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EDITORIAL

ON POLITICAL PARTIES IN CONTEMPORARY DEMOCRACIES *From the classic perspective to the current debate*

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ABSTRACT: The crisis of political parties in contemporary societies and democracies is composed of different points of views, that require a joint effort for social and political science to try to understand the changing relationship between citizens and parties. Compared to the political mass models, which are typical of the second half of the twentieth century, parties undergo deep processes of transformation. The beginning of a critical season for the traditional forms of political organization goes back to those years; and this critical season can be configured as ideological, organizational and institutional. Between the twentieth and twenty-first century, the political parties has strengthened the structure of their political organization and the weight of their parliamentary activities within the institutions, becoming more and more «state-centered parties», characterized by the progressive reduction of the forms of territorial settlement and the growth of the importance of central organisms and the representatives of the assemblies, especially those elected in national parliaments. This results in significant changes of the organizational model and their political functions. In the face of these changes, will the parties still remain a key player for the functioning of contemporary democracy? We will focus on three fundamental steps: the analysis of the creation process of parties and of their function; the description of the most recent perspectives in political parties; the analysis of the relationship between the personalisation of politics and the passage to leader democracy.

KEYWORDS: Political Parties, Transformation of Political Parties, Personalisation of Politics

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1. Introduction

In the present age of anti-politics and strong criticism addressed at the traditional instruments of political participation, our choice to dedicate a monographic issue of an international revue to the study of political parties may appear peculiar.

At the beginning of the third millennium, both in common sense opinions and in scientific reflections, parties are considered to be, at best, auto-referential instruments. They are seen as destitute of political legitimacy and operating in a democratic model that would be able to overlook the structure of traditional political organizations and the ideological dead weights looking back at the twentieth century. However, notwithstanding limits and malfunctions revealed in the course of time, parties continue to be ineradicable within the political equilibrium of all the advanced democracies. To paraphrase, if it were possible, the words pronounced by Robert Michels to introduce the «iron law of oligarchy», we could affirm that, at the beginning of 2000s, *who says democracy, (still) says political parties*. It is a matter of fact that, notwithstanding the renewed instruments of political deliberation, the close relationship between decision-making processes and gatekeeper actors, able to aggregate and represent the interests of the whole (or parts of) society before the institutions, is still the basic characteristic of each political system democratically elected. Parties continue to play an essential role in this mechanism. Hence the necessity to continue to devote ample space to the study of parties, analysing their historical transformations, their environmental adaptation and unsolved problems, such as, in particular, the renewed forms of political participation and inclusion. Starting from these premises, and before introducing the contributions of the single authors, we will focus on three fundamental steps that are essential for anyone who intends to approach the study of parties in contemporary age: 1) the analysis of the creation process of parties and of their functions, on the basis of classical literature; 2) the description of the most recent research directions, with particular attention to contemporary party models and the related debate; 3) the analysis of the relationship between the personalisation of politics and the passage to leader democracy, both in the cases where these processes produce the transformation of leadership in mainstream parties, and in the cases where the redefinition of political representation combines with the rise of anti-politics and populism.

2. The perspective of the classics

In modern politological language, parties – from the Latin *partire* (divide) – far from being meant as factions fighting to physically eliminate the adversary representatives in the political counter-opposition, are understood as «parts» in a continuous dialectic with the «whole» in order to control the power of government. It is from this conflict that the first parliamentary institutions have arisen, accompanied by advanced democracy regimes based on the dialectic between the different parts at stake. To analyse the party instrument, we will now try to answer three substantial questions: what is the purpose of parties? When did they form? What are they?

2.1. First question: what is the purpose of parties?

Despite the different typologies and the numerous political nuances, Anthony King (1969) attributes six basic functions to parties: 1) integration and mobilization of citizens. Parties not only organise the participation but also try to integrate masses of people, with their needs and expressed claims, in the political system; 2) structuring the vote. Parties take part in the organisation of electoral campaigns, playing an active role in the development of individual political orientations; 3) aggregation of interests. Parties are gatekeeper actors, placed between the people and the decision-making institutions, with the purpose to transform the different claims expressed by civil society into alternative political manifestos; 4) recruitment of political leaders and staff. In modern political systems, parties have also the task to identify the persons appointed to manage power roles, both within the party and within political institutions; 5) organization of government. This function has a double connotation: it is meant as participation in the alliance game to define parliamentary and governmental balances, as well as practice of the so-called party-government, that is to say the massive employment of party people in the available public offices and spaces; 6) influence on policies. Parties have problem solving competences and strong abilities to influence decision-making process. Of course, in national political systems, democratic and non democratic, parties do not always (rather, nearly never) play all the listed functions at the same time, but perform one or another according to the different historical times and party models (Raniolo 2006; 2013).

2.2. *Second question: when did political parties form?*

There are numerous interpretative hypotheses about the origin of parties. Among the contemporary mainstream political science scholars, Stein Rokkan (1970) brings back the birth of modern parties to four cleavages, observed in correspondence with two fundamental revolutions, the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution. In the first case, the centre-periphery cleavage (defence of the centrality of the State against the claims of the peripheries) and the State-Church cleavage (strengthening of the political independence of the State from the historical privileges of the Church) would determine the development of regionalist, liberal and confessional parties. In the second case, the city-country cleavage (interests of agricultural landowners versus interests of emerging industrial bourgeoisie) and the capital-labour cleavage (owners of production means versus proletarians owners of their only labour force) would contribute to found peasant and conservative parties at first, and socialist and left parties later. The scene got more complex after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, with the consequent birth of the communist party, and, as a reaction, of fascistic parties.

2.3. *Third question: what are political parties?*

To try to answer to this question we will propose an analytical insight based on the interpretations of the classical authors who engaged in the study of parties. We will refer, in particular, to the contributions of Ostrogorski and Michels on one side, and of Weber and Duverger on the other side. The first two reveal a strong intolerance towards this political instrument, while the second show a greater approval of the instrument itself. In the subsequent pages we will present the arguments of the above mentioned authors and a reflection of Kirchheimer on the evolution of the most recent forms of party organisation.

In 1903 Moisei Ostrogorski, a liberal Russian émigré born in France at the end of the nineteenth century, wrote his main work entitled *La démocratie et l'organisation des partis politiques*. In this volume, the scholar expressed his preoccupation about the new forms of political organisation: in his opinion, parties, once transformed in «party machines», represented a risk of corruption for the political regimes of his time. The importance attributed to the work of Ostrogorski originates from the radical character of his thesis and from the originality of his interpretation. According to him, the enlargement of suffrage occurred in the English society of the mid-nineteenth century would give social protagonism to a mass of new voters who were intellectually and

morally unprepared for the democratic game. Ostrogorski wrote «If everybody cannot speak, everybody can sing» to describe the intellectual impoverishment of the ruling class who replaced the cultivated and qualified notables. To sum up, according to the Russian liberal, the birth of the parties is not supported either by the development of a political class with free and unconditional opinions towards the masses, or by the growth of an intelligent and competent generation able to become a government elite. According to the scholar, masses would show a limited capability to comprehend and solve collective problems, and parties, physiologically bound to the formation of a wide popular consent, would create new forms of participation and communication turning out to be simplified if compared to those previously experienced. According to Ostrogorski, the development of ritualism and liturgy are the premises to identify those who might engage and otherwise would be excluded because of their evident amateurism. To sum up, the party would allow the participation of the incapable, offering unintelligible public rewards to those who work with their hands rather than with their brain. For his contemporary society Ostrogorski identifies a possible solution in the abolition of parties as they are conceived in the political system of late nineteenth century, attributing to them the status of simple groupings of citizens that freely form (and reform) according to the problems produced by contingent historical processes.

Because of this point of view the liberal Russian is considered a sort of father of anti-partitism. However, at the beginning of the twentieth century, Ostrogorski had to share this title with Robert Michels, another scholar who distinguishes for being likewise critical towards party forms. Born in Germany but Italian by adoption, Michels belongs to classical élite theory; he argues that – like Mosca (1896) and Pareto (1916) – also in democratic political systems a minority of ruling citizens (the élite) always rules on a majority of ruled citizens (the people). The main work of Michels, entitled *Zur Soziologie des Parteiwesens in der modernen Demokratie*, was written in 1911 and his thought is quite simple to sum up. His point of view focuses inside political parties and, in particular, inside the German social-democratic to which he initially belonged. According to him, democracy is an unattainable myth as it is governed by an oligarchic drive that provokes the prevailing of a minority on the majority. The premises of the argument of the German political scientist are the following: 1) representative democracy is founded on parties; 2) there may be democracy in a political system only if the existing parties are democratic as well. His conclusions are unamendable: a) democracy in the parties is unachievable (and it is unachievable also in SPD, the main German party which fights for the attainment of national democracy), as it is the body of professional officers who seizes the rule of the parties; b) as democracy in the parties is unachievable, the same democratic principle is consequently unachievable. Hence the so-called

«iron law of oligarchy» formulated by Michels, who extends the principle of elitarian functioning observed in the parties to all forms of social organisation. According to Michels, «who says organization, says oligarchy» (ivi, 56-57). In particular, in the parties, the bureaucratic structure controlled by officers is made necessary both by the «mass» dimension reached by parties at the beginning of the twentieth century, and by the complexity of the goals they intend to pursue. All that entails: i) the creation of an army of political managers, whose acquired know-how makes them essential to rule the structure of the party; ii) a distortion of the scopes of the organization, which transforms itself from an instrument to reach a goal into a goal in itself. According to Michels, in parties and in all social organisations: the organ predominates on the whole organism (ivi, 495).

In the politological debate the negative opinion on political parties was moderated by another classical scholar of modern sociology and political science. Max Weber, in the first volume of *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, (1922, 282) defines parties as «associations, membership in which rests on formally free recruitment. The end to which its activity is devoted is to secure power within an organization for its

leaders in order to attain ideal or material advantages for its active members. These advantages may consist in the realization of certain objective policies or the attainment of personal advantages or both».

The evaluation of Weber is radically different from the opinions of Ostrogorski and Michels. Far from representing parties as instruments of corruption or as structures of oligarchic control of power, Weber considers them as aimed at pursuing predetermined goals, both «objective», such as a programme for government with material/ideal goals, and «personal», that is to say aimed at obtaining individual benefits (power offices) or collective advantages (promise to ameliorate public life-style). According to Weber, parties fulfill both the indicated functions. Parties may be organisations of «patronage of offices»: here the ultimate goal is the assignment of the party leader to management offices, from where he might appoint trusted persons, namely party apparatus officers, to subordinate posts. Alternatively, parties may be based on a «Weltanschauung », a vision of the world, and thus aim at achieving political ideals shared by all the party members. In theory, according to Weber, parties may be one and the other thing at the same time. However, in the society where the scholar really lived, parties were characterised also by another aspect, namely the «voluntarism» shown by each member when choosing to enroll in the political organization. If one is a voter because the right to vote automatically descends from the entitlement of citizenship rights shared by all citizens (Marshall 1950), one decides to become member of a party only following an active behaviour and a personal choice. In the argument of the

German scholar this distinction is crucial as, in his opinion, the formally free nature of volunteer membership influences the two main characters of parties: the partial separation between the interest of the representatives and those of the political organisation tout court, and the cleavage between leaders and members. Weber attributes both these boundary lines, internal and external, to the volunteer nature of membership. One is not member of a party thanks to a status lasting *vita natural durante*, but only on the basis of his effective political activism. The party will therefore consolidate around a very complex organisation structure, which will then become a bureaucratic rational apparatus managed by «professional of politics» who are full-time committed to the party.

The topic of organisation is at the centre of the analysis of Maurice Duverger. The French scholar is author of a book published in 1951 and entitled *Les partis politiques*, where he gives a substantial positive opinion about parties and, in particular, about the twentieth-century form of party, still undisputed protagonist of European and Western democratic political systems even after Second world war. Duverger is representative of the so-called “structural perspective” which classifies parties according to a process of interior or exterior creation. Parties deriving from an interior creation form within parliamentary institutions following regular political elections. Parties deriving from an exterior creation form outside the institutions and structure themselves around pre-existing association networks, cooperatives, trade unions, lobbies, with the goal to represent the interests of social blocs excluded from mainstream political processes. This second typology of political organisations, that Duverger calls «mass parties», is characterised by a centralised bureaucratic structure and by a political organisation which would make it especially disciplined and consistent with the objective to be attained. Within this party form, the parliamentary group (once elected) would exercise an institutional role much more important than that recognised to parties deriving from an interior creation. Because of these premises, the analytical model of Duverger has been charged with ethnocentrism for it focuses on the evolution steps of only Western political systems, failing to include, for example, the single-party regimes in his ideal-typical framework. However, despite these criticisms, the reflection of the French scholar proposes an interpretation of parties which deserves a further insight effort. Duverger introduces a distinction between political organisations searching to take limited advantages within the constituted political systems, and political forms originated outside institutional praxis trying to explicitly transform the predetermined rules of the constituted system. It is within this second category that Duverger positions mass parties, the model of political organisation that he considers the most adequate for the modern nature of political regimes founded on democratic representation. In particular, according

to him, the structure of mass parties invented by the socialists at the beginning of the twentieth century was then imitated by communist and fascistic parties, and in some case also by the Christian Democrats, while the conservative and liberal parties were not able to change their traditional structure of cadre parties (Duverger 1951). The mass party described by Duverger has the goal to permanently regiment as many people as possible, to give a political education to the masses and a professional ruling class to the party. This mass party is organised in a pyramidal form with a series of structures going from the bottom to the top (local sections, provincial and/or regional federations, up to the national headquarter); it establishes a set of rules about the training of its managers, and identifies specific internal behavioral rules in order to limit the influence of personal power of those who are not at the top level of the structure. Duverger distinguishes between democratic integrative parties and the totalitarian integrative parties. The democratic integrative parties are based on a mainly political, though extremely binding, aggregation. The totalitarian parties, on the contrary, are characterised by an indoctrination that is not only political but also spiritual: they impose the acceptance of a whole vision of the world. According to Duverger, the socialist parties would be restricted while the communist and fascistic parties would be totalitarian.

The French scholar writes his considerations at the beginning of the '50s, but while he sings the praises of mass party, the international politological reflection on parties takes completely different directions. In his analysis Otto Kirchheimer (1966) describes precisely the changes occurred in those years, also in Europe, in the traditional form of political party. Fifteen years after Duverger, Kirchheimer, a German Jew emigrated to Paris and then to the United States during Nazi Fascism, predicts the birth of the so-called *catch-all party*. According to the scholar, mass party represents only a stage, historically determined and nearly outdated, of an organisational political development: class and confessional parties are transforming into real electoral agencies, becoming everyday more similar to US parties. Mass party, as product of the power relationships determined by industrial society, is turning out to be a *popular catch-all party*. Leaving behind the functions of political education, socialisation and integration of the masses, the prevailing form of party moves towards an institutional model mainly concerned with electoral market, with the goal to widen its electoral constituency beyond a predefined *classe gardeé* to reach the highest number of voters. According to Kirchheimer, the success of the catch-all party depends on five related conditions:

- 1) A drastic reduction of ideological baggage and propaganda focusing on general principle issues shared by a large share of voters;

- 2) Greater attention to specific stakeholders, associated with a change of the historical relationships with side organisation such as associations, trade unions, religious institutes;
- 3) Downgrading of the political weight and role of party members and of their political activism;
- 4) Strengthening of organisational power of the leaders, to build intense relationships with stakeholders, especially aimed at financing the party;
- 5) Weakening of the commitment to traditional electoral constituency and of connections with political sub-cultures, in order to recruit citizens-voters free from single class belonging.

A further characteristic of the catch-all party is the progressive *professionalisation* of its structures and organisations. Unlike mass parties, built around an apparatus of bureaucrats, in the catch-all party a fundamental role is performed by external professionals with specific skills to recruit as many voters as possible. Because of these basic features the catch-all party theorised by Kirchheimer anticipates many of the party forms that will appear on the international political scenario in the years between the second half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty first century.

After this overview on the most traditional party forms and the corresponding interpretative theories, we will now reflect on the renewed political models described by the politological literature after Kirchheimer. In particular, we will analyse: the party models created after the appearance of the catch-all party and the corresponding organisational change; the forms of political cartel centred on the appointment of public offices with the aim of keeping unchanged the influence on government policies; the process of personalisation and focusing on leadership of the different forms of political transformation. This last aspect will be examined in depth in the fourth paragraph of this article, as it needs to be accurately analysed together with the topics related to political mediatisation and party's internal participation in the contemporary age.

3. Recent trends and perspectives

From the lesson of the classics we learned that political parties are complex, multi-dimensional and multi-goal "institutions". Particularly we can identify four analytical dimensions: the organizational dimension (party as proper organization), the structural or sociological dimension (party as representative agency), the institutional dimension

(party as public agency) and the competitive dimension (party as team leader)¹. These dimensions have been the starting point for the development of the analysis of parties and their change.

The history of parties varies greatly depending on whether you look to Europe or to America and, again, to the nineteenth-century parliamentary regimes or to the (democratic and authoritarian) mass regimes of XX century.

The best-known party model, erected as a paradigm of the modern forms of political organizations, as we have already seen, is the mass party. However the mass party was the expression of the conditions and conflicts typical of the industrial society (Daalder 1966), but also of the (parallel) rationalization process and organizational gigantism that concerned both the State (with the Weberian bureaucratism) and the factory (with the taylorism-fordism). The image of parties proposed by the most recent literature is the most distant from the classical organizational paradigm. Indeed, we could say that parties reflect a more general process involving the organizational phenomena: the “deconstruction of the instrumental and reified conception of organization and its progressive substitution by a more nuanced, anarchic and immaterial conceptualization” (Friedberg 1994, 71). This revisionism has then eliminated the different persistent prejudices in the party analysis (Panebianco 1982).

3.1 Parties as organization and the monistic prejudice

The theme of organization, although it was the central axis of the reflection of classics, from Weber to Ostrogorsky, from Michels to Duverger, has met with mixed fortunes (Panebianco 1982). Still in the early Nineties Katz and Mair (1994, 2) complained that “we still know surprisingly little about the organizational development of parties” and “the organizational dimension is today one of the very few remaining gaps in the cross-national research on parties” (ivi, 3). In particular, here we will point to three lines of development of the analysis: the organizational strength, the types of party and the organizational *change* (Mair 1992).

The first theme was already central in Duverger - who distinguished the overall structure, the members and the leaders (1971, 114-130) - and was later taken up again in the work of Kenneth Janda (1980), of Ersson and Lane (1987) and in the contribution

¹ For a similar perspective see: Ware (1995), Luther and Müller-Rommel (2002). A classical differentiation is that of Key (1964), who distinguishes between the party in government, the party as organization and the party in the electorate.

of Panebianco (1982)². Party organizations are defined by a plurality of internal and external dimensions so that it is possible to say, almost with a slogan, that the organization (the organizational model) does not coincide with the structure. This fact raises a relevant empirical and theoretical question: do parties tend to become similar from an ideological, structural and strategic point of view (isomorphism) or rather is it the variance of organizational forms that develops through the overlap of old and new types of parties? The answer to this question has to do with organizational change.

Panebianco (2011; 1982) recently reiterated the need to consider the parties' organizational models in "dynamic" terms, which requires looking, on the one hand, at the process of formation and institutionalization of political parties (see Levitsky 1998; Randal and Svåsand 2002), and, on the other hand, at the phenomenon of organizational change (Harmel and Janda 1994; Mair 1997; Appleton and Ward 1997; Harmel 2006).

A theoretical perspective that met great success, to the point of becoming almost common sense in political science, linking organizational change and refusal of a unitary construction of the party, is that of Katz and Mair (1992; 1994). So it is necessary to disaggregate "party organizations at least into three different elements, or faces, each of which interacts with the others" (Mair 1994, 4). The first face is that of the party on the ground, which essentially refers to the membership and the territorial roots; the second is that of the party in central office, and deals with the organization of the central offices and the internal bureaucracy so important in the traditional mass party; the third and last, the party in public office, concerns the relationship between party and state institutions. Furthermore, the authors admit the existence of a progressive decline of the party on the ground, substituted by the primacy of the party in central office and, above all, of the party in public office.

In this perspective the change (or decline) in one of three dimensions, for example, the crisis of the party as an association of members, that is, the party on the ground (Ware, 1995; Tan 1997; van Biezen, Mair and Poguntke 2012), does not mean the change (or decline) of the party itself. In fact, parties that are minimum in terms of social roots and number of members are maximum in the rootedness in institutions. Hence the trend, already central in Kichheimer, towards the statalization of the parties (Katz and Mair 1994, 1995). The new cadre parties or professional framework parties would fall within this category (Koole 1994; Beyme 1996; Wolinetz 2004). Another way to address the point is to look at the "organizational incentives" that supporters and voters receive from the party (Clark and Wilson 1961; Ware 1995; Katz 2002). So, the

² With reference to the Italian party see: Morlino and Tarchi (2007), particularly the chapters of Raniolo and D'Amore, and Bardi, Ignazi e Massari 2007.

crisis of parties coincides with the progressive decline of collective incentives (ideological and membership) and, conversely, with the expansion of individual or patronage ones which are more manageable through the control of the State (for a broader interpretation see also Lawson 1980; Lawson and Merkl 1988; Rommel, Farrell and Ignazi 2005; Dalton, Farrell and McAllister 2011).

Anyway, since the parties (the democratic ones) are free associations of volunteers, the spread of parties without partisans (Dalton and Wattenberg 2000) poses a problem of legitimacy not only for themselves but also for the democratic regime. It is not surprising, therefore, that in the last decades it has become increasingly diffused - starting from the experience of left-libertarian and ecologist parties - the tendency to distribute "incentives of process" (Ignazi 2004), that is the expressive benefits more appropriate to the situation of thoughtful citizens.

Harmel and Janda (1994) spoke, with reference to the radical left and ecologist parties, of intra-party democracy seeking. More generally, the development of "deliberative arenas" within the parties (Teorell 1999; Morlino 2006) and their democratization affect various spheres. Not only the choice of candidates, but also those of leaders and of the policies to be pursued, through referenda and online consultations (Scarow, Webb and Farrell 2002). There remains, however, the fact that the most attention has been devoted to the "primary elections" (Pennings and Hazan 2001; Hazan 2006; Valbruzzi 2005). In this regard, the comparative research has been moving in two directions, on the one hand, it has tried to catch the specificity of these particular elections (especially in Europe) in terms of definition of candidacy, identification of selectorate and degree of decentralization; on the other, it has investigated their function not only as a means for effective participation of citizens, but also as a means to strengthen the plebiscitary legitimation of leaders³.

Anyway, the transformation just described, together with others (eg. in the mobilization of resources, in the role of the leadership, in the type of communication structures etc.), have come to define the formation of new types of party. Among these, perhaps the most well-known labels are the professional electoral party (Panebianco 1982), the cartel party (Katz and Mair 1995) and the party as franchise system⁴ (Carty 2004). Like the catch-all party defined by Kirchheimer, these models are variants of the electoral party characterized by an emphasis on specific organizational or strategic aspects. We will return on these types later, but the franchise-system model requires a brief reflection. This is a decentralized model with large autonomy from national politics and with a stratarchic organization (neo-notabiliare), but it shares with the other types the fact

³ The Italian case received the attention of many researches: Pasquino and Venturino 2014; Pasquino 2014

⁴ In the next section it will be discussed the personal party.

that it is "more leadership-oriented and less accountable to ordinary members" (Zielonka-Goel 1992, 94).

3.2 The parties as representative agencies and the sociological prejudice

Parties are not born in a sociological vacuum, they reflect and mediate the "great social conflicts" articulated along the functional-economic and territorial-cultural axes that have historically shaped Western European societies (Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Rokkan 1999; Ware 1995; Bartolini 2000; Seiller 2003). However, the cleavages theory has been often interpreted in a more deterministic way than its fathers intended (Boix 2007; Cox 1997). Sartori (1969), just two years after the successful work of Lipset and Rokkan, proposed instead an "organizational hypothesis" which effectively overturned their argument, in the sense that the articulation of conflicts and the salience of divisions were not the outcome solely of structural conditions but also of the intervention of political, organizational and institutional factors.

Recently, Bartolini (2011, 276) pointed out that the concept of cleavage has three dimensions: the "interest orientations rooted in social conditions, cultural (ideological) orientations rooted in regulations system, and behavioral patterns expressed in organizational membership and action". However, in times of 'light' political parties the organizational hypothesis seems to lose relevance compared to the "institutional hypothesis". In essence, the process of cleavage politicization involves a sequence of phases: from "possible or imaginable parties" to "an actual number of launched parties" then to an even "smaller number of known parties" that have a high probability of being voted and, finally, to "seats-winning parties" (Cox 1997). These passages would depend also, if not especially, on institutional constraints: electoral rules, party financing, rules for the selection of the rulers, etc. Another issue, then, is whether leaders and parties are actually able to take advantage of these successes.

Ultimately, socio-cultural (globalization, social, economic, cultural changes, technological innovations) and institutional factors have joint effects on political change. As do the shift from post-war mass parties based on stable cleavage politics to the prevalence of issue-based parties labeled as "electoral parties" in the XXI century, as well as the resulting change in party strategies from responsiveness to accountability (Penning and Lane 1998; Luther and Müller-Rommel 2002; Bardi, Bartolini and Trechsel 2014). Indeed the theory of cleavages is not static but implies change (Flanagan and Dalton 1984; Dalton and Watterberg 2000; Karvonen and Kuhnle 2001). Of course, historically some cleavages, such as state-church and, above all, workers-employers,

have left traces on the others and assumed greater salience. The left-right dichotomy itself, interconnected with the economical cleavage, although weakened, is still the most important political dimension of conflict in Western capitalist democracies (Lijphart 1999; Volkens and Klingeman 2002). However, at least since the 70's and all the more after 1989 the attention of scholars has been focused on the changing structure of cleavages under the following circumstances: (Bartolini 1996): 1) declining relevance of traditional cleavages – electoral decline of cleavage-based parties (social class and religion) 2) activation of latent cleavages – with the ethno-regional parties; 3) formation of a new dividing line - the rise of green parties or populist parties or even anti-European parties.

This involves both dimensions of democratic representation, the territorial and the functional one. As concerns the former, one must consider the growing relevance of territorial politics, characterized by territorial, or ethno-regionalist parties⁵ either “pure” ones, defending an identity rooted in a territory (Basque Nationalist Party, the Scottish National Party, or, in Italy, the Party Sardinian Action and the Tyrol People's Party in South Tyrol) or “challenging” ones, which emerge in reaction to traditional politics and raise issues such as taxes, immigration, security, corruption and so on (Vlaams Belang in Belgium, the nationalist Block galiego in Spain or the Northern League in Italy) - for this distinction see Tronconi 2009; De Winter and Tursan 1998. In the latter case, these parties share common elements with the extreme-right parties (Ignazi, 1994) and, more generally, with populist parties (Mény and Surel 2001; Rooduijn 2013). Centrality of leadership, appeal to the people, anti-establishment rhetoric are traits in common with radical left parties, especially if they are political opponents and act as challenger⁶ (see par. 4). The crisis of representation and the fuzziness of party political programs therefore concern primarily mainstream parties pertaining to government area (cartelization), but not the new political forces able to mobilize the resentment and protest of citizens, especially during economic crises. As a result these new challengers articulate a new cleavage between the winners and the losers of globalization (Kriesi and al. 2006). This effect overlaps with the existing opposition to European integration and the related emergence of “hard and soft Eurosceptic parties” (Taggart 1998; Kopecky and Mudde 2002).

⁵ This turn has been associated with the transferring of decision-making powers from national state level to the sub-national level, now rapidly growing in Europe.

⁶ It was also introduced the concept of left and right populism.

3.3 The parties as public agencies and oligarchic prejudice

The parties are not simply the *trait-d'union* between civil society and institutions. Their leaders are fighting for power, to attain public office and opportunities of patronage (powering), but also to find solutions to collective problems (puzzling). Both tasks cannot be related to political representation and the transmission of social questions. On the other hand, they imply a radical overturning of the approach shifting from a bottom-up one, appropriate during the stages of the democratization process, to a top-down perspective, more suitable to advanced democracies – or authoritarian systems. Hence the emergence of specific party configurations such as the «cartel» party (Katz and Mair 1995), the «professional» party (von Beyme 1996), the public utility party (van Biezen 2004) and, most recently, the «State-centered party» (Ignazi 2004; more generally Shefter 1994). In all cases the emphasis is placed on State-parties relationships rather than parties-society ones. It is, however, a relevant transformation that reflected the social legitimacy of parties and their relationship with democracy, hence the “trilemma between responsiveness, responsibility and accountability” (Mair 2009).

The idea underlying this debate, however, is not new. Traditionally, with the notable exception of the United States (Schattschneider 1942, Rose 1976; Castles and Widelman 1986), liberal democracies are strongly associated with party governments, that is, political regimes where parties control and influence government institutions and public policies. In mainstream literature such control was related to the competition – between majority and opposition, even if the existence of democracies with limited or no competition constituted a clear and puzzling acknowledgment of empirical reality, as in the case of so-called “uncommon democracies” (Pempel 1990) and consensual democracies (Lijphart 1999; O’Flynn and Russell 2005). However, the concept of “partyness of government” paved the way to some dilemmas: on the one hand, the chain of delegation (principal-agent theory) from voters to parties and then government may imply the risk to distort action of agents (Müller, Strøm and Bergman 2003), on the other hand, building government coalitions is based on the trade-off between policy-seeking and office seeking (Strøm 1990) and should consider the legacies of the institutions (structure- induced equilibrium).

On the same token, as Daalder and Rokkan show, research on powering put emphasis on the patterns of government alternation (Bartolini 1998; Mair 2006; Pasquino and Valbruzzi 2011). In fact, the process of nationalization has been accompanied by the fading away of parties excluded permanently from the Government, - with the exception of extremist niche parties. As this outcome did not occur everywhere with the same intensity it is true that the increasingly heterogeneous coalition is a clear trend in

the changing party systems of the XXI century. However, it could be argued that the increased alternation in government is caused by the fact that alternative parties hold less divisive positions in terms of ideology and policy (Blyth and Katz 2005).

Anyway, parties are constrained by relations with state institutions, but also may find opportunities to get incentives in term of influence (Müller 2002). More exactly, as van Biezen (2007) suggests, parties-state interactions should be seen as multifaceted with reference to at least three aspects: a) to what extent parties depend on the state for free media access and other benefits of state finance; b) parties' ability to use state patronage for pursuit of goals; and then c) the regulation of political parties (if organic laws exist). In recent years, there has been a rather increasing attention on public funding in European representative democracies, growing rapidly from the 60s to become the main source of party resources in response to dramatic decline of their enrolled memberships (Scarrow 2002). Therefore, the argument is that the party in public office plays an important role to the detriment of the party in central office and especially over the party on the ground. Such changes may have a prominent effect, then, on the various loci of power within the parties. By emphasizing the influence of the state on party, this issue is at the heart of the cartel party argument (Katz and Mair 2009).

However, the cartel party does not imply only government positions to be occupied, but also political decisions to be made. This second component of party nationalization or party government has opened the long-running debate over whether "political parties matter" (Castles 1982). The role exercised by parties in twenty-first century democracies appears redundant (Daalder 2002) and unbalanced. It means that political parties have seen reduced their capacity to monitor and control policy but they are only concerned with the their ability to appoint their own. There used to be talk of inconsistent party nationalization, in the sense that the inclusion of political parties in public institutions could be interpreted as "defense mechanism" (Katz 2006) and strategy for survival effective only in managing resources and little or not at all in the control over decisions. In other words, parties (mainly American but not only) succeeded in controlling two of four power arenas featuring the political and administrative systems, that is the distributive and the constitutive, while they failed in management of redistributive and regulative policies (Lowi 1972; Calise 2010). It occurred for various reasons: the complexity of the problems, bounded rationality, international constraints and the role of "non- majoritarian institutions", etc. The argument, though, is that the cartelization would not only reduce the representative capacity of democracies, but also their sovereignty and freedom of choice.

3.4 The parties as team leader in competition and the electioneering prejudice

In political science the most recent research has finally overcome the teleological prejudice arguing that the party's main goal is not only to win elections (Sartori 1976). Instead, parties must be thought of as pursuing diverse goals simultaneously and facing difficult trade-offs between goals⁷. Therefore, parties' goals include vote seeking, office seeking, and policy seeking (Newton and van Deth 2010). If on one side this distinction has led to a broader definition of the party system and competitive arena (Bardi and Mair 2008), on the other, these goals can be pursued by different internal groups (factions) within the same party. In doing so, following the distinction between ideological factions and interest factions (Raniolo 2013) much scholarly attention was focused on the stratachic form of political party and internal factionalism.

Regardless of whether they are considered a unitary actor or – more realistically – an “organised anarchy”, political parties act strategically; this implies they must take into account all the constraints deriving from the competition they partake in: it is the dilemma between identity and competition, or between bonding and bridging strategies (Norris 2004). At the same time, however, they operate in a strongly prestructured field, that is the party system. Such a system of stable interactions is also the result of path-dependence processes that can be traced back to some salient dimensions of variation. In particular, building on previous contribution notably by Daalder (2002) and Ware (1995) we can mention: 1) the degree of penetration (or rootedness) of parties in the society (Rose and Munro 2010; Mainwaring and Torcal 2006; Morlino 1998); 2) the level of legitimacy of government and of the democratic regime (Sartori 1976; Linz 1978; Capoccia 2002) ; 3) the degree of party nationalization; 4) the logic of political competition based on the number of parties (but also on their weight) and the type of mutual relationships (polarization) (Sartori 1976)⁸.

With regard to the latter, since the 60s, Sartori's contribution is recognized to have continuing validity as dominant paradigm. The typology, based on the relationship between the number of relevant parties (format) and degrees of polarization or ideological distance (mechanics), not only helps to understand the relationship between the party system and the quality of democracy in terms of stability and efficiency of deci-

⁷ It should be mentioned that starting from Anthony Downs and William H. Riker analysis in the 50s and 60s a rational choice approach emerged arguing that parties are as collective self- interested actors both in the electoral competition, as it is said, in the coalition formation and in decision-making processes. See Giannetti (2003).

⁸ Earlier it was considered a fifth dimension of variation, the configuration of the cleavages in the society, interconnected with the relationship between modernization and political development

sion-making, but also to detect the change in the format and / or mechanics of the party system. In fact, Sartori argues that the most important change is the shift from multipolar (or extreme or polarized) multipartitism to the bipolar systems (two-party system or moderate multipartitism). The twenty-first century has led to an overcrowding of the moderate pluralism category experiencing what Wolinetz (2002) calls extended multipartitism, understood as a system with many parties not in opposition among them. Meanwhile there are signs of an opposite trend towards neo-polarization (Capocchia 2002) and all other systems, two-party system and predominant party systems, are a memory of the past.

In order to account for these changes and anomalies, a search for new typologies has started, which partly follows in Sartori's footsteps. Generally speaking, four strategies seem to prevail in the classification of parties at present. A first strategy is rather quantitative, and looks at a variety of dimensions such as the fragmentation of party systems, the effective number of parties, volatility of vote, polarization and so on: an attempt is then made to derive qualitative profiles of party systems from these numerical indexes (Pennings and Lane 1998; Karvonen and Kuhnle 2001; Lane and Ersson 1996). A second set of works of research aim at shedding light on the intensity and level of change in the party systems or the regime: thus Smith (1989) has identified four different levels of political change: temporary fluctuations, small change, widespread change and transformation. In the last two cases there is a real change of regime, as in the case of the Fifth Republic in France in the Fifties. A third set of works has focused on changes in the logic of competition, from multipolar and centrifugal structures to bipolar and centripetal ones. Actually, some such line of interpretation was already implicit in the original typology by Sartori – although indeed party systems have changed radically and in unexpected ways (and to unexpected effects) since that typology was devised between the Nineteen-Sixties and Seventies: increased moderation of anti-system parties, and especially of the more ideological ones, has mitigated the competition, so that the number of parties which gravitate in the sphere of government has risen. (Wolinetz 2004). The term bipolar thus comes to indicate not only the mechanics of the competition (based on two poles) but also the fact that these poles may be composed of more or less heterogeneous groupings of political parties. Which indeed creates a very different outcome from the one envisaged by traditional biparty or moderate multiparty models. Such bipolar configuration made up of blocs is witnessed at present in Italy, France, Germany, Austria, and outside Europe in Israel, among others (Mair 2006).

Finally, a fourth paradigm directs attention beyond the horizontal dimension of electoral competition⁹. In this regard, Peter Mair (2006, p. 246) suggested to develop and integrate the model proposed by Sartori, incorporating novel elements, " to understand to what extent the competition for government is a device for party competition" and, therefore, how patterns of alternation can change over time (Pasquino and Valbruzzi 2011). Following this approach Mair (2006, 67) stated that there is a change in the party system when " new alternatives of government emerge, and / or when a new party or a new coalition of parties gain access to government for the first time". Over time patterns of competition for government tend to stabilize, but they can also destructure. This is what happened in Italy after 1994, when the executive becomes for the first time effectively contestable and vulnerable (and in fact since then in subsequent elections different coalitions alternate in power, albeit with different effects and political fortunes).

4. Personalization of politics and perspectives on leader democracy

In the literature about political parties, the issue of the relationship between leaders and parties, between leaders and voters, and between leaders and governments, has for long time been neglected, especially because the attention was mainly focused on the organisation of mass parties. The personalisation of politics and the passage from party democracy to leader democracy are not unilinear processes, nor are they perfectly replicable in different political systems. If the personalisation of politics is a phenomenon common to Western democracies, the major or minor resistance against the transformation of political actors, and the transition from an organisation of political representation to another, highlight different dynamics. On one hand, where the reaction to the crisis of the traditional socio-political system is the quickest, the leadership democracy produces an effect of personalisation of the apical leadership in the mainstream parties. On the other hand, where the transition struggles to achieve a redefinition of politics, waves of anti-politics, populism and parties which are anti-parties, are more likely to arise. As Blondel and Thiebault (Blondel 1987; Blondel, Thiebault 2010) observed, the poor attention addressed at leadership has to be attributed to the persistence in the twentieth century of the freezing hypothesis of social cleavages and political parties formed during the creation of the modern Nation-State (Lipset, Rokkan

⁹ The studies on comparison between the party system at electoral and parliamentary level (Bardi 2006) and so-called "plural party systems" due to territorial cleavages, as the case of Spain (Linz and Montero 2001) fall into this type of research.

1967). According to this interpretative hypothesis, a same system of political and organisation identities has been “frozen” in European mass democracies at least until 1989, practically until the end of the twentieth century. Actually, if on one hand studies on Presidents have flourished in the Anglo-Saxon countries (Burns 1978; Tucker 1981) and in France after the Fifth Republic and De Gaulle (Mabileau 1960), on the other hand the phenomenon of leadership in other European democracies was subordinated to the relationship between mass integration parties, reference social classes, ideologies and organisation, except for some cases such as Weber’s studies on leadership and charisma (Cavalli 1981; 1987).

For a long time leadership in the parties was considered simply an element of the changing geometry of functions and powers that belong to the different faces, or images, constituting them (Edersveld 1964). Moreover, due to the mass integration model prevailing for a large part of the last century, literature mainly analysed the relationship between party organisation and society. Scholars focused on party’s intermediary role between institutions and social groups, looking at society on one side and at State on the other side, like a “Janus faced” party (Katz, Mair, 1995, 8). It is only with Kirchheimer’s catch-all party model (1966) that the figure of leader starts to acquire relevance, following the de-ideologisation process and the necessity to rely on the leader’s personality to maximise the party’s attractiveness in the eyes of everyday more unpredictable voters. However, we must not forget the importance of the leadership role in social and political change in classical political sociology. In particular, in the studies of Bryce, Weber, Ostrogorski, Michels about European countries, and in those about the United States where Bryce, Ostrogorski and Weber examined, for different periods, the leadership selection process and the evolution of the relationship between President, party machine and elective assemblies.

The same definition of leadership is formulated according to a plurality of perspectives, although a common factor may be its description as a social relationship between leader, followers (voters) and context (Nye 2008). In general, according to Bass (1990, 19-20), leadership stems from an interaction between two or more members of a group, where the leader shows his skill to channel or modify the perceptions and expectations of the group members. It is an interaction which changes the party’s internal structure of power relationships and refers to many factors, such as the socio-cultural transformation of the context, the political culture, the institutions and the rationality of the individual actor, namely the leader. Parties and leaders operate in a complex system but do not passively undergo the social and political change, as they actively contribute to modify it within a sociological, institutional and competitive opportunity structure (Raniolo 2000; 2013). The environment plays an essential role in

the shaping of leadership; it is not only an epiphenomenon as the leader “breathes” the same air of his social, economic and political environment. Precisely for this reason, the party crisis, or, to say it better the legitimacy crisis of mass party in Europe, refers to a series of processes, such as socio-economic transformations, change of values and political cultures, centrality of political communication, rise of new relevant issues and changes of political agenda, role of European integration and reforms of constitutional models (Luther, Muller-Rommel 2002, 7-10). One of the most important developments of the above mentioned phenomena is the progressive personalisation of politics, as one of the outcomes of the general individualisation process affecting the modernisation of contemporary societies.

As regards the role of leadership in the transformation of democracies and political parties, it is necessary to distinguish between different contexts, as personalisation of politics, personalisation of power, and “presidentialisation” are not synonymous of the same phenomenon. Personalisation of politics refers to the downgrading of collective actors as intermediaries between citizens and institutions in favour of the rise of the single individual at the centre of politics (Calise 2010). Personalisation of politics implies on one hand the creation of an individual relationship of trust and identification of the single citizen with the single politician, and, on the other hand, the politician’s awareness of the necessity to attract consent on his own person, developing his personal accountability and responsiveness towards his voters, and not towards his party. As Manin argues (2010, 243-245), the personalisation of politics is not an unprecedented phenomenon in contemporary democracies, as also in liberal regimes before the mass democracy the political bond was based on the individual relationship between notable and voter. At the same time in parties’ democracy the role of the leader is not unimportant, as his power can be relevant as much as his qualities; however, the core of the system is the internal ruling class described by Duverger (1951), namely the party bosses and oligarchies outlined by Weber and Michels. In Western democracies, or better in Western European democracies of the second after war, leadership takes mainly the connotation of “headship”, and, as such, is exerted by neo-corporative élites tending towards a consensual and oligopolistic power (Field and Higley 1980; Pakulski, Körösenyi 2012). In the “audience democracy”, what changes is the centrality of the leader with respect to the intermediate apparatus of the party, the relevance of his personal and political biography, the selection procedures and the foundation of his legitimacy: this latter does not arise from the confidence expressed by meetings, conventions, boards or by whatever bureaucratic body, but rather from the voters. These processes are influenced by numerous factors which vary according to the single political systems. However, according to Karvonen (2010, 5), they are mainly: the institu-

tional structure and electoral laws, the role of mass media in electoral campaigns, the leader's political communication, the citizens' perception of politics as struggle between leaders, the formation of political opinions and voting choices on the basis of the leader's image, and, last but not least, the leaders' individual characteristics influencing power relationships in politics and in society. The electoral competition thus moves from being party-centred to candidate-centred (Garzia 2011, 698; Rahat, Sheafer 2007, 69): the image of the leader is now created through a story-telling which selects and especially highlights some of the leader's more personal and private features, rather than his political characteristics. (Swanson, Mancini 1996; Barisione 2006; Campus 2006).

Moreover, the personalisation of politics still plays an important role during the crisis of the representation mechanisms of political systems, following periods of profound and troubled social change. In contexts of crisis, a party and government leader is not asked only to exert a role of political direction, he is rather supposed to become a symbol, and therefore to gain the citizens' confidence. The leader has to cope with citizens' insecurity in contemporary risk societies and has to perform a series of tasks, mainly five according to the prescriptive scheme elaborated by Ansell, Boin and t'Hart (2014, 422-423). The leader has the task to interpret the different aspects of the crisis in order to simplify its comprehension, and, at the same, he is asked to cope with the "hard calls", namely the most difficult decision-making choices face to extremely complex problems. In addition to his "interpretation" of the crisis, the leader has the essential task to describe to citizens and stakeholders the solutions identified and the decisions that he is going to take, redirecting towards the institutions the confidence expressed by citizens towards his person. In doing this the leader not only must be able to maneuver government, or party, policies, but he also has to manage the process with the help of experts, media, communication strategies, and all the necessary instruments to solve the crisis. At the same time he has to show his capability to transform the crisis in a process of reforms aimed to prevent future situations of trouble.

The personalisation of politics, and the growing relevance of leaders, are not synonymous of the process of power personalisation (personalisation of apical leadership) or of presidentialisation. Already highlighted by Mabileau (1960), the personalisation of apical leadership refers to the concentration of decision-making and government power in the hands of the leader, who is not anymore *primus inter pares* in collective bodies, such as the board of ministries or the party's executive boards, but rather he is the holder of a superior and autonomous power. It is where the personalisation of the leader's power combines with the institutionalisation of monocratic power that starts, indeed, the process of presidentialisation. With this regard, Poguntke and Webb (2005,

5) identify the process of presidentialisation with the leader's acquisition of a government power legitimated by the citizens who elected him, rather than by the Parliament. Moreover, his role as leader of the executive power is not limited by the organisation of his party, nor has he necessarily to be the "formal" leader of it. Presidentialisation can be anatomised in three "faces", each highlighting the tension between parties and leaders with regard to autonomy, to power resources and to the ability to overcome the possible opposition of other political actors. In the analysis proposed by Poguntke and Webb (Id., 8-11) these "faces" refer to government institutions, to geography of power, and to electoral process. In particular, if the presidentialisation does not explicitly request the control of the party machine - as well as, we might add, the personalisation of government leadership does not always imply a constitutional reformulation - there is no doubt that the personalisation of party apical leadership can develop with different features.

4.1 Populism and anti-establishment parties

In periods of crisis and transition from a system of political representation to another, there may be centrifugal drives within the democratic regime - and therefore forms of dissent "about democracy" - or moments of skepticism towards the traditional political actors, with the rise of a conflict "in democracy". In the case of contemporary European democracies, the spreading of an anti-political feeling refers to a sort of *malaise démocratique*, a mainly selective refusal of the "present" actors of democracies characterized both by disaffection, skepticism and hostility towards politics (Mastro-paolo 2005), and by an anti-establishment orientation, at all levels. In conjunction with this new cleavage between establishment and anti-establishment, a series of new political subjects develop, from new radical right parties (Ignazi 2003) and new radical left parties (Kitschelt 2000), to anti-political establishment parties (Abedi 2004; Mudde 2007; Barr 2009). Although radical, these parties are not conditioned by past ideological schemes, nor they can be included among the traditional fascist or communist anti-establishment parties outlined by Sartori (1976); they may rather be connected to the opposition against establishment parties expressed by the so called GAL (Green/Alternative/Libertarian) and TAN (Traditional/Authoritarian/Nationalist) parties (Hooghe, Marks, Wilson 2002).

One of the recurring events during times of representation crisis is the rise of populism and populist parties, creators of the cleavage between citizens, people and élites. Populism develops as a symbolical, rhetorical, and cum grano salis ideological

investment of a leader who wants to take advantage from the trouble due to the vanishing of political references during the passage from democracy of the parties to democracy of the public. With this regard, Meny and Surel (2001, 29) outlined the main arguments of populist discourse, namely: the blame on traditional parties, charged of being distant from citizens' real problems; the gap between electoral promises and actual government policies; politicians' incapacity to include several relevant issues in the public debate; the absence of mechanisms to enforce emerging unconventional issues; dissatisfaction towards government policies; distrust towards the traditional political class.

Sociologists, political scientists and political philosophers repeatedly attempted to define the nature of populism, each time encountering the difficulty to trace a definite perimeter around a concept which takes many different connotations according to different historical, cultural, and territorial contexts (Berlin 1968; Ionescu, Gellner 1969; Canovan 2013; Gherghina, Miscoiu, Soare 2013). Without delving more deeply into the different interpretations of populism, or, to say it better, of populisms (Taguieff 2003), it is anyhow appropriate to talk about "typologies of populism" (Canovan 2005), just because of that "Cinderella complex" mentioned by Isaiah Berlin at the London School of Economics Conference on Populism in 1967. On that occasion Berlin used the metaphor of "a shoe – the word "populism" – for which somewhere there exists a foot. There are all kinds of feet which it nearly fits, but we must not be trapped by these nearly fitting feet": it is thus impossible to circumscribe populism in a shared paradigm. Populism has been defined in many different ways: as an ideology, a *forma mentis*, a movement, a syndrome, a social identity (Gherghina, Soare 2013, 3). According to Taguieff (2003, 80), it is a political style which shapes a changing symbolic complex and takes different connotations according to the single ideology whom it is addendum. The possibility, or impossibility, to identify it with an ideology, its many-sided nature, its undefined reference to specific social classes, make populism a phenomenon which takes its fuel from the representation crisis of traditional parties. Populism as a "transdoctrinarian ideology and processual type of ideology" (Şandru 2013, 53) thus becomes the reference for various types of anti-political establishment parties, whose program is not a structured series of government policies, but rather focuses on the counter-opposition between the people and the political class, where the latter is blamed for representing only its own interests rather than safeguarding and defending citizens (Schedler 1996; Abedi 2004).

Populism does not produce an autonomous party family, but it can play the function of ideological addendum to the positions of anti-establishment political parties, mainly of the new right, where the leader represents the voice and synthesis of a people seen

as community, nation, and heartland (Taggart 2000). Each time the populist leader calls on an “imagined community”, a symbolic representation of something that is not historically real, and, in the name of it, he politically orients the citizens’ dissatisfaction and need for identitarian security against immigrants, taxes, big corporations, banks, trade unions, journalists, intellectuals, judges. Populist leadership tends to take a manicheistic attitude (Zanatta 2013, 25), counter-posing good versus evil, allies versus enemies, “us” versus “you”, nation versus other States, politicians versus non politicians. At the same time the populist leader builds a narration about himself as “belonging to the people”, a common person, even when he is socially, economically, and culturally superior. He thus presents himself as being at the temporary service of a collective movement who opposes to the political and bureaucratic oligarchy. Taggart highlights that precisely the absence of “a soul” in populism, and the fact that it “lacks universal key values” produce its strong connection to a charismatic personality – though Taggart does not give a specific definition for charisma (Taggart 2000). Although most of the scholars are inclined to attribute charismatic qualities to populist leaders, this use of the concept of charisma is quite far from the “extraordinary quality” that Weber ascribes also to plebiscitary leader democracy. Even in this case it seems appropriate to avoid the immediate overlapping of charisma and populism, both from a sociological and a political psychology perspective (Hermet 2001; Dorna 2004). Charisma identifies a leader who opposes to the political establishment, who introduces himself as a “symbol” to identify with thanks to his extraordinary qualities, who is able to generate a radical transformation in values, as a Great Political Reform at political and institutional level, and who is capable to lead his followers out from an extraordinary crisis. In contemporary democracies the charismatic leader is a political manifesto himself: the core of his message is not in “denunciation” because “solution” is his testing ground. On the contrary the populist leader tends to represent himself as “servant leader” (Greenleaf 1977), lacking any innate and superior qualities distinguishing him from his followers, but with excellent skills to listen, take care, produce awareness, persuade, elaborate concepts, manage, have farsighted perspective and engage for individual development and growth of communities (Spears 1998, 6).

The populist leader is the entrepreneur of dissent, “one among the others” who antagonizes the élite, acting as spokesperson rather than guide, with a manipulation ascribable to the same counterfeiting of charisma (Glassman 1975). However, if parties with both populist and charismatic leaders may have common traits, there is another diverging aspect between them, consisting in the different way of “keeping together” heterogeneous social levels and different political cultures. Parties with populist leaders do not have the goal to govern, as the main bound keeping its voters together is

the challenge to the system (while internally there may be deep divisions on single policies), let alone the fact that their access to the government would determine a “normalisation” of the party. On the contrary, for parties with charismatic leaders the government option represents the main test for the extraordinary quality of the leader: through the citizens’ electoral examination, he firstly requests their support and secondly their acknowledgement of the accomplished change of the system and solution of the crisis.

4.2 New leaders in old parties

In addition to populist and charismatic leadership, scholars identified another type of personalised leadership, developed within the transformation process of mainstream parties rather than without the party system. In the personalisation process of apical leadership, even the parties heir to mass party and formed on the traditional social cleavages rather than focused on the leader, tend to dismiss the bureaucratic and territorial organisation, and to take the nature of electoral committees and “cheerleaders” for a successful leader (Pakulski, Körösényi 2012, 19). These transformations may develop because of external pressures, such as the changes in the institutional and electoral system, and the necessity to cope with the appearance of new political subjects on the political scene, or following internal pressures, such as the challenges to the ruling class represented by rival leaders or elites, the demand for a generational turnover, and the decline of an organisation model (Panebianco 1982, 446-448). With this regard, it is evident that in the passage from party democracy to leader democracy, it is not parties which disappear but, more precisely, the model of mass party (Ignazi 2012). The relationship between leader and parties may give birth to partially different phenomena, such as the rise of personal parties and notables’ micro-parties, as well as the transformation of mainstream parties into parties with personalised leadership (Viviani 2015). As Calise argues (2010, 112-113), the dissolution of the apparatus of traditional political organisations favours the rising relevance of networks of personal relationships. This process does not concern only the concentration of power in the monocratic apex, but also the decline of the party as collective political body on one hand, and, on the other hand, the rise of the centrality of the leader’s body, both in his private and public dimension, as final sum of identification and trust. The personalisation of party leadership may be furthermore favoured by specific criteria to select candidates, in particular the primary elections, whose introduction may be proposed by the party governing board to democratise the organisation, or following a pressure from below to protest against the party ruling class (Rahat, Hazan 2010; Cross, Katz

2013). Primary elections, especially if “open”, that is to say allowing the participation of all voters, furthermore strengthen the personalisation of apex leadership thanks to a double legitimacy process (Rahat, Hazan 2001, 313). In leader democracy party leaders candidate also for apex monocratic positions, both national and local; they directly choose the collaborators for their own staff independently from the bureaucratic party organisations, they autonomously raise funds, they dialogue with their electors without the intervention of party intermediate structures, and they use everyday more traditional media and social networks. The personalised leader tends to be in conflict with the party traditional ruling class as he addresses his own accountability and responsiveness towards party members and voters, rather than towards internal collective bodies. When the party leader is also the government leader, he acquires power not only towards the party in central office, but also towards the party in public office, with the consequent marginalisation of the role of elective bodies. Finally, some of the dynamics characterising populist leadership can be observed also in personalised leaders of mainstream parties, so that it is possible to speak of hard populism in the first case and of soft populism in the second case. Also soft populism employs manicheistic simplifications, such as old versus new, oligarchies versus new political class, lobbies’ interests versus people’s interests; however, differently from hard populism, soft populism does not locate at the “periphery” of representative democracy, and leaders compete for government offices. In conclusion, the processes of personalisation of party and government leadership represent a challenge for social and political science: new theories and new empirical instruments are necessary to comprehend the dynamics of social, political and institutional change, not only focusing on their communicative dimension, but exploring the interaction between new social cleavages and new actors of contemporary politics.

5. Conclusion

Starting from the analysis carried out, after having dealt with the study of the parties, from both standard perspectives to more open questions, we propose a long list of contributions which might help to better depict the terms of the problem. In particular, the research works that we propose in this special issue can be divided into two different analytical categories. Some papers propose sophisticated theoretical considerations, trying to propose new hypotheses of socio-political interpretations regarding the transformations of the renewed party models. On the other hand, there are authors offering an endeavour in theoretical-methodological comprehension, trying to verify as

fieldwork some working hypotheses based on the most recent contemporary literature.

Roberto Segatori tackles the thorny issue of the formation and institutionalization of contemporary political parties. According to the author Rokkan's theory of cleavages is insufficient to explain the new forms of political organization. In fact, according to Segatori, after the economic crisis of 2008, the loss of protection of the social rights of citizenship of the new generations of European citizens determined a new fracture between 'protected' (state employees with steady jobs, workers of large and medium-sized firms protected by the Unions) and the "non-protected" (the unemployed, self-employed and seasonal labourers). At the beginning of the third millennium, the conflict that the parties will have to learn to manage is what divides the citizens into the categories of 'established' and 'non-established'.

Donatella della Porta e Daniela Chironi face the themes of 'movement-party' and the continuity between movement and political party. The aim is to show the conditioning that social movements often exert on political parties also through double militancy and the dual membership of individual members. In particular, the authors focus on the study of the 'OccupyPD movement' as a specific case of interaction between party and movement, in this case between the most important centre-left Italian party and the largest anti-austerity movement which, starting from the United States, spread in Italy and Europe at the beginning of the 2000's.

Giovanni Barbieri focuses on a very current subject, the study of Eurosceptic parties. The author examines the reasons for the growth of this kind of party, trying to link their growth to the economic crisis of the 'Great recession'. In his work Barbieri tries to link the appearance of the Eurosceptic parties to the processes of globalization or de-nationalization which produce social conflicts between the 'winners' and 'losers' of globalization. The author attempts to verify the health of the Eurosceptic parties in the 2014 European elections, showing how for an electoral growth there is not a real explosion in political/institutional terms, since they do not succeed in forming even one single autonomous group among the European Parliament benches.

The work carried out by Daniela Piccio reflects on the endogenous regulations of the political parties trying to verify in the field (with a large source of data) whether the modality through which the decisional process employed for the approval of national laws be a suitable tool to promote a privileged environment for the parties operating within it. The aim of the author is to demonstrate how parties, while exerting their functions, continue to strengthen their legitimacy in the whole of Europe, guaranteeing themselves an institutional survival regardless of their ability to propose themselves as a vehicle of political representation.

Rossana Sampugnaro address the issue of the dedifferentiation, intended as the tendency of contemporary political organizations to designate external agencies or associations for some essential tasks once carried out by the party (above all electoral activism and political communication). In particular the two authors attempt to link the subject of dedifferentiation to the analysis of the election campaign in the 2014 European elections. By analysing the main social networks this study shows that the European Social Party's 'outside campaign', although it had different results in each single European state, contributes to defining the social base of the PSE.

Enrico Calossi and Eugenio Pizzimenti concentrate their attention on the existing relations between the parties' national and subnational levels. Their contribution, in particular, analyses eight important Italian parties, examining the models of organizational change registered after the reforms of the municipal, provincial and regional electoral systems. The period of time examined (1991- 2012) goes from the years of administrative reform up to the end of the Second Republic. In their analysis, the authors dedicate their attention to two specific dimensions of analysis: the levels of involvement and autonomy of the Regional units of the party.

Giulia Sandri and Anissa Amjahad tackle the theme of "Party membership and intra-Party Democracy", with particular reference to the case in Belgium. In particular the two authors treat the matter of crisis in legitimacy affecting most political parties in Western Europe. The study concentrates on the organizational consequences found in the parties after adopting tools that had been thought up to shorten the distance between parties and the voters (internal ballots, internal referenda, primary elections). Regarding the case of Belgium, the authors try to show that members' satisfaction with the party and their degree of previous internal activism affect the level of involvement in intra-party democracy activities.

Valeria Tarditi takes a look at the European new left proposing a comparison between the cases of Italy (*Sinistra ecologia e libertà*), Spain (*Izquierda unida*) and Greece (*Syriza*). More particularly Tarditi attempts to reason on the connection which exists between the capitalist economic model of the main Euro-Mediterranean countries and the ability of the parties of the radical left to propose alternative policies to those upheld by neoliberal capitalism. The article proposes a comparison over time of the different party models with the aim of explaining their greater or lesser capacity in attracting consensus in recent years.

Marco Damiani and Lorenzo Viviani look further into the new left in Europe. The authors attempt to give a picture of the radical left parties in Europe by analysing the process of differentiation that distinguishes them from the 'reformist' left. This theoretical analysis precedes the attempt to show the main characteristics found in the

fieldwork. In this regards the study of the German Die Linke is chosen as a reference model to empirically show some of the inclinations attributed to such party models.

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