Re-thinking Populism within the Borders of Democracy

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Abstract

Although populism has many references and various definitions as an elusive and ambiguous concept, this article approaches it as a political strategy which has the potential to destabilize democracy in some ways. This approach enables a broader comprehension of populism rather than confining it to certain ideological tenets or a few undisputed populist movements. This study attempts to reveal the logic of this political strategy through a tripartite analysis which consists of the sense of democracy inherent in populism, its way of thinking and reasoning, and the political circumstances which enable and strengthen populism. It is argued that the analysis performed here can offer an outline of the ground on which the struggle against the features of populism, that threatens democracy, can be carried out. Finally, in the light of the aforementioned analysis and some ideas which are borrowed from the works of Habermas and Mouffe to a large extent, it is aimed to re-read democracy in order to deal with the populist challenge in liberal democracies.

Keywords: populism, populist politics, populist logic, illiberal democracy.

1. Introduction

The populist movements have been the centre of attention in media and academy after they have gained strength in the western democracies in the last decades. Thus, populism has been discussed with its various dimensions so far. The views put forward by academics about the effect of populism on democracy ranges from 'threat' to 'corrective force' (Gidron, Bonikowski, 2013). However, almost every populist movement claims that their paramount goal is democracy's promise of power to the people and many of them favor

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the ways of direct democracy such as referendum and popular initiative. Therefore, they consider themselves as true democrats who are giving voice to popular opinions and grievances which are disregarded or failed to be noticed by institutionalized politics and media (Canovan, 1999: 2).

The support and vote percentages populist movements have obtained recently point out that they possess an undeniable place in the game of democracy. The will of their supporters cannot be ignored in a democratic framework. But how is this being created and forged? How are the circumstances coming into existence? What are the factors which help populists to obtain public support and to mobilize it? Do these movements have a characteristic reasoning and rationality? There are lots of question like these concerning populism and, as it seems to me, grasping the logic of populism to some extent is the first step for the ones who want to seek the proper answers. Departing from that point, in this paper I will attempt to make such an analysis by addressing populism with regard to the sense of democracy, rationality and reasoning and political circumstances it feeds on. I argue that such a tripartite analysis can offer the ground to diminish the destabilizing effects of populism on democracies by figuring out its logical patterns.

It should be noted that the paper mainly focus on the context of European right-wing politics, and does not have any claim to equalize the characteristics of populism in different contexts such as Latin American, North American and European left-wing populist movements. As Kaltwasser (2015) aptly elucidates, populism has different grounds of emergence in each case, and it is not worth trying to develop a theory which encompasses all of them. It is possible to find much in common amongst them when they are examined as political strategies with some certain features. Yet, it has been asserted recently that Latin American and European left-wing cases employ inclusionary politics in contrast to the popular surmises about populist movements (Stavrakakis, Katsambekis, 2014; de la Torre, 2016; Mudde, Kaltwasser, 2013). In Latin American populisms, economic issues, in particular, and the quest for alternatives to neoliberal policies bring populism to the fore; although, as Mudde and Kaltwasser (2012) remark, no certain economic doctrine can be attributed to populism since we can see both left-wing and right-wing populists in contemporary Europe. Nevertheless, rather than involving the discussions about the varieties or good and bad examples of populism and differences between them, I will address some common features of populist politics which enable us to conceive and conceptualize populism. Still, I agree with Urbinati (2015) on the view that if the aim is to understand populism, we should pay more regards to what can go wrong in its

relationship with constitutional democracy by studying the negative, instead of focusing relatively smooth experiences.

Within the course of the study, I will firstly deal with the notion of populism and elucidate in short what makes a movement, a party, an ideology or a political strategy populist and then delineate in what meaning I will use populism in this text. In the second part, I will attempt to carry out the tripartite discussion of populism which handles its relationship with democracy, its logical frame and the political circumstances in which that logic succeeds. Lastly, inferring from this discussion, I will attempt to sketch a normative political framework within which potential destabilizing and debilitating effects of populism and populist movements on democracy can be minimized.

2. Populism: premises, core ideas, various dimensions

The same as many other concepts and terms in social studies, populism is discussed on and criticized due to its elusiveness and ambiguity. As Taggart (2002) points out, it is 'one of the most widely used but poorly understood political concepts of our time'. Nevertheless, to achieve a perfect definition of populism is not my aim in this section. Although it is possible to find studies which provide comparisons of the different understandings of the concept as an ideology, political strategy or special discourse (Gidron, Bonikowski, 2013), in this part, I will attempt to set forth and discuss common aspects and ideas in various definitions of populism in order to have an adequate understanding and analytical core of the notion for the later analysis and discussion since all of them refer to a specific set of ideas (Kaltwasser, Taggart, 2016; Panizza: 2005).

Mudde (2000) classifies the general types of populism as agrarian, economic and political populism even though he notes that these are just ideal types and can overlap in both theory and practice. Agrarian populism considers the peasant as the source of morality and the agricultural life as the foundation of society. In economic populism, the pro-active role of the state has the key role, which aims a fair redistribution of wealth, taking measures to protect domestic market and sectors etc. Lastly, the main lines of the political populism can be stated as referring to 'the people' as a homogeneous entity and proclaiming a rigid dichotomy between 'the pure people' and 'the corrupt elite'. In her seminal work, *Populism*, Canovan (1981) also asserts that although an effort to identify a definite ideology or a specific socioeconomic situation which is common in all forms of populism does not seem meaningful; anti-elitism and some kind of exaltation of 'the people' are involved in all those

forms. The main axis in this study can be considered as the last one to a great extent considering the second one is somehow intrinsic in it, too.

In structural sense, populism challenges established power-holders and elite values. That is why, what is meant by populist ideology can be conceived through this challenge. However, the content of the mentioned ideology varies in different contexts. For instance, populists in one country which charges high taxes to fund a welfare state may aim to have a fully-fledged economic liberalism; while populists who live in a country which has a free market economy may demand protectionism and more state provision (Canovan, 1999). That is to say, populist reactions depend on the nature of the elite and dominant political discourse. As Gidron and Bonikowski (2013) posit, populism cuts across ideological cleavages, geographical borders and historical eras; still, regarding liberal democracies, the liberal values such as individualism, multiculturalism, internationalism etc. can be seen as the cornerstones of elite political culture. Thus, these values are what populists challenge in general in the context of liberal democracies. Populists in established democracies have the claim to give voice to the 'silent majority' of ordinary and decent people against corrupt politicians, arrogant elites and strident minorities (Canovan, 1999).

The discourse of 'the people' holds a significant place in the literature. However, Deiwiks (2009) asserts that the notion has various usages. It may refer to the individuals within a particular region as in the example of the Lega Nord which considers the people of the Northern Italy as 'the people'. On the other hand, it may refer to a community of blood, race, or other radical perceptions of identity etc.; and in these situations, populism may turn into racism. Similarly, Canovan (2004) argues that the notion of 'the people' has various meanings in many political senses and discourses, and it slips one meaning to another easily.

Rooduijn (2014) specifies four main characteristics as an outcome of his study which seeks the lowest common denominator among populist actors by means of an analysis and comparison of six selected case of well-known populist movements.[1] These characteristics can be stated shortly as emphasizing the central position of people, criticizing the elite, perceiving the people as a homogeneous entity and proclaiming a serious crisis. The first three are almost common in every analysis of populism, but I consider the last one as significant as them since populist movements explain the need for themselves by it. It can be better comprehended if it is kept in mind that

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[1] The cases are Watson's People's Party, Perot's Progress Party, Peron's Justicialist Party, Chavez's Movement of the Fifth Republic, Le Pen's National Front and Berlusconi's Forza Italia.

populists present themselves as the alternatives to established politics as a result of a crisis which cannot be dealt with by conventional ways and parties.

According to Mudde (2004), populism does not own the same level of intellectual equipment as, for instance, liberalism or socialism although it is still a distinct ideology. Nonetheless, it is a thin-centered ideology; therefore, it is easily combined with a large variety of other ideologies. In the same way, Akkerman (2003) stresses one of the striking differences between left and right implementations of populism. According to him, although both complain about democracies being captivated by political elites and powerful interest groups, the populists of the left express dissatisfaction with large corporations and their special interests while the populists of the right are discontent with ethnic and other minorities in addition to these elites.

Another aspect to which Akkerman (2003) draws attention is a kind of populism which he calls 'respectable populism'. What distinguishes respectable populism from the radical ones is its constitutionalism. As an example, in terms of creating a party discipline or forming and using a rhetoric which brings party and nation closer, Blair's movement could be regarded in populism. Nevertheless, he adopted an anti-partisan strategy and aimed to attract support by policy reforms in favor of popular majorities, and he struggled to create consensus. Thus, this kind of populism should be distinct from the radical ones. Herein, Jagers and Walgrave (2007) make a necessary distinction between thick and thin populism is useful for the analysis of the concept. A thinly defined populism is simply a strategy, a political communication style to mobilize support which can be adopted by all kinds of political actors. In that way, it is viewed far from all pejorative and authoritarian connotations. However, they note that traditional parties which are tempted to emulate the discourses of the populist ones can make the situation worse instead of blocking the rise of populist movements (2005).

Kessel (2014) makes a parallel interpretation in this regard. According to him, there are two main issues which cause problems while defining the cases of populism. Firstly, political movements or parties can use populist discourse to various degrees and it is unclear that at which point they can be classified as a complete example of populism. Secondly, features of a populist rhetoric can be added to or removed from their repertoire quite easily and this situation may change their positions in terms of populism. In spite of these hardships, he states that there are political parties whose populist nature appears almost undisputed, such as the French Front National, the Austrian Freedom Party, the Belgian Flemish Interest and the Italian Lega Nord (2014).

Weyland (1999, 2001) defines populism as a political strategy with some definite characteristics. In his account, the leader who 'appeals to a heterogeneous mass of followers who feel left out and are available for

mobilization' bypasses established intermediary organizations and reaches the followers while his/her political party which has a low level of institutionalization functions mostly as a personal vehicle (Weyland, 1999: 381). In parallel, Jansen (2011) offers focusing on populist mobilization and examining populism as a mode of political practice instead of regarding it as type of ideology, regime, party or movement: 'What, then, makes a political project populist? I define as a project of populist mobilization any *sustained, large-scale political project that mobilizes ordinarily marginalized social sectors into publicly visible and contentious political action while articulating an anti-elite, nationalist rhetoric that valorizes ordinary people*' (Jansen, 2011: 82).

In my view, regarding populism as a political strategy which aims mobilization of people for political power as in Weyland's and Jansen's approaches[2] is noteworthy for this study in three respects:

- It helps to concentrate on the logic of populist mobilization instead of ideological tenets, organizational structure or position in political spectrum. Canovan (1981) notes that labeling populism as Right or Left is vain since it depends on which variety or combination of varieties is in question. Mény and Surel (2002) also criticize the propensity to identify populism with the extreme right by asserting that 'many parties on the extreme Right are not populist and many populist movements are too specific, heterogeneous or eclectic to be identified with the extreme Right'. Moreover, populist parties insist that they are democrats since their goal is to restore the power to the people while traditionally the parties of the extreme right have a standing against democracy.

- It offers a broader understanding in order not to restrict the notion within the boundaries of some 'undisputed' populist movements. Similarly, Mudde (2013) notes that the main threats to illiberal democracy have come from the mainstream political organizations rather than the radical ones. Berlusconi in Italy, Orban in Hungary and Kaczynski brothers in Poland are examples of this situation.

- It remarks the nationalist component existing in populism in general. Although political populism could be represented by non-nationalist and left-wing political actors, it has been linked with the right-wing and

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[2] Although populism is addressed as a political project in Jansen's work, I agree with Anselmi (2017) on considering him in the same group with Weyland, since both of them center their approaches on a strategy of mobilization, unlike the other ones which examine populism either as an ideology or as a discourse. In addition, strategy is a more suitable term for conceptualization of populism from my point of view because – although both refer to almost the same content which can be regarded as 'a detailed plan to achieve a particular purpose' – project as a term inherently indicates a period of time while strategy does not have such a limitation.

national populism (Mudde, 2000). The reason for this situation is that the belief of homogeneous, undivided people is compatible with nationalists' perception of the nation. Therefore, the notion of populism in the later analysis and discussions can be read in light of these points.

3. A tripartite analysis of populism

In this section, what I first intend to show is the perspective on democracy that populism has as a political strategy. It will take us to the thought process and reasoning which is used to mobilize supporters or voters. Lastly, I will try to critically approach the political ground which helps populism emerge and strengthen. Rather than an ordinary order, I would like it to reveal the main columns of the logic in populism and constitute the foundation of the later argument of democracy to a large extent.

3.1 Perception of democracy in populism

Zakaria (1997) asserts that democracy is about the accumulation and use of power while constitutional liberalism is about the limitation of power. The tension is visible at this point. In my view, populism mainly originates or gains strength from the manipulation of this tension. By depicting liberal norms and values as threats on sovereignty of the people, populist movements aim to get rid of these 'impediments'.

The essence of this issue appears as the identification of democracy with the 'liberal democracy' which is entrenched in the Western tradition as Zakaria points out. He remarks that Western governments embraced democracy and constitutional liberalism together and it has become difficult to imagine these ones apart (Zakaria, 1997). Yet, he posits that democracy does not necessarily bring about constitutional liberalism. Lacking in the essential elements of constitutional liberalism, illiberal democracies emerge and strengthen. Mudde (2004) calls it 'democratic extremism' because in an illiberal democracy 'all limitations on the expression of the general will' is rejected with an extremist and majoritarian understanding of democracy. Populists insist on an undiluted democracy and have a tendency to see democracy as only the power of the people (Canovan, 2004). The division of power, the rule of law and respect for the rights of minorities are rejected since they limit people's sovereignty, and that brings the understanding of democracy in populism an illiberal content (Jagers, Walgrave, 2007; Kriesi, 2014).

With regard to the different understanding of democracy in populism, Urbinati's (2014) analysis is illuminating one. She exposes that representative and constitutional democracy which is what we broadly approve as democracy

is built on a diarchy of will and opinion. This diarchy gives the individuals the way to reflect their opinions through interaction and form the general will through their individual wills without making any of them identical. Thus, it lets the entire system change according to the changing opinions of the citizens. In addition, representation functions as a filter, stabilizes the framework and protects the general interest from the dominance of particular interests. So, the proceduralism stemming from the aforementioned processes constitutes the figure of democracy in this understanding. Nonetheless, in the other one, such procedures and contestations are seen as means to an end which transcends those in the name of the truth represented by the people. Thus, the will of a proportion of people – even if they are the majority – becomes the truth and the source of legitimacy. Therefore, she considers populism as a disfiguration of democracy.

Plattner (2010) contends that a regime must guarantee the liberty and protect the rights of individuals and minorities to be considered democratic since what is understood from the concept is liberal democracy today. However, individual rights and majority rule as the two main components of liberal democracy can be separated in both theory and practice, and we have seen the examples so far. He claims that ancient city-states were democratic in governance but not liberal with respect to individual rights. Some monarchies in Europe were relatively liberal, and Hong Kong under the British colonial rule was exceedingly liberal although they were not democratic in terms of ruling (Plattner, 2010).

De la Torre (2007) exposes another ambiguity in populism's relationship with democracy. On the one hand, as a form of protest and resistance, it 'vindicated the worth of the poor and the excluded'. In the construction of the nation, they are placed at the centre. On the other hand, populist representation is built on the identity of people, which has a single voice and interest, and most of the time it is embodied by a leader. Those who do not share the same vision as of the leader are labeled as anti-nation or excluded somehow. Their rights are not respected since they are considered as enemies.

As the last point, complaining about the representative politics is a common feature in various kinds of populism. Molyneux and Osborne (2017) assert that most populist accept the representative principle in one form or another; however, the representation from the viewpoint of populists is seen as delegation; which means representatives have to express what their constituents want. Nevertheless, in liberal democracies, representation is always located somewhere between trust (in representatives) and delegation. Taggart (2002) sees the link between representative politics and populism critical for democracy. He argues that populism tests the tolerance of

representative politics. That is to say, when the latter weakens or fails to provide the platform for ideas, groups or parties; the first ascends.

After all, it can be said that populism's perspective on democracy has problems with the liberal values in it. Populism's extreme emphasis on sovereignty as a political strategy causes conflicts with contemporary dominant understanding of democracy since that emphasis diminishes its tolerance for checks and balances in the system. It may revive the political participation which can be viewed as a positive effect. However, its understanding of democracy is imbued with majoritarianism; thus, whether the mobilization populism provides serve to create a more democratic atmosphere is contentious.

3.2 Reasoning and rationality in populism

Although it has no interest in an analysis which aspires to explain the nature of populism, in my view, the basic line in the two volumes of *Theory of Communicative Action*, which are mainly predicated on a critique of instrumental reason, is very useful in understanding how radical types of populism, in particular, mobilizes the people. In that work, Habermas (1984) argues that practical reason is what should govern the communicative action; however, market powers or bureaucracies use means such as financial sources or media to steer the communication. Via such a distortion, the lifeworld – which can be very shortly interpreted as the subjectively and inter-subjectively experienced realm of informal practices and understandings – is colonized, or at least eroded, and agreement ground and consensus lose legitimacy to a great extent. Of course, there are critiques of Habermas' work in terms of consensus seeking (Mouffe, 2005) or with regard to his assumption of rational norms of communicative action as universal norms (Hillier, 2003). Nevertheless, my aim here is neither to defend the theory; nor to discuss the pros and cons or weaknesses in it. My intention is only to view populism through a new perspective I borrow from it: the colonization of practical reason and rationality. I can illustrate my claim through two aspects of populist movements.

1) Impeccable leadership: The characteristic way of populism to provide a direct linkage between the rulers and the ruled is to introduce a charismatic leader who is not from the established political elite. This leader has direct access to the people; he knows what they want without intermediaries and acts as their spokesperson (Kriesi, 2014). Panizza (2005) objects to this popular opinion and puts forward that populist leaders are not required to be charismatic or tyrant as it is traditionally assumed. Instead, this person is attributed a function as a symbol, it embodies a promise: a fully reconciled

people. At this point, Arditi (2004) voices an interesting parallel between populists and Hobbesian political obligation. In that, there is a classical exchange of obedience for protection and safety. Today, populists transform this obedience into a passionate allegiance to a political grouping for security, jobs or other promises. The centrality of the leaders as the embodiments of general will make them 'something akin to infallible sovereigns' and therefore renders their decisions unquestionable. By this way, democratic debates and discussions are rendered unnecessary. Yet, how can the people who are dissatisfied with the representative political elites support and let their opinion be formed by other representatives? Pasquino (2008: 21) gives an answer and asserts that populist leaders do not have a claim to represent the people; but rather consider and show themselves as 'an integral part of the people'. Apart from recognizing that the leader is endowed with qualities to lead, s/he should be considered by people as 'one of us'. In other words, s/he becomes the people to a great extent; thinks and gives opinion as them, instead of representing their thoughts or opinions.

2) 'Friends or foes' outlook: The antagonism between 'the people' and 'the others' constitutes the political basis of populism (Panizza, 2005: 28). Mudde (2004: 544) describes populism as 'moralistic rather than programmatic'. The key element of populism is a Manichean outlook, which prescribes a dichotomy of friends and foes. Opponents are not only regarded as people with different values and priorities in populist ideology but are simply regarded as 'evil'. As a result, since it damages the purity, compromise is rendered impossible. There can be objections to the identification between this outlook and populism, such as Laclau's objection. He asserts that simplification of political space and replacing it by dichotomies cannot be seen as a trademark which is peculiar to populism. According to him, it is a necessity in politics and a condition in political action (Laclau, 2005). In my opinion, the crucial question here is the extent of this dichotomy held in any political strategy. According to Müller (2016), populists are anti-pluralists, which refers to both homogeneity of the people and their singularity as the only legitimate representatives of the people. This exclusive representation, of course, is predicated on a moral basis in the populist logic. This moral distinction and identification make populism an exclusionary form of identity politics (Müller, 2016). Moreover, such an outlook eradicates the legitimacy of the opponents and blocks an exchange of views and democratic discussion between them.

In his theory, Habermas (1984) sees reaching an understanding vital since the rational basis of communicatively achieved agreement is an outcome of its processes. Of course, agreement or consensus as an ultimate goal is controversial and will be discussed later. Nevertheless, listening and

understanding the views of opponents are essential to democratic discussions. As can be seen from the two aspects above, populism narrows the domain of rational communication among different sides. The orientation to success, which can be sum up as realization of the general will, colonizes the practical reason and rationality and blocks the channels of democratic communication and discussion.

Still, these two parts of the analysis focus on one part of the story. Kaltwasser and Taggart (2016) draws attention to an important point that regarding populism as a problem of populist parties and leaders using a particular discourse which appeals to certain constituencies would be concentrating on the supply of populism. That is why, such approaches may ignore the conditions which create the demand for populism, and they cannot give a healthy analysis of the related concept when merely taken. These conditions should be scrutinized to construe the demand for populism as well.

3.3 Depoliticization and over-rationalization: political and social grounds of populism

Canovan (1981) draws attention to populist imagery which is founded on stories, struggles and virtues of 'the little man'. Symbolic and fictional representations of ordinary persons create everyday heroes and these portraits which are far removed from showing the difficulties of the real life. Instead of elites, common man becomes the hero in populist narratives.

Touched upon before, populism is a political strategy which struggles to mobilize the passions of the people for its goals. To say it differently, it appeals to the emotions of people. Thus, 'politics of faith' and 'politics of skepticism' which are defined by Oakeshott (1996) is useful to conceive the starting point of populism as a political strategy. The first form of politics posits that politics is about achieving perfection and salvation in this world and governmental action is vital for this; thus, it entails mobilization of people by their enthusiasm and increasing power to reach its goals. By contrast, the second is suspicious of such power seeking and enthusiasm, expecting less from governments. For the defenders of this style, the duty of politics is to keep order by maintaining rule of law and the rule of law is crucial. They need one another for a balance in democracies. Drawing on Oakeshott's distinction, Canovan (1999) argues that modern democracy as an idea and phenomenon is a point of intersection between these styles (which he renames them 'redemptive' and 'pragmatic' respectively) of politics. Hence, the tensions between them indeed revivify the democracy (Canovan, 1999).

Mouffe takes a similar position and asserts that 'a pluralist liberal democracy does not deny the existence of conflicts but provides the

institutions allowing them to be expressed in an adversarial form' (Mouffe 2005: 30). She considers the current tendency to celebrate a politics of consensus not useful in terms of democracy since a clash of legitimate democratic positions, about which confrontation between left and right should be, is vital for a well-functioning democracy. When such a confrontation cannot provide 'collective forms of identification strong enough to mobilize political passions', Mouffe (2005) argues that passions cannot find the right direction and agonistic dynamics of pluralism are restrained. By this way, political frontiers get blurred, dissatisfaction with the existing political parties increases and essentialist forms of nationalist, ethnic or religious forms of identifications get stronger. In my point of view, she gives a good account of the political ground from which populism benefits to a large extent since it is beyond taking populism into consideration only as a result of the voting behavior which steers towards alternatives of established parties. The research by Akkerman, Mudde and Zaslove (2014) in the Netherlands can be regarded as a good support to my point. To state it shortly, the research revealed that there is a high consistency between populist attitudes at the individual level and party preferences. The Netherlands can be considered ideal for such a research, thinking that the populist parties, both from left-wing and from right-wing, have obtained almost 21% of the vote in elections on average since 2002. It is also a country which has a multi-party system and offers a number of parties to vote for if frustrated with the more established or mainstream parties. Thus, voter behavior cannot be explained by just protest voting. In other words, the populist parties represent more than weak and temporary tendencies in contrast to common belief.

As another dimension, it is also possible to read the consequences of this depolitization and over-rationalization from the social sphere. Pasquino (2008) puts forward that there are many common features shared by the individuals who are attracted by populist leaders. Suffering from political isolation and alienation and not being members of any kind of organizations/associations (or tendency to be passive members) can be counted as the significant ones among them. As an example, when individuals move from an area where traditional ties are sufficient to bind them to other members of their community to another in which new networks are relatively hard to create, they become socially dislocated. These socially isolated or dislocated people are more exposed to populist leaders offering an experience of (albeit subordinate) involvement and participation (Pasquino, 2008). Populists succeed in reaching these masses since their rhetoric is constructed on emotions and identification through them.

A pattern towards non-ideological, apolitical and depolarized politics has been observed in Western democracies in the last decades. Mudde (2004)

contends that they have become depoliticized democracies and administration has replaced politics in their context. Thus, the call of populists to depoliticize the public realm has been taken into account by more people. Blokker (2018) draws attention to another dimension of the issue by examining the constitutional project of populism, and asserts that the main point of this project is a critical stance against rationalization and juridification of society by legal and liberal constitutionalism. Moving from this point of departure, populists convey their majoritarian approach to the field of constitution since the existing legal instruments and institutions are associated with the status quo. The constitutional arrangements they envisage reflect the populist distinction between a good and moral majority and an immoral minority; thus, populist constitutional project aims to defend and expand the interest of this majority. Thus, according to Blokker, although populist constitutional vision may draw attention to the intrinsic problems of constitutions which prioritize judicial aspects and neglect engagement of larger society with constitution; the answer of populist constitutional project is a non-liberal one which paves the way for an authoritarian, even despotic legal foundation on behalf of its imagined majority.

To put it simply, when established politics cannot address the emotions or passions of the people due to various reasons such as over-rationalization of politics, lack (or suppression) of conflicts, or, as in populist claim, 'corruption of political elites', populists successfully fill in the blank.

4. Re-reading democracy as an answer to populism

Populism has been a more visible phenomenon in liberal democracies in the last decades and made a room for itself in politics. Herein, Rydgren brings forward an insightful account for the transformation and re-emergence of right-wing populist movements in Western Europe in the course of time. According to him, there were two significant stigmatizations which rendered them impotent in the politics of Europe after the Second World War: 'anti-democratic' and 'racist' (Rydgren, 2005). They dealt with the first by positioning themselves between the 'normal opposition' and openly antidemocratic groups without overstepping the line opposing to democracy. To overcome the second, they, of course, used the left's notion of difference and multiculturalism as a basis for their claim, and disregarded the nonhierarchical elements in it. They embraced ethnopluralism in multiculturalism, which prescribes that nations have to be kept separated in order to preserve their unique national character since culture and ethnicity are deterministic and monolithic. By that way, they were able to 'mobilize on

xenophobic and racist public opinions without being stigmatized as racists' (Rydgren, 2005: 427).

In addition to the justifications above, poorly configured representation systems or channels in democracies may show populist claims as being right and increase the legitimacy of populism to a great extent. Populist movements and parties raise legitimate questions related to the dilemmas in democracies, even though their solutions are more controversial than helpful (Kaltwasser, 2014). The situation of the politics in the EU is a remarkable example of that situation even at supranational level. It is widely admitted that the representative channels of the EU is insufficient and this situation causes 'democratic deficit' debates. Aside from the solution offers within the borders of the EU such as increasing the powers of the European Parliament, Eurosceptics, who are populists in most of the cases, advocate strengthening the power of domestic representative institutions at the expense of EU institutions (Taggart, 2003). Their primary argument is definitely protecting sovereignty of the people as a basic principle of democracy against dominant elite values and power structures in the Union. It is not easy to argue that they respect all of the foundational principles of liberal democracy in the same way, yet they successfully process the problems of political intermediation (Anselmi, 2018).

In these circumstances, it looks difficult to dismiss populism and populist movements out of democratic politics as deviants. Thus, Mudde (2004) rejects the normal-pathology classification in the analyses of populism. He puts forward that the populist discourse has become regular feature of politics in Western democracies at least since 1990s, and he calls it 'populist Zeitgeist'. In order to curb extremist actors and preserve democracy, use of some legal restrictions on political participation and expression has recently been considered legitimate (Capoccia, 2013). Nonetheless, the oddness caused by the measures which narrow the field of democratic politics to in order to preserve democracy is obvious in that path. According to Panizza (2005: 30), populism is actually 'a mirror in which democracy can contemplate itself, warts and all, and find out what it is about and what it is lacking'.

Apparently, ignoring populism and this 'spirit' – expressed by Mudde – is not possible in democratic politics today. Instead of it, I argue that an emancipatory reading and re-conceptualization of democracy can be helpful to diminish anti-democratic effects stemming from populism as a political strategy. Mény and Surel put forward a close explication to where I stand in this regard:

> But in spite of these variations in time and place, and in spite of its constitutive ambiguity, populism cannot be seen and analysed merely as a

kind of democratic sickness. Rather, it is the indication of a democratic malaise that political actors and citizens do well to take seriously. It is valid and timely reminder that democracy is not a given, but is instead a permanently renewed construct (Mény, Surel, 2002: 21).

In my view, such renewed considerations of populism and democracy may let liberal democracies to adequately deal with populism. Since the sovereignty of people appear as the primary issue in any populist discourse, I would like to return to Habermas again for a new insight to conceive it. Drawing on the theory of communicative action largely, Habermas sketches a new concept of sovereignty different from the republican and liberal understandings of the concept. The republican view interprets that the people are the bearers of sovereignty which cannot be delegated in principle; so they cannot have others represent them. In the liberal interpretation of the concept, any authority which originates from the people is exercised through elections and by specific legislative, executive and judicial organs (Habermas, 1994). However, in the discourse-theoretical view of democracy presented by Habermas, will and opinion formation through communication processes establishes the legitimacy of democracy. Its processes elucidated as follows: 'Informal public opinion-formation generates "influence"; influence is transformed into "communicative power" through the channels of political elections; and communicative power is again transformed into "administrative power" through legislation' (Habermas 1994: 8).

This course does not mean only a discussion stage before the decision-making. First of all, it is vital for the legitimacy of decisions through a public process of will and opinion formation (Lubenow, 2012). Secondly, 'it has the aim of justification of decisions from reasons that everybody could accept' (Lubenow, 2012: 64). I find the chain Habermas exposes very important for an emancipatory new reading of democracy because it focuses on communication channels in democratic processes, and it is what a democracy requires today to prevail over marginalization and polarization of societies around populist discourses. It is essential to extricate the rationality of societies from the colonization which is discussed before and to change the 'success-oriented game' approach to democracy which induces it to voting.

Canovan (2002) notes that Habermas manages to reinterpret popular sovereignty and will formation in a thoroughly non-populist way. However, she finds Habermas' account for the procedures of popular sovereignty too complex and opaque for people to recognize. It may need a commentary in some respects.

Of course, the stress on communication does not refer to overcome all the conflicts in politics. Mouffe's approach is helpful at this point. She proposes a new type of relation and calls it 'agonism'. As she states:

> While antagonism is a we/they relation in which the two sides are enemies who do not share any common ground, agonism is a we/they relation where the conflicting parties, although acknowledging that there is no rational solution to their conflict, nevertheless recognize the legitimacy of their opponents. They are 'adversaries' not enemies. This means that, while in conflict, they see themselves as belonging to the same political association, as sharing a common symbolic space within which the conflict takes place. We could say that the task of democracy is to transform antagonism into agonism (Mouffe, 2005: 20).

Why I consider the communicative theory of Habermas in terms of a reaction to populism in democratic politics can be figured out from this angle more clearly. Being in communication (implicitly or explicitly) involves the legitimacy of interlocutors, which is regarded significant for the agonism which Mouffe brings forward. A not necessarily consensus-based but communicative conceptualization of democracy can be seen as a remedy for depoliticized or over-rationalized politics which is discussed in the tripartite analysis because it could provide platform for the mobilization through passions of individuals around conflicts. In addition, canalizing emotions in such a healthy way blocks essentialist forms of identity politics.

Instead of a something which constantly struggles to protect itself, rethinking democracy as a chance an opportunity to include all sectors of society in politics may change how we regard populism. As Yılmaz (2017) argues, populism has the potential and an inherent egalitarian logic to transform to a radical democratic possibility through pluralizing the political arena and showing that 'the people' is not something which can be embodied by any individual, or precisely represented by any political structure or institution. However, for this purpose, democracy has to be reconstructed to render the people active components of politics, rather than merely a congregation of voters. When that cannot be succeeded, as a result of the reactions against the neoliberal politics all over the world, reactionary and nationalist populisms pave the way for illiberal political structures.

Canovan's (2002) warning should be taken seriously that paying attention to socioeconomic issues, ideological tensions or the defects of the party systems are not sufficient in finding the source of populist protest. Instead, the effort should aim to widen the political arena to include the people into politics.

Lastly, it can be argued that in many authoritarian regimes which claim to be a democracy have no possibilities to use the mentioned communicative channels or to transform antagonism to agonism. Yet, at that situation, it is likely to say that populism is not the big part of the story, and as Molyneux and Osborne (2017) remark, populism is not the central issue but a part of the toolbox in many cases. For instance, in the case of authoritarian leaders, authoritarianism should be focused upon even if they use populism to gain and consolidate power.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, an analysis of populism, which is taken as a political strategy, is carried out, after presenting and discussing the premises and core ideas in the notion. The analysis addresses three main aspects of populism:

- sense of democracy,
- way of thinking and reasoning,
- political circumstances which enable and/or strengthen it.

In the light of this analysis, I attempt to make a new reading and conceptualization of democracy taking these aspects into account and mainly drawing on Habermas' and Mouffe's ideas. What I offer is a democratic framework which prioritizes legitimacy of different sides through active communicative channels embracing conflict as a source of politics which enables political mobilization and participation. I argue that such a democratic political ground can defuse or diminish destabilizing effects of populism and populist movements. As Urbinati propounds, the diarchy of will and opinion is crucial in order to maintain a smoothly-functioning democracy and it is only possible by overcoming the misconceptions and distortions of democracy against approaches which instrumentalize democracy for certain ends since democracy is an end in itself: 'Democracy does not have any utopia to deliver and seems in fact to be the consumption of all utopias insofar as it is apolitical system that erodes messianic visions or Platonist plans of justice and epistemic actualization in the moment it allows them to compete for consent and seek majority approval' (Urbinati, 2015: 236).

Democracy can overcome destabilizing effects of populist politics by preventing mergence of majority's opinion with public opinion. The task is to keep the opinion formation channels as open and accessible as possible for every citizen. Rather than precautions against populist movements; examining populist logic and the circumstances engendering populist politics give us the opportunity to re-read democracy as a measure against impoverishment of democratic politics.

Handling the three decades of populist radical right parties in Western Europe, Mudde (2013) points out that these parties have never challenged the bare essence of their democratic systems; even in the cases where they were in government, civil society or legal frame and the resilience of coalition parties restrained them. Yet, of course, it can be read as 'they could have never challenged'. Moreover, populist movements and parties are not the only threat populism could bring into politics, since the ones regarded as mainstream often appeal to populist strategy and use populist discourse, as well. Therefore, instead of restrictions which narrow the field of politics, a renewed democratic frame which is reinforced by active communicative channels seems to be the correct way to deal with populism today.

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