They must feature secure private property, an unbiased system of law, and a provision of public services.²⁵⁷

Economic institutions must safeguard domestic economic prerogatives.

²⁵⁵ Ibidem, pp. 7-8.

²⁵⁶ Maffettone, Pietro. *Populismo e Filosofia Politica*, Capitolo 3.

²⁵⁷ Acemoglu, Daron, and James A. Robinson. *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity and Poverty*. Profile Books, 2013, pp. 74-75.

Turning to global finance, according to Rodrik here the problem is that: “policymakers press for regulatory harmonization, fearful that diverse regulations will raise transaction costs and impede financial globalization”.²⁵⁸ Since the 2007-2008 crisis, it is evident that the successes of the central financial actors who promoted the described idea, i.e., the US and EU, have been just a few. The G-7 has been substituted by the G-20 which includes also developing countries once not considered to be the main beneficiaries of the process of financial deregulation. In brief, contrary to what Western states attempted to achieve, financial regulation has been characterized mainly by “international discord” rather than harmonization. Populists are pressuring national policymakers to provide financial reforms which have a national matrix more than waiting for international institutions to develop international standards for finance. On this aspect, Europe has been divided into two main strands for long: states following the British approach which is wary of regulatory overreach and those in favour of a more continental approach, more stringent toward deregulation. In the US it depends a lot on the presidency. For instance, former US President Obama endorsed the Volcker rule aiming at prohibiting banks from trading on their “own accounts” and imposing ceilings on bank size.²⁵⁹ To sum up, harmonization is replaced by weak agreements providing only the lowest common denominators and not “appropriate to all”.²⁶⁰

The solution is quite simple: there is a need to recognize differences between states for trade.

On the one hand, such acknowledgment would allow a margin of leeway to national governments to preserve national firms and industries by requiring, through their regulations tailored to the domestic interests, a foreign firm which is interested in conducting business in another country to hold the “same level of capital reserves as domestic firms, face the same disclosure requirements, and abide by the same trading rules”. By doing so, populism would be taken metaphorically away the possibility to climb at least over the economic mountain, because policymakers would make clear that

²⁵⁸ Rodrik, Dani. *The Globalisation Paradox: Democracy and the Future of the World Economy*, p. 157.

²⁵⁹ Ibidem, p. 158. For further information on the position of former US President Barack Obama on the Volcker Rule see “Statement by the President on the Volcker Rule”, *National Archives*, 10 December 2013, Statement by the President on the Volcker Rule | whitehouse.gov (archives.gov).

²⁶⁰ Ibidem.

the national economy matters, and the preservation of the stability of firms and industries is central to the establishment.

What is argued here is to allow regulatory diversity, allowing governments to “keep banks and financial flows out (...) to prevent the erosion of national regulations”.²⁶¹ Hence, diversity implies restrictions on global finance. It is the most viable solution to avoid domestic economies becoming hostage to the risks coming from the transactions needed to import financial services from lax jurisdictions.

To conclude, there is a need for a new global financial order which is rooted in a set of essential but minimal international agreements providing guidelines and limited coordination at the international level (as Rodrik explicitly writes, these guidelines may specify “limited aims (...) financial transparency (...) consultation and information sharing (...) limits on jurisdictions as well as enabling governments to limit “cross-border financial transactions” to ultimately safeguard domestic regulatory standards from foreign competition coming from less strict jurisdictions.

Populism comes currently often as a backlash to technocracy which is perceived as the establishment carrying out the interests of supranational institutions such as the EU, and of international economic centres such as the IMF or WB. By democratizing and politicizing finance national parliaments would become more accountable and the influence of technocrats would be reduced drastically. The people would likely shift their beliefs toward a more open-minded approach toward financial measures as they would not feel anymore totally disenfranchised as they are when governments such as the one led by Mario Draghi, the previous Governor of the European Central Bank and former Italian President of the Council of Ministers are at the helm of powerful economic states like Italy.

Developing countries would also be benefitting from diversity: they would access a larger policy space to manage flows of capital and prevent “sudden stops and over-valued currencies”.²⁶² Where harmonization would be concretely possible is only among like-minded countries which may be willing due to their common approach to regulatory measures to harmonize them. But, as long as the world keeps being sovereignly divided, deepening financial globalisation without understanding the risks implicit in it, may

²⁶¹ Ibidem, 159.

²⁶² Ibidem, 160.

provide fertile grounds for populism and make evident that policymakers do not grasp the challenge behind the process.

4.6.2. The Labor Market

Finally, it is important to add a further element in the elaboration of a sane version of globalisation: the labour market. Rodrik is right when asserting that: “labour markets are not sufficiently globalized”.²⁶³ Crossing national borders, apart from a few exceptions, may be extremely costly for workers. At the same time, when considering the wages in similar workers’ categories in developing and developed countries the wage gap is significantly large. The problem is mainly due to the visa policy, that tends to favour skilled and well-educated workers over ordinary labourers if they can be called so, as in the case of the European Union Blue Card that regulates and facilitates high-skilled migrations. From chapter 3, we know that right-wing populism exploits migrations and foreign workers to defend national sovereignty claiming that they “steal” the jobs away from nationals. The best way to eradicate this famous populist claim would exactly be to boost incomes around the world in an equitable way to reform international labour mobility. Reduction in visa restrictions may be useful in advanced countries as small-scale programmes of expanded labour mobility could generate “large economic gains for the migrant workers and their home economies”, while being fully manageable.²⁶⁴ It requires political unity and acumen. For example, the usual objection which claims that from such restructuration of the labor market a new underclass would emerge does not take into account that workers from developing nations, if the visa programmes would only encompass temporary jobs, would still “queue up” for these opportunities.

The main issue which Rodrik considers quite complex is how to make sure that workers return to their home countries after the visa expires. Either through imposing penalties from home governments or by withholding earnings in blocked accounts until repatriation. To these two hypotheses by Rodrik, I would add also a third one: prohibiting those workers from coming back to the country, where they were welcomed through a visa, for another temporary job or permanent occupation. Such practice would guarantee

²⁶³ Ibidem, 161.

²⁶⁴ Ibidem, 162.

liberal democracies larger accountability and transparency as well and would allow citizens to feel not deprived of working opportunities vis-à-vis migrant workers.

To regularize globalisation for populists to have less path available for their discourse to become articulated and to be spread and welcomed by social groups, there is the need to reconsider both the ideas of trade and financial liberalization. Both are not sustainable in the long term unless diversity between states is acknowledged. It does not mean that international integration is wrong or shall be stopped, rather, international agreements should provide minimum standards which enable local governments to still keep in their hands economic sovereignty by respecting those standards and imposing measures which would protect the domestic economy and domestic policymaking. Consequently, the claims by populists would be rejected by empirical evidence as national industries would feel protected and the citizens would be more involved in the decision-making process. However, reframing international finance and trade is not sufficient; the global labour regime which still lies in the 50s must be reformed. Labour mobility must be expanded and citizens, rightfully worried about losing their jobs should be explained through an “honest and clear-sighted” political debate the reasons why the shift toward labour openness would significantly improve the domestic economy.

Rodrik affirms that we should shift our perspective on globalisation:

Instead of viewing it as a system that requires a single set of institutions or one principal economic superpower, we should accept it as a collection of diverse nations whose interactions are regulated by a thin layer of simple, transparent, and common-sense traffic rules.²⁶⁵

By agreeing on these limited but straightforward traffic rules for the global economy, populism would loosen its grip as a natural consequence of the disappearance of long technocratic governments and as a direct outcome of the people with the economy, at least partially, “back in their hands”.

4.7. Further Considerations on Populism

Mudde and Kaltwasser describe populism as the “bad conscience of liberal democracy” which has become an “illiberal democratic response to undemocratic

²⁶⁵ Ibidem, 169.

liberalism”.²⁶⁶ It is clear how populism sets alight the debate over democracy and its liberal variant by asking questions which are tailored to what is perceived to be the will and interest of the people. Moreover, liberal democracies are often adopting a technocratic and indirectly elected set of bodies and institutions which do not contribute to increasing the trust of the people toward the system. At the same time, mainstream politicians have rarely attempted to sell their choices and policies convincingly to the people. Therefore, populism may be understood as having a “framing effect” on democracy. Policies are presented as necessary to comply with the orders coming from supranational or international institutions, but the people have received them as exclusionary decisions curtailing the possibility for the electors of being involved in the decision-making process. Partially thanks to the narration provided by the media, those people have ended up supporting populist movements independently from the fact that their claims are hardly realizable, but just because populists can frame the issues and the concerns of the people more acceptably and appealingly. Individuals do not want to be fooled by their political representatives. Therefore, liberal democrats should understand that populism is not always wrong *a priori*, but that rather it is good at stimulating the conscience of the people by posing problems, which may not be the most relevant ones, but which are the most relevant to the people (the electorate).

²⁶⁶ Mudde, Cas, and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser. *Populism: A very short introduction*, p. 116.

CONCLUSION

The potentiality of populism is evident. As chapter 2 discusses, populism relies primarily on the inherent conflict with liberalism to thrive. It is accused by liberals of promoting a majoritarian version of democracy that is anti-pluralist and precludes minorities from accessing the political arena. For liberals, populism is a mild version of authoritarianism evident both on the left and on the right sides of the political spectrum, even if most of the literature agrees on its being distant and detached from extremisms such as fascism or communism. One does not have to underestimate the threat that populism presents to liberal democracy. The equation *populism = authoritarianism* has been used by various authors to coin the term “populist authoritarianism”.²⁶⁷ However, as Moffitt notices, the idea that populism “has veered towards authoritarianism, is by no means a universal phenomenon”.²⁶⁸ When in power, a few populists have steered toward less democratic forms of government (it is sufficient to look at Syrzia or Podemos as counterarguments). Therefore, when assessing the potentiality of populism vis-à-vis democracy it is important to develop a twofold assessment.

On the one hand, populism may lead to a more autocratic form of government which, because of its nature, tends to exclude from the political arena those sectors of society which disagree with populists’ claims, and transform them into scapegoats for economic, social, cultural, and political problems. Simultaneously, especially when populism emerges in already authoritarian systems, such as the *Solidarity* movement in Poland or the *Partido de la Revolucion Democratica* in Mexico, it could act as a positive contributor to democratization by challenging corruption and closeness of a state. But carefulness is required, because a political fight against structural problems of governments does not mean that populism is compatible with democracy. It simply acknowledges that the claim to represent the will of the people may be useful for populists to become more enfranchised and active in particularly closed regimes. As written in chapters 1 and 2, once democracy is effectively working, populism loses its positive contribution to it as it attempts to devise a democratic model which is anti-plural and exclusionary. In other

²⁶⁷ Inglehart, Ronald, and Pippa Norris. “Trump and the Populist Authoritarian Parties: The Silent Revolution in Reverse.” *Perspective on Politics*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2017, pp. 443-454., doi:10.1017/S1537592717000111.

²⁶⁸ Moffitt, Benjamin. *Populism*, p. 107.

words, populism may at most lead to radical democracy, but surely not to liberal democracy. Evidence comes from the importance that populism attributes to its leader, the actor who allegedly “draws together the unsatisfied demands of numerous groups and helps them to form a collective identity as the people”, while in liberal democracies the leader acts far more as *primus inter pares*, thus standing on the same level as the other fonctionnaires or ministers siding him or her.²⁶⁹ The populist leader is perceived as infallible and unchallengeable but often these traits make him a solitaire and authoritarian man or woman, who wishes to have all powers concentrated in his or her hands.

The core paradox of populism is that radical democracy for what it is described by populist leaders can never be realized, as it would also mean the end of the populist mission or as Chantal Mouffe (2018) has argued, it would represent the “closure of questioning the political order”, because it would reveal the contradiction that fuel and characterize populism.²⁷⁰ Hence, populists have no real interest in achieving a model of democracy which is the one that they propose. They are fully content to fluctuate in the liberal setting as it allows them to conduct their battle and to exist. That is why populism turns out to be, as chapters 1 and 2 have demonstrated, mostly a short-term phenomenon. To summarize, I quote Professor Sebastiano Maffettone, who affirmed during his series of lectures on populism at LUISS Guido Carli University that:

Populism is a good way to win an election but not to run a country.²⁷¹

In 1998 Nadia Urbinati asserted that: “the debate over the meaning of populism turns out to be a debate over the interpretation of democracy”.²⁷² It seems that populism is “either completely ‘outside’ or completely ‘inside’ democracy” because, *radical democrats do equate populism with democracy while liberal democrats consider it as a self-sufficient phenomenon which challenges democracy*. In 2015, Paulina Ochoa Espejo argued that:

²⁶⁹ Ibidem, p. 108-110.

²⁷⁰ Mouffe, Chantal. *For a Left Populism*. Verso, 2018, pp. 79-85.

²⁷¹ Throughout the course of Political Philosophy taught in the academic year 2021/2022 at LUISS Guido Carli, Professor Sebastiano Maffettone discussed the impact of populism on democracy.

²⁷² Urbinati, Nadia. “Democracy and Populism”. *Constellation*, vol. 5, n. 1, 1998, p. 116, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8675.00080>.

Scholars who study the phenomenon empirically and claim to eschew normative judgments (...) unwittingly introduce such judgments by accepting the distinction between democracy and populism.²⁷³

The answer to the relationship between populism and liberal democracy may be that the former is “an internal periphery” of the latter.²⁷⁴ It attempts to make politics “more accessible”, it aims at including those who are more disenfranchised and excluded and it shed light on corruption and dysfunctions implicit in the institutional architecture of democracies. But, at the same time, it denies the complexity of liberalism, it moves toward “extreme personalisation”, and it prevents fair treatment to the opposition. Populism and democracy are in tension. Reasonably populism and democracy are linked for two main reasons. First, democracies have been the promoters of the process of economic and political globalisation which has formed new societal cleavages, above all the one between winners and losers of globalisation, which consequently has created the space for populism around the world to carry on their shoulders the claims by the latter group, to advocate for them, and to represent the social backlash toward supranational, international and global institutions both economic such as the IMF, WB, WTO and political like the EU or the United Nations (UN). However, because Western democracies, as chapter 3 has explained, have not turned out to be the main winners of globalisation, the authoritarian model offered by actors such as China has increased the pressure felt by liberal democracies and the discontent and mistrust that the members of democratic communities feel toward the elite and those in power.

Secondly, due to these concerns raised by citizens, populism is free to argue for the shift from liberalism, accused of focusing too much on equality and by doing so whipping out individual peculiarities, to majoritarianism, which would reinstate the people, through the populist leaders, as the central decision-makers. But this conclusion cannot be reached in practice as it would ultimately lead to the end of the populist process, as it would demonstrate how fragile and inconsistent majoritarian democracy would be compared to liberal democracy.

²⁷³ Ochoa Espejo, Paulina. “Power to whom? The people between procedure and populism”, in de la Torre, Carlos (editor). *The Promise and Perils of Populism: Global Perspectives*. University Press of Kentucky, 2015, p. 60.

²⁷⁴ Arditi, Benjamin. *Politics on the Edges of Liberalism: Difference, Populism, Revolution, Agitation*. Edinburgh University Press, 2007, p. 87.

Liberal democrats, however, cannot underestimate the resonance of the populist challenge. They have the duty to take into consideration the claim that populists make.

On the one hand, populist right and left-wing parties are welcoming larger consensus both at national and supranational levels, therefore the risk of seeing them at the helm of national governments or supranational institutions more frequently than in the last decade is concrete.

On the other hand, as for the attempt by populists to shed light on marginalized groups in society, the political elite may be clever enough to accept their claims and reframe them in a more democratic way which could play to the advantage of the perception that citizens have of the liberal model.

Furthermore, because there is increasing evidence that globalisation cannot be stopped, Western democracies must come up with alternative solutions which can curb the plague of populism while allowing for internationalisation and economic integration.

Either they provide more solid welfare systems, safety nets, or measures which protect the workers who feel more pressurized by migrations and technological development, or as Dani Rodrik and Pietro Maffettone have argued, they change their trajectory toward a saner model of globalisation, which is open to trade and commerce, but which still allows for a certain degree of restrictions to protect the domestic institutional and market structure.

The consequences of the globalised economic model have diminished the political autonomy of citizens while also producing distributive effects which are in contradiction with the spread idea that those who are worse off need to be prioritized when policymakers legislate. *Populism also exploits the tension between the ideal of distributive justice advocated by liberals and the actual economic injustice as an outcome of the economic manoeuvres taken by liberal governments in the last decades.* The content of populism is not casual. If the antithesis between the corrupted elite and the pure people must be framed through the categories of political and distributive justice, then, as Pietro Maffettone puts it:

It is not implausible that policies based on the redistribution of economic resources and [...] a larger economic autarky, become *prima facie* plausible.²⁷⁵

²⁷⁵ Maffettone, Pietro. *Populismo e Filosofia Politica*, p. 163 (translated from Italian).

Therefore, the measures that populists propose such as the Italian *reddito di cittadinanza* or leaving the European Union as for Brexit in the United Kingdom, attempt to accomplish their anti-globalist mission. However, following Pietro Maffettone's line of thought, what populists leave aside is that they never explain how these measures can be concretized in detail and that these policies cost, and often cost a lot.

Populism promises to create a new world where like a miracle, the problems hampering social life disappear. Pietro Maffettone writes it brilliantly: "the day when populism will reveal its ineffectiveness, the people who are now embracing it because feeling betrayed by the establishment, will end up losing trust in any form of political system".²⁷⁶ That is why it is essential to ensure stable and enduring institutions capable of reconnecting the economy to the people. Furthermore, the elite must acknowledge to have improperly handled the past and promise to be truthful about the future. The latter responsibility can become concrete whenever citizens become simultaneously more informed about the markets and about the fact that economic policies cost.

In conclusion, *populism is therefore neither a democracy's foe' nor a democracy's potential saviour, it is rather consubstantial to it* - it is the outcome of globalisation, a process initiated by democracies, which has come to threaten the very core of liberalism.²⁷⁷ If globalisation cannot be stopped, *populism must be curtailed by other means*, and it is up to liberal democrats to display them in the best way possible to safeguard the liberal pillar and economic internationalisation, while not abandoning the central actors of both processes: individuals.

²⁷⁶ Ibidem, pp. 165-166.

²⁷⁷ Canovan, Margaret. "Trust the people! Populism and the two faces of democracy". *Political Studies*, vol. 47, n. 1, 1999, pp. 2-16.

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